Chapter III

The Fragmented Self of Postmodern Individuals

In the postmodern world, the flourishing development of capitalism, the advancement of technology, the wide spread phenomenon of globalisation, and the war between different factions of society have ensued in an intense and considerable transformations in social, cultural and economic structure as a whole. The postmodern condition and the concomitant globalisation have influenced the contemporary lifestyle, identity formation and the ways of thinking. Michael Ondaatje insinuates that the identity of the characters is a unique phenomenon in the postmodern world as it reflects the social arena to which they belong.

Ondaatje delineates that in the postmodern age of discontinuity, fragmentation, and metamorphosis, it is hard for contemporary people to ascertain who they really are. The myriad metamorphosis in the ambience of the world has counteracted the modernists' notion of forming a stable, predictable and coherent identity. Fredrick Jameson comments in the book, *The Cultural Turn: The Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983-1998* that "the modernist aesthetic is in some way organically linked to the conception of a unique self and private identity, a unique personality and individuality, which can be expected to generate its own unique vision of the world . . . " (6). He claims that the cultural turn in the late modernity has exacted the notion that "this kind of individualism and personal identity is a thing of the past; that the old individual or individualist subject is 'dead' . . ." (6). Ondaatje ascertains that in the contemporary epoch of displacement and disenchantment, the primarily established norms of identity have turned obsolete.

In the postmodern world, the concept of identity is considered as a fugitive, mutable and self-effacing entity. The shifting scenario of the contemporary world has actuated millions of people to cross the frontiers of their country. There are various reasons for migration—political upheaval including war, persecution, climate-related refugees, economic migrants, education, and family reunification. The transplanted migrants have the profoundest anxiety of identity crisis as they confront the jeopardy resulting from hyphenated identities. Stuart Hall abduces in the article entitled "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?" that in the late modern times, the individuals do not have any unified identity, instead they are "increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to . . . the process of change and transformation" (4).

Ondaatje avers that the Second World War and the civil war have uprooted millions of people like Hana, Almásy, and Caravaggio in *The English Patient;* and Anil in *Anil's Ghost*. They have migrated either to fight for the cause of war or to escape the trauma of war. They lead a nomadic life without any permanent place of settlement. They experience physical and cultural dislocation and disorientation while encountering an alien world. In the article entitled "Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*," Frank Birbalsingh shares his view that "this shared sense of homelessness and placelessness is a symptom of the general disease of human fragility and vulnerability. . . . In Ondaatje's view . . . they have been intensified by the joint effect of European enterprise and a dominant, European, scientific culture . . ." (171-72). The displaced characters muse over their memories of their homeland but their experiences of war benumb their desire to rejuvenate a new life after war.

The novelist examines the psychological disintegration and dismemberment of the characters who are torn by the conflicting forces of society in the novel, *The English Patient*. Sudha Rai in the article entitled "Ondaatje's *The English Patient*: Ideology and Form" examines how Ondaatje's novels are placed against "the backdrop of war are wounds, burns and scarring memories, as permanent in their residues as the mutilation of limbs and the agonized deaths of victims of the war" (158). The victims of war suffer vicariously from the excruciating pains and violence they witness during the war. The pervasive images of death, disease and destruction are associated with the broken and tattered bodies of the characters. The prolonged exposure to the cataclysmic events ruptures them from their original selves.

The Second World War has destroyed the physical realities of houses, landscapes and cities but beyond that it has shattered the notions of order, coherence, stability, and identity. The traumatic experiences they endure constitute an additional assault on their sense of integrity of the self even after the end of war. The social and political upheavals coerce them to the abysmal periphery of the society. Consequently, the peripheral zone, to which the traumatised people are driven, exemplify the utter chaos, desolation, and meaninglessness of their existence.

Ondaatje subsumes the fragmented identity of the war victims with that of the emigrant Sri Lankans like him and that of Anil in *Running in the Family* and *Anil's Ghost* respectively. He avows that during war and civil tensions, many families have left Sri Lanka and entered new homes in various foreign and distant shores. The sense of detachment from the homeland coupled with the feeling of displacement in the new environment result in fragmented identities. Abhijit Gupta in his review entitled

"Unearthly Beauty" reiterates that in expatriate writings, "The overwhelming theme is that of separation, of human beings fenced apart from each other, each inhabiting their personal island of pain. Cut off from the nourishing roots of family and community, all of Ondaatje's characters seem to live in a state of numbness, a shell shock of the mind" (23-24). Ondaatje avers that the aloofness from the homeland severs them from their roots of language, history, and culture. The sense of rootlessness and uncertainty which is shared by the expatriates affects the integrity of the self.

The emigrants perpetually struggle to reconstruct the other half of the identity by developing an intimacy with their homeland. They uphold their desire to renew and rebuild some attachment with their homeland. Salman Rushdie in his essay collection, *Imaginary Homelands* comments that the expatriates' impulse to maintain ties with their homeland is due to their notion of being "haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt" (10). The physical displacement of the emigrants does not repress their love for their nation. They are emotionally and psychologically attached to the social conditions of the country and consequently advocate the welfare of the nation.

In the novels *In the Skin of a Lion* and *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje accentuates that the expatriates like Patrick, Nicholas and Bolden who settle in foreign countries are conscious of otherness, of not belonging, and of standing apart. They confound the experience of cultural shock and social isolation as the difference between the host culture and the native culture widens. The linguistic, ethnic, and cultural differences between the immigrants isolate them from the mainstream society. As language is considered as a major locus of acculturation, stress or homesickness, the immigrants face

mental crisis when they are prompted to adapt to the language of the new land. The need to change one's language affects both the everyday life and self-identity of an individual.

The expatriates feel estranged as a result of economic frustration, isolation from the society, frustration growing out of their inability to adapt to the new environment, personal displacement and loss of identity. The feelings of isolation and alienation trigger feelings of loneliness, fear and helplessness. Munir in the article entitled "Paradigmacity of Postmodernism" reinforces that "The postmodernist discovered that the sense of alienation in the contemporary world is so intense and acute that it cannot be felt any longer, and thus the whole attitude about it got changed" (163).

The new environment threatens not only the physical health but also the mental stability of the immigrants. The cultural denigration, the conscious and unconscious oppression of the indigenous personality and culture by a supposedly superior race or culture jeopardises their sense of self. Ondaatje posits that while some of the expatriates manage to abandon the feelings of depression and continue with their lives, others succumb to them as they find it difficult to overcome and control the conflicting forces of the society. The expatriates who surrender often face destruction or even death as they do not cope with the changes of life. They construe the sane world as a life-threatening force which tends to isolate them even further and destroy their reality and hence they seek refuge in silence.

Ondaatje demonstrates the fragmented identity of the characters who have been ensnared by the adverse circumstances of the world in the select novels, *Coming Through Slaughter*, *Running in the Family*, *In the Skin of a Lion*, *The English Patient*, and *Anil's Ghost*. He discerns the way trauma is experienced both as a physical and psychological

event that affects the psyche of the individuals. He evinces that the social and political terror haunts the individuals and entices them to break away from the path of order seeking the means of achieving self-satisfaction. He charts precisely the close connection between the inner self and the outside world. He envisions that the individual's psyche is anchored depending upon the adherence to their homeland and hence with the evanescence of this bond, the individual loses the control of his self.

In *The English patient,* Ondaatje portrays the fragmented identity of the characters who are trapped by the atrocious events of war. The colonial power draws Hana; Almásy, the English patient; Caravaggio and Kip to the villa in Italy. The war has instigated them to leave their homeland and work in unknown alien lands. They become psychologically disoriented as they endure the trauma in the aftermath of the death of their most loved ones. In the article entitled "Trade and Power, Money and War: Rethinking Masculinity in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient,*" Susan Ellis reinforces that "The novel depicts a world of four individual lives that are 'in near ruins' from the effects of fire, war, torture and colonialism" (22). The precarious life of the postmodern characters that is haunted by the nomadic existence and the myriad death of millions of people perturb their psyche and ensue in the loss of self and identity.

Hana who is the adopted daughter of Patrick is trained as a nurse at the women's college Hospital in Canada. She devotes herself to the nursing duties but she becomes psychologically disoriented when she attends to millions of shattered bodies in the field hospitals of the First Canadian Infantry division during the Sicilian invasion in 1943. It is after the battle of Arezzo, Hana "was surrounded day and night by their wounds. After three full days without rest, she finally lay down on the floor beside a mattress where

someone lay dead, and slept for twelve hours, closing her eyes against the world around her" (53).

Hana dedicates her life to take care of the patients of war. She has removed blood from their faces or pieces of shrapnel from their bodies. During the war, she has received reports of about how certain people whom she has known have died. She dreads that she may have to face the body of her own father among the other patients of war. She begins to empathise with the suffering soldiers and once after the death of one of her patients, she opens his bag against the rules, takes his pair of tennis shoes and puts them on. This act signifies her urge to experience the trauma of the soldiers by fitting into their pattern.

Hana becomes disillusioned by the most heinous scenes of the Second World War. She has witnessed the casualties of many unknown soldiers and other loved ones such as her soldier lover, and her step father. The death of Hana's lover disturbs her but she suddenly becomes too busy nursing the affected soldiers after the battles at Moro Bridge and Urbino. As the war turns worse, it starts affecting more and more people. She has been entrusted with many patients among whom a few died but the news of her step father's death and her inability to nurse him at the end of his life destroys her. She finds it difficult to relate herself to the ravages of war. The trauma endured by the people around her makes her to realise the existential crisis of the postmodern world.

Hana is almost destroyed by the war physically and psychologically. She becomes thinner and her face gets tougher, "She was always hungry and found it a furious exhaustion to feed a patient who couldn't eat or didn't want to, watching the bread crumble away, the soup cool, which she desired to swallow fast. She wanted nothing exotic, just bread, meat" (53). The physical appearance which represents youth and beauty is at odds

with the trauma around the world. Hana decides to replicate the arena by shortening her hair, since she cannot tolerate the irritation of the presence of her hair that has touched the blood of the patients she has treated. The continuous exposure to the incidents of violence makes her to turn away from all deaths and the blood she has witnessed during the war. She does not wish to have anything that links her to death. She stops looking at the mirror as her appearance begins to reflect her shell shocked state of mind as well as her physical exhaustion.

Hana refuses to leave the monastery of San Girolamo in Italy even after the end of the war. The doctors and nurses residing in the villa decide to shift the hospital to the safe quarters in Pisa so as to escape the hidden mines left by the retreating German army but Hana declines to follow them. When the nurses find it impossible to move the burnt English patient to the new location because of his fragile limbs, Hana elects to stay all alone to nurse him as she feels that "the war is not over everywhere. . . . She was told it would be like desertion. This is not desertion. I will stay here" (44).

The Italian villa becomes a second home for Hana. She decides to stay in the villa ready to face all the dangers around her. The villa has no electricity, no doors and the rooms are open into landscape. There is hardly any demarcation between the house and landscape as there is no difference between the damaged building and the shelled remnants of the earth. The staircases have lost its lower steps during the fire that has been set during the war. She decides to replace the lost staircase with some of the books in the library. She nails the books to the floor and starts using it as stairs. Moreover she depends upon the left over things of the hospital to fulfill her basic needs. She even seeks the help of a man from the town to trade soap, sheets and other commodities.

Hana does not have any qualms about the dangers of the mines that are hidden in various parts of the villa. She moves about freely during night and sleeps on the very edge of rooms without walls, in thrilling and dangerous locations. In the deserted house, "She herself preferred to be nomadic in the house with her pallet or hammock. . . . She was living like a Vagrant . . ." (14-15). She is accustomed to a considerable level of threat on the frontline of the war, so she becomes numbed by the rawness of her war life. Throughout the war, she survives by keeping a coldness hidden in her role as a nurse. She is determined to survive in the world without falling apart. She is a dynamic character who metamorphoses herself from a child to an adult during the course of war. Her experiences in Italy make her more expressive and realistic.

Hana has been extremely occupied by her last patient during the war. He is one of the two hundred patients she has nursed during the invasion up the north. He is a man "with no face. An ebony pool. All identification consumed in a fire" (50). She caters to the needs of the affected unknown individuals with the belief that she would gain satisfaction. She visualises the image of her father in this patient and considers it as her duty to take care of him and also keep him engaged by reading.

Reading books is the only way for them to forget about the cruelty of war, "This was the time in her life that she fell upon books as the only door out of her cell. They became half her world" (7). These books help her in recollecting her childhood memories of her father when she has been in Toronto and feels that the books conjure her memories free from the tragedies of the war. As Hana reads one book after the other, she develops an urge towards life. She works in the garden and orchard planting beans in one corner of the wild garden which is suspected to be a hiding place for unexplored mines, "In spite of the

burned earth, in spite of the lack of water. Someday there would be a bower of limes, rooms of green light" (45). She utilises the water from the fountain to till the burned earth and plants enough vegetables for them to survive. These minor activities keep her occupied in the miniature world she establishes around her and her patient. However, with the entry of Caravaggio and Kirpal Singh, she acquires a new scope in life.

Hana's relationship with Kirpal Singh, the Sikh Sapper from India also known as Kip gives her a sense of security and sanity. She begins to spend the evening hours with him and their intimacy develops gradually. It is this bonding between them that helps her in gaining the vitality to face life cheerfully. Glen Lowry in his article on "Between the English patients: 'Race' and the Cultural Politics of Adapting Can Lit" observes that "Singh's arrival at the villa and his ensuing relationship with Hana are crucial to her attempt to heal herself from the devastation of the war and to come to terms with her grief over the death of her stepfather, Patrick" (224).

This sense of security and support deteriorates with Kip's decision to leave Italy after the bombing of Hiroshima. She comprehends the uncertain state of her existence after Kip's departure. She feels displaced and reckons that "the trouble with all of us is we are where we shouldn't be. What are we doing in Africa, in Italy? . . . We should all move out together" (129). Hana's decision to move from Italy symbolises her realisation that it is impossible to lead an isolated life in war torn areas. She feels that in her homeland, she will be able to remain herself. So, she decides to return to Canada, a place to which she belongs, where she will be received without prejudice or violence and a place she has once called home.

Hana writes to her step mother exclaiming that "*I am sick of Europe, Clara*" (314). She comes to the conclusion that by returning to her homeland, she will be able to regain her identity. She says, "*I want to come home. To your small cabin and pink rock in Georgian Bay. . . . And wait for you, wait to see the silhouette of you in a canoe coming to rescue me . . .*" (314).

Ondaatje ascertains that home offers the "emotionally disturbed handmaidens of the war" (190) to reconstruct a future as opposed to the limbo of the villa at the end of Second World War. Identity of an individual remains at stake even after the end of war, so one has to escape from that arena to start life anew. Hana's realisation enables her to restore her identity whereas her patient known by the names such as Count Ladislaus de Almásy, Cicero and the English patient, fails in achieving a stable identity.

Almásy does not have any fixed identity throughout his life time and this is evident in the multiplicity of names he possesses. He is a Hungarian by birth but his education in England enables him to acquire English personality and manners. He has contact with many English friends but when war begins, he aligns himself with the Germans. He becomes a guide for the spies under the name Cicero and takes them across the desert into Cairo. During his expeditions in the desert, he erases his family name and nationalities. He avers that "By the time war arrived, after ten years in the desert, it was easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation" (148).

Almásy aims at transcending himself from the limited realms of national identity but his peculiar English nature makes the persons around him to suspect him as an English man and hence has been given the name English patient. The Bedouin tribes who rescues him after the plane crash suspect him to be an English man and question him, "Who are

you? I don't know. . . . You said you were English" (5). As he realises that he cannot regain his former self after the crash, he decides to erase his identity and remain as an anonymous English patient. He leads the latter half of his life in Italy in anonymity, without any clues to his real name, without any rank, battalion or squadron.

The trauma Almásy has endured during the war affects him psychologically and physically, so he does not make any effort to regain his original self. The war transfigures the fixed contours of his body changing the shape of his body and self. His entire body gets hideously charred as the fire during the plane crash consumes his identity as an explorer leaving him immobile in the Italian villa. Meanwhile, the burnt features of his body destroy the markers of his racial identity. It is this absurdity and meaninglessness of the war that prompts him to turn away from the feuds of the world.

Ondaatje foregrounds the existential crisis of the postmodern world that degenerate the composite identity of the individuals. He conjoins the fragmented identity of Almásy and Caravaggio with that of their fragmented body parts. In the article entitled "Multi-Ethnic Polytropic Identity in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*," John Richard asserts that the "fragmented nature of consciousness is a method of dealing with the feeling of disintegration of the post-war and the post-colonial period" (172). The incapacitated body of the individuals endorses their destabilised self. Caravaggio who has acted as a spy for the Allies during the war shares the predicament of Almásy as he has also been tattered physically and psychologically by the abominable events of war.

Caravaggio was born in Italy but he has stayed in Canada for most of the years of his life. He is a postmodern traveller, who has chosen to remain nomadic in the world. He has been a professional thief before the war. He has worked with intelligence departments in

Cairo and Italy. Caravaggio has suddenly become an important commodity, a source of unique skills which seem vital to the war-effort. The thieves are legitimised because they have the ability to read through the camouflage of deceit more naturally than official intelligence.

The thumbs of Caravaggio have been mutilated when he has been caught by the Nazis during his attempt to steal. The anguish of losing his thumbs impairs his pride and hence he loses his identity. He feels that his existence has no significance as he finds it impossible to mobilise his skill for the benefit of the country. The skills, which he has claimed that his country has taught him during the war, become futile. The war transmutes Caravaggio from a charming thief into a taciturn victim. He is no longer considered the daring individual he used to be, but as a man who ruined his original identity by being admitted as just another bandaged man in uniform in a hospital.

Caravaggio has been in the military hospital in Rome for more than four months. He has hardly spoken to anyone in the hospital. He is mentally and physically handicapped by the war, the "War has unbalanced [Caravaggio] and he can return to no other world as he is, wearing these false limbs that morphine promises" (123). He does not reveal his name and his whereabouts to the officials in the hospital, instead he is acknowledged as one among the many affected by war and not as an individual with unique identity.

The war has transferred Caravaggio into an introverted personality; when he learns of Hana and her patient, he decides to join them even after knowing that it is a terrible place where the ruins of the war are still visible. His close ties with Hana's father while living in Canada makes him to enter the villa with the intention of saving Hana from her surroundings. He decides to shed off his identity as a thief and professional spy. Instead, he

takes up the new role of a father bringing in a new meaning to his life. His days at the villa give solace to his mind and release him from the tensions of war. Moreover, he assuages his loss by protecting Hana and thereby adds meaning and purpose to his life.

Ondaatje has highlighted the mental trauma of the characters whose personal experience during the war has made them to condemn war altogether. They become psychologically and physically affected by the trauma of war. The war has transformed them from effulgent, adventurous and fun loving people into matured, sober and impoverished existence. The war has ruined their hope and identity. Yet, they ultimately decide to overcome the maladies of war by regaining equilibrium.

Ondaatje suggests that in order to reconstruct one's identity after the political trauma, one should harness one's will power to move out of the impoverished existence and start life afresh. The tormented atmosphere of the war escalates their agonies and it is only when they realise that they are living in an alien land, they decide to estrange themselves from their temporary abode. They move out of the haunted environment to their homeland so as to avoid becoming a casualty of the imperialistic designs. This feeling of otherness enables them to recognise that the villa represents neither the world nor their home. The survivors of the villa decide to eventually return home and join their family or friends, in places where they can remain peacefully.

Ondaatje corroborates that the life in the homeland renders the characters a sense of integrated self. He has been physically absent from his homeland for twenty five years but in his mid-thirties, he realises that he has slipped past a childhood he has ignored and retreated. As his expatriated life has engendered him to acquire a hyphenated identity, he yearns to establish a niche for himself by returning to Sri Lanka after the death of his

parents. In *Running in the Family*, he canvasses his family history by reviving the memory of his parent's generation that has frozen in his memory.

Ondaatje undertakes the task of rediscovering his lost identity knowing that one's identity will be lost when one is remote from homeland. Matthew Bolton endorses in his article, "Michael Ondaatje's Well Told Lie" that the novel is an attempt "to share an experience of the process of Ondaatje's self-discovery, in part through the act of writing, a process that is at least as much the search for an origin myth as it is the documentation of history and biography" (239).

Ondaatje avows that to contemplate the socio-cultural conditions of his homeland, he must confront and negotiate with the ancestral heritage of his family. He has stayed aloof from his family for most part of his life and this makes him to collect information from his relatives and friends to cognise more about them. He evinces that by congnising the attributes of his family members and their role in the country's history, he could reestablish ties with his homeland. S. Leigh Matthews in the article entitled, "'The bright Bone of a dream': Drama, Performativity, Ritual, and Community in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*" speculates Ondaatje's quest to have a composite identity as opposed to hyphenated identity. He remarks that in this novel, Ondaatje "creates a public, theatrical space for performing himself in ways that do not justify his sense of independence, but rather perform the rediscovery of his personal *inter*dependence within a special familial and cultural community" (355).

In Ondaatje's quest for his parents' lineage, he admits that he has never spoken to his father, Mervyn Ondaatje as an adult. He regrets having failed to develop an intimacy with his father when he lived. He expresses his desire to know more about his father and to

extrapolate his views on such sensitive terms like love, passion, duty. He has expected an illusionary meeting between him and his father where he wishes to confess that "I am the son you have made hazardous, who still loves you. I am now part of an adult's ceremony, but I want to say I am writing this book about you at a time when I am least sure about such words. . . Give me your arm. Let go my hand. Give me your arm" (202).

Ondaatje realises that Mervyn who belonged to the community of Ceylonese Tamil has led a fragmented life during his life time. He avouches that during his father's generation, his coevals have also incurred two separate selves. The shifting political ambience of the country has transformed them from being a prodigal to that of a revolutionary, fighting for the cause of the nation. Ondaatje remarks that "From the twenties until the war nobody really had to grow up. They remained wild and spoiled. It was only during the second half of my parents' generation that they suddenly turned to the real world" (47).

Mervyn has been an utterly entrancing and benignant person, but his path has remained unknown to his parents and wife. Even as a young boy, he has been very lavish and extravagant by nature and so when he completed his school education, his parents decided to send him to a University in England. They believed that the austere atmosphere of the university will refine his overall personality, yet their effort has turned futile. He does not clear the entrance exam, instead, he cheats his father and collects funds that are necessary for three years of university education. He has led a very luxurious life by renting extravagant rooms in Cambridge. He has also made close ties with the students of Cambridge and engages himself in reading contemporary novels, boating and involves in other merry making activities.

Mervyn's pre-war life has been full of exuberance and amusements. He has been briefly engaged to a Russian Countess during his Cambridge days. However, he has dropped his idea to marry the Countess when he meets Doris Gratiaen and decides to marry the latter. In order to settle the issues of breaking up the engagement, he joins the Ceylon Light Infantry division. He follows the technique of trying to solve one problem by creating another problem at the same moment. He is very calm by nature and is not concerned about the various complications he creates.

Ondaatje reiterates that during the pre-war years, "The only occupation that could hope to avert one from drink and romance was gambling" (41). Mervyn has been a staunch follower of all the leading traits of the country. He becomes obsessed with train journey as "Rail trips became his nemesis" (160). Ondaatje comes across different versions of his father's train escapade during the research of his father's whereabouts. His obsession with train is so illustrious that even after his death, people associate him with it.

Mervyn has worked as a major in the Ceylon Light Infantry division during the war as the in-charge of the battalions of transport security. He has been obsessed with a possible invasion of the Japanese troops and this has made him very vigilant during his service for the cause of the nation. He has disposed nearly twenty-five bombs mined by the Japanese troops in the running trains. The war has transformed him from an extravagant to that of a solemn person as the reality which he has confronted during his service disorients him. His dipsomania started recurring every two months and during this period, he transfigures himself from a humorous and gentle person into a violent person who would do anything for the sake of alcohol.

Mervyn decides to become a farmer as he gets exhausted due to war. He returns to his estate in Kegalle and works as superintendent of a tea and rubber plantation for a short period. He starts his farming career with the vegetation of ordered gardens by planting flower rose beds but his interest shifts with his transformation in personality. His devious and defensive kind of personality that has emulated as a result of the crisis he encountered prompts him to shift his focus to the growth of cactus. His interest towards garden prompts him to become a founding member of 'The Ceylon Cactus and Succulent Society.' The thorny bushes that spring around him resounds his desire to replicate the abounding perplexities of life. He leads a very simple and secluded life during his stay in Kegalle. In his later years, he concentrates on animal husbandry and remains separated from his earlier circle of friends.

Ondaatje foregrounds the psychological ramifications of Mervyn who undergoes emotional turmoil as he finds it difficult to consort with the contemporary reality. He gets affected by paranoia during the last stage of his life. He lives under the illusion that someone would poison the entire family. He remains silent for most of the time as he does not want anyone else to be troubled by him. He is aware of everything that is happening around him. He avoids talking to anyone during his bouts as an only defense to suppress his anxieties within him. His distrusting and skeptical nature keeps him distant with his own children as he suspects them to be his mere imitations. He personally shatters three hundred eggs by beating them to pieces with a long shaft so that nothing will survive.

Ondaatje demonstrates the influence of the socio-political condition on the psyche of the individuals. He underscores the metamorphosis of his father from an exuberant personality to a revolutionist and then finally to a paranoid. His knowledge of his father

and other family members enables him to recognise his adherence to a wider framework of his ancestry. The long list of names he finds in the church ledgers enables him to know of his rich heritage. He realises that his ancestors who are prominent in their own fields have made remarkable contributions in the field of agriculture, law, finance, military and religion and hence states that

> There was nothing one could speak about that would not infringe on another's area of interest. If the subject was something as innocent as flowers, then Dr. William Charles Ondaatje, who was the Ceylonese Director of the Botanical Gardens, would throw scorn on any opinion and put the others in their place. He had introduced the olive to Ceylon. Finance or military talk was Matthew Ondaatje's area, and law or scholarship exercised Philip de Melho Jurgen's acid tongue. The only one who had full freedom was the Reverend Simon who said whatever he felt like during the sermon, knowing his brothers could not interrupt him. (63-64)

Ondaatje's emigrant life enables him to acquire a panoramic view of the country and of his ancestors. He has been under the prejudice that he belonged to a disgraceful family, where the Ondaatje's are absolute pariahs but the knowledge of his father's contribution to the society changes his perception. He recounts, "That night, I will have not so much a dream as an image that repeats itself. I see my own straining body which stands shaped like a star and realise gradually I am a part of a human pyramid. Below me are other bodies that I am standing on and above me are several more, though I am quite near the top" (13).

The ties that Ondaatje re-establishes with his ancestors alleviate him from the notion of being uprooted in the alien lands. He regains a sense of identity as he begins to identify

himself with the maze of relationships around him. He speculates that "During certain hours, at certain years in our lives, we see ourselves as remnants from the earlier generations that were destroyed" (201). He insists that the collective identity is the only means of achieving a coherent self in the postmodern world of fragmentation.

In *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje examines the hyphenated identity of Anil Tissera who emigrates from Sri Lanka. He considers that the civil tensions in the country have urged millions of people to migrate. The migrated people initially face cultural displacement in the foreign countries but the fear of facing the trauma of war belittles their cultural alienation. They learn to assimilate themselves to the new environment. The life in the alien land distances them from the cultural and linguistic patterns of the homeland; however, during the moments of social upheaval, the emigrants share emotional affinity with the inhabitants of their homeland. The conflict that gradually arises between the contradictory forces results in hyphenated identity.

Ondaatje denies the fixity of identity by questioning the possibility of a definitive view of identity or identification. He exposes the fragmented self of Anil Tissera who is known by two different names replicating her split selves. As she has been unconvinced with her name during her childhood days, she has desired to have her brother's unused second name 'Anil'. She has tried to buy the name from him when she was twelve years old by offering to support him in all family arguments. Her intense sense of contentment and determination to maintain her newly adopted name does not diminish over time, as "Everything about the name pleased her, its slim, stripped-down quality, its feminine air, even though it was considered a male name. Twenty years later she felt the same about it" (68).

Anil has migrated from her homeland at the age of eighteen to study medicine in England. She has been an exceptional swimmer as a child and has won several accolades in Sri Lanka. She has been known throughout her homeland as a child prodigy. Her talent has become an indispensable part of her life, but when people around her fail to recognise her talent, she feels alienated. She becomes timid and reticent as she finds it difficult to open up conversation with people. Moreover, the contrasting ambience of the homeland and the host country stifles her. In the tropics, the classrooms are filled with the noises of the birds, lorries, and fighting dogs whereas the intricate geography and the serene atmosphere of the English classroom astounds her. She feels lost and perceives herself to be living in far ends of the world when the ties with her homeland diminish. Her sole connection with the island is the new sarong that her parents used to send her every Christmas but with the death of her parents, she loses all ties with Sri Lanka.

Anil longs to have conversation with someone to discuss some common features of her homeland as she feels that all these trivial matters will help her in overcoming the grief of living in an unknown land. It is this desire to develop some intimacy with her countrymen that drives her to the smoke of a bad marriage. She interprets her husband's irrepressible behaviour as "an attempt to limit her research and studies. It was the first handcuff of marriage, and it almost buried her . . ." (144). She tolerates him because of her loneliness but when she finds it difficult to get along with him, she decides to end their marriage. This incident represents the ordeals that Anil undergoes so as to identify herself with the Eastern cultural identity.

Ondaatje exposes Anil's conflicts between the dichotomies of Eastern and Western cultures. He apprehends the anarchy involved in following one's tradition in the alien

lands. He reiterates that in homeland, one is surrounded by family order and values. There is no anonymity in one's homeland but when the individuals migrate to the foreign lands they escape the vigilance of the customs and manners. He substantiates that "We take our clothes off because we shouldn't take our clothes off. And we behave worse in other countries. . . . What is that quality in us? Do you think? That makes us cause our own rain and smoke?'" (138).

Ondaatje explores the effect of acculturation on individual identity. He accentuates the influence of Western countries on Anil's perspectives and life style as with the continuous passage of time, "The island no longer held her by the past. She'd spent the fifteen years since ignoring that early celebrity" (11). She assimilates herself to the Western virtues of individuality and does not associate with the communal culture of Sri Lanka. Her global training along with her education in European and North American education endows her to acquire a hyphenated identity. She feels at ease living in the new land and gradually loses the sense of her original self.

Anil does not wish to rebuild an intimacy with her relatives in Sri Lanka. She feels very glad to be alone in her own world. She adopts Western style of dressing and manners. Her absence from the homeland in fact distances her from her mother tongue. She avers that she can speak "Just English. I can write some Sinhala'" (36). During her meeting with her ayah, Lalitha, she experiences a loss of language. Anil finds it difficult to speak with any non-English speaking Sri Lankans. Antoinette Burton in the article "Archive of Bones: *Anil's Ghost* and the Ends of History" claims that Anil like other professional women who migrated to the foreign land, strived hard "to maintain her hard-worn status against all odds" (41).

Anil's distance from her homeland makes her to interpret the sufferings of the people in her homeland with a distant view. The surfeit of violence that has taken place in Sri Lanka after her departure has in turn numbed her desire to return. She gets appalled by the blood that that has flown through the bridges since the war. She feels that the island has become "a more complicated world morally" (11). So, she gets bewildered when she is sent by the International Human Rights Investigation to investigate the widespread murders carried out in the island. She considers going to Sri Lanka as an unfortunate temporary leave of absence from the West instead of being grateful for the opportunity she has been given. She muses,

> Suddenly Anil was glad to be back, the burned senses from childhood alive in her. The application she had made to the centre for Human Rights in Geneva, when a call had gone out for a forensic anthropologist to go to Sri Lanka, had originally been half-hearted. She did not expect to be chosen, because she had been born in the island, even though she now travelled with a British Passport. (16)

The political trauma that Anil witnesses on her entry to Sri Lanka disorients her as it contrasts her previous experience in different war fields. Her investigation in war torn areas in Sri Lanka enables her to acquire an extensive idea of the predicament of people in her homeland. She realises that during the civil war, millions of people have been found missing and hundreds of them are found dead. Anil becomes exhausted by the widespread murders and the physical condition of the survivors who are affected by various diseases like dysentery, hepatitis, dengue fever. Her dislocation and sense of being out of place in her motherland is overcome when she is finally able to identify the victims of civil war not

as strangers, but as her own people, "'I think you murdered hundreds of us.' *Hundreds of us*. Sarath thought to himself. Fifteen years away and she is finally *us*" (272).

Anil's life in Western countries influences her customs and manners, but when she witnesses the trauma experienced by the people of her homeland, she once again identifies herself as a citizen of Sri Lanka. Silvia Albertazzi in her review of the novel, *Anil's Ghost* observes that "her progressive awareness of the political situation of the island coincides for her with the emergency of a new sense of identity, in which her Asian past is no more at odds with her Western present, to the point that, in the end, she decides not to go back to the States" (74).

Ondaatje demonstrates the personal experience of trauma both physically and psychologically which affects the psyche of the individual. Anil has her food along with the exhuming bodies and gradually becomes much thinner as she gets more and more involved in her work. She realises that she is besieged by the uncertain laws and fear that is prevalent everywhere. She longs to utilise her skills to put an end to the extensive murders that is carried out in the island, "In her work Anil turned bodies into representatives of race and age and places" (55).

Anil struggles to have a definite path leading to the source of mysteries around her. She avouches to bring out some changes in the island instead of composing a document that would give her financial gains, but her hyphenated identity in turn creates distrust in the minds of the natives like Sarath and Gamini, "'You know, I'd believe your arguments more if you lived here,' he said. 'You can't just slip in, make a discovery and leave'" (44). Ondaatje posits that the unassailable love that Sarath and Gamini have for their homeland inspite of the massacres that is carried out in the island, epitomises the love that natives

have for their land. They represent the importance of maintaining the nationalistic consciousness so as to retain a stable self.

Ondaatje ascertains that Anil's experience in her homeland has changed her attitude towards the country. She develops an emotional affinity with people of her homeland. She takes up the conviction to bring about peace by projecting the plight of the country to the International Human Rights authorities. She takes up the resolution to maintain the same intimacy even after leaving Sri Lanka, "If she were to step into another life now, back to the adopted country of her choice, how much would Gamini and the memory of Sarath be a part of her life? Would she talk to intimates about them, the two Colombo brothers?" (285). Her desire to identify herself as the sister of Sarath and Gamini exemplifies her intention to be identified as a Sri Lankan.

Ondaatje emphasises that the national identity enables Anil to transcend the condition of homelessness and wilderness by achieving a stable identity. He highlights that the fragmented nature of Anil's self which is divided between the adopted Western culture and the sense of affinity towards the homeland transforms as she develops an intimacy with Sri Lanka and starts sharing her concern for the condition of Sri Lankans. Her ardent desire to bring about a change in the social condition of the country reflects the reawakening of her native identity. She rejuvenates her national identity by aligning herself with her native culture, a culture from which she has moved away temporarily.

In the novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, Ondaatje spotlights the fragmented identity of the Canadian immigrants like Patrick and Nicholas by delving deep into the psychological trauma of dislocation inherent in the immigrant experience. The immigrants are uprooted from their homeland and cultures, and are transplanted into the alien environment of

Canada. Ondaatje evinces that the communication gap among the displaced immigrants make them socially alienated from the outside world. They continue to feel a profound sense of otherness, of not belonging. Moreover, they are divided from their old world and are excluded from their new one because of their inability to communicate with their colleagues. The major protagonists of the novel such as Anglo-Irish immigrant, Patrick Lewis and Macedonian immigrant, Nicholas Temelcoff belong to varied nations but they share the notion of having a fragmented self due to estrangement and isolation.

Patrick's social domain has been very limited to the small village of Bellrock, a region which was not mapped till 1910. His childhood days have been regulated by the country life and this has disenabled him from social interaction. He has worked in the forest or on the log drives with his father and his knowledge of the outside world is derived mostly from books. His only other link to the outside world has been the presence of the thirty loggers who come to skate along the river. Ondaatje deciphers the fragmentation of Patrick Lewis' individual self as he migrates from his rural village to the urban arena of the country after the death of his father.

Patrick has worked for several years in the village, but he has owned nothing. He has scarcely had any money to sustain his life. The prospect of the city draws him there but the reverberations of trade and the movement of people across him bewilder him. He experiences the sensation of having been lost in the labyrinth of chaos. He feels displaced in his own country as he finds extreme contrasts between the urban and rural life. He has been accustomed to the tranquil state and open space of the serene country and so feels threatened by the chaotic condition of the exuberant city life.

Patrick is socially and linguistically isolated from the outside world. His identity is ambiguously divided between his position as a native and an immigrant. He is a native of Canada but by emigrating from the country to the city, he becomes an immigrant in his own land. His poor social conditions barricade him from identifying with the native rulers. Moreover, his racial differences with the immigrant workers restrain him from mingling with them. He is secluded both from the white rulers and the immigrant workers. He does not communicate with them even while working for several hours in the same tunnel, "Patrick is as silent as the Italians and Greeks towards the *bronco* foremen" (106).

Patrick resides with the immigrants in the Southeastern section of the city working with the muckers in the manual digging. He is paid extra for his work as nobody else attempted to undergo the claustrophobic uncertainty of his work. The money he earned helps him to have a hold in the uncertain world. He leads an anonymous life reducing his existence to a void space. The linguistic difference between him and the other immigrants from Italy and Macedonia disorient him. The common working and living condition of the immigrants make them identify each other. Patrick relates his own position as an outsider in their image, "The people on the street, the Macedonians and Bulgarians, were his only mirror" (112). They rely on the code language to communicate. Patrick recognises the other tunnellers working with him by looking at their ragged shirts. He finally bridges the gulf between them by attempting to learn their language:

> He had discovered the Macedonian word for iguana, *gooshter*, and finally used it to explain his requests each evening at the fruit stall for clover and vetch. It was a breakthrough. The woman gazed at him, corrected his pronunciation, and yelled it to the next stall. She came around the crates and

> outlined the shape of a lizard. *Gooshter*? Four women and a couple of men then circled him trying desperately to leap over the code of languages between them. (112-13)

Patrick begins to reconstruct his identity in relation to the immigrants from different communities—Greek, Macedonian, Russian and Italian. He makes connections with the immigrants, crossing linguistic and cultural barriers to forge ties with "these strangers who in the past had seemed to him like dark blinds on his street, their street, for he was their alien" (113). He surmounts the sense of isolation by acquainting himself with people around him. His friendly gesture assimilates him to the other immigrants and he feels suddenly surrounded by the greetings of friendship and concern, the "women shook his hand, the men embraced and kissed him, and each time he said Patrick. Patrick. Patrick. Knowing he must now remember every single person" (113-14).

Patrick feels happiest amongst people with whom he shares little ethnic identity. The compassion he receives from them overwhelms him. He is more comfortable with the coloured people even if he belongs to the white race. This is evident when he claims that he loved, "things to do with colour, hating the whiteness . . ." (53). The new social bonding prompts him to look upon the immigrants more as potential friends than strangers. He realises that his "own life was no longer a single story but part of a mural, which was a falling together of accomplices" (145).

Patrick ultimately establishes himself in the nexus of Toronto's working class communities. His personal growth is accomplished when he decides to move away from his Anglo-Irish roots. He does not inculcate the attitude of parochial Englishness, instead he confronts a more extensive sense of cultural awareness and identity. His association

with the immigrants prompts him to attend the gathering at the waterworks. It is in this congregation, the workers have their communal meetings and celebrations:

> On Sundays, as darkness fell, the various groups walked up to the building from the lakeshore where they would not be seen. There was food, entertainment, political speeches. A man who mimicked the King of England stepped forward with a monologue summarizing the news of the past week. Numerous communities and nationalities spoke and performed in their own languages. (158)

Patrick espouses a new knowledge of his self by deciphering his role in the community. He has lived in Canada all his life but he is unaware of the zeitgeist of the country "He has always been alien, the third person in the picture" (156). His contact with the immigrants enables him to know about the unknown stories around him. He gradually cognises the various union battles and the threats posed by the rulers on the immigrant workers. His encounter with them enables him to realign with the detritus and chaos of the age.

Ondaatje posits that in the postmodern world of migration, the immigrants leave their homelands in search of better living condition in dissimilar environments and cultures. They become financially stable by undergoing most arduous tasks but the cultural and linguistic changes that they undergo, fragment their notion of a stable identity. Ondaatje insinuates that the immigrants from foreign countries like Greece, Macedonia, Russia and Italy find themselves dislocated as they attempt to embrace the alien landscape, climate, culture and language. They are regarded as outsiders and are often rendered inarticulate by language barriers. They are prevented from communicating or expressing

themselves adequately due to their inability to speak English. They typically retreat into silence, abandoning any effort to make themselves understood. This further isolates and excludes them from the rest of the society.

The Macedonian immigrant, Nicholas Temelcoff, is a representative of both types of exclusion. He experiences the linguistic and cultural isolation as he finds it difficult to cope with the new environment. He has been cut off from his family and friends in Canada as he has left behind his own language and the old images of himself. He remains invisible and silent after having crossed the border as he loses the markers of his identity such as the passport and his name which remain as an attestation of one's identity in foreign land. His decision to start life afresh and become integrated in Canada makes him learn and speak English, a language spoken by the majority of the people in Canada. He becomes obsessed with the learning as he realises that "if he did not learn the language he would be lost" (46).

Ondaatje highlights the metamorphosis of immigrants' identity by portraying their struggle to adjust and assimilate with the new country. This process of cultural metamorphosis involves several profound changes in their identity. They almost exchange the old identity to acquire a new self but their greatest obstacle is the difficulty in learning a new language. Temelcoff reckons the process of learning the new language as a strenuous task as he finds it difficult to understand the intricacies of the language. In order to acquaint himself with the pronunciation, speaking styles, and mannerisms of the new country, he forsakes his old accent and pronunciation. He utilises the recorded songs, wall posters, Fats Waller and talkies to learn English. He tries to improve his pronunciation skill and accent by reciting the songs and mimicking the actors on the stage:

> It was a common habit to select one actor and follow him throughout his career, annoyed when he was given a small part, and seeing each of his plays as often as possible – sometimes as often as ten times during a run. Usually by the end of an east-end production at the Fox or Parrot Theatres the actors' speeches would be followed by growing echoes as Macedonians, Finns, and Greeks repeated the phrases after a half-second pause, trying to get the pronunciation right. (47)

Ondaatje apprehends that the notion of alienation and bewilderedness caused as a result of displacement can be surmounted by acquiring a place for them in the society, adapting to the new culture and language, as well as by overcoming their fear as outsiders. Temelcoff succeeds in establishing himself in the new environment by associating himself with the immigrants from other countries and finds a job in the bridge constructions. He involves in the most laborious jobs so as to open a bakery of his own, "In a year he will open up a bakery with the money he has saved" (49). He avows that by developing a collective identity, the immigrants will be able to sustain a stable identity in the new land but Ondaatje opines that if they fail to confront the social condition, they would degenerate from their static state.

In *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje explores the fragile mental conditions of Buddy Bolden who fails to cope up with the demands of society, and particularly, the demands imposed on an artist in society. He highlights the odyssey of the Jazz musician who transforms from a highly jovial and exuberant person into a paranoid seeking recluse in the realms of silence. His highly charged and tortured life fragments his composite

identity. His schizophrenia demonstrates the result of an increasing implosive pressure and his inability to control the pressure and maintain the balance.

Ondaatje delineates the degeneration of Bolden's delicately balanced life as a "barber, publisher of *The Cricket*, a cornet player, good husband and father, and an infamous man about town" (7). Bolden has accomplished a very fine and precise balance to his life by carefully allotting the hours to perform his duties. His role as a barber enables him to listen to the excruciations of people around him and the information he receives from them turn as news in his broadsheet. He becomes enamoured by the men and women who idolize him and longed to dance to the tune of his music. His enchanting demeanour draws him towards the children of his locale. He teaches them the nuances of music and inturn learns all the street songs from them.

Bolden has a panoptic vision of the world. He is very dynamical in his approach towards life and never speaks of his past. He pins down the possibility of any limitations in life. He perceives that certainty will bind him to a definite path where everything is "complete and exact and final" (118). He obstinately draws away from the conviction of the society that prefers ordered and integrated life. He embraces the vitality of chaos and the adeptness of life and music as opposed to the monotonous life. His music exemplifies his predilection for fragmented self-consciousness.

Bolden's strong passion for music makes him consecrate his life for music but his music has been unpopular during his lifetime. The social arena in which he has lived belittles his musical talent. Ondaatje through his protagonist says, "If you are at the peak you don't have time to think about stopping you just build up and up and up. It's only a few months later when it wears off – usually before anyone else realises it has worn off –

that you start to go, if you are the kind that goes. But he was still playing fine . . .” (78). Bolden has played the loudest cornet in jazz but he is subjected to destructive fits of rage. He is caught between the conflicts of temperaments, where he sometimes resorts to complete silence or he would start shouting and at times behave like a child. The dualities of his dispositions surmount his ability to yield a coherent form to his music.

Bolden’s spontaneous, anarchic, and transient music epitomises the conflicting nature of his self. He efficiently blends the two contradictory genres like hymns and blues; the blues creates the picture of the sinners and the evil doers whereas the hymn reverberates the feeling of listening to a humming in mother’s church. The paradigm of the scenario keeps changing with the kind of music he played. His dilemma between the contradictory genres resounds like a battle between the Good Lord and the Devil:

> I knew his blues before, and the hymns at funerals, but what he is playing now is real strange and I listen careful for he’s playing something that sounds like both. I cannot make out the tune and then I catch on. He’s mixing them up. He’s playing the blues and the hymn sadder than the blues and then the blues sadder than the hymn. That is the first time I ever heard hymns and blues cooked up together. (83)

Bolden has declined to confine his art within fixed boundaries. He believes that by surrendering himself to the confined domain, he will lose all possibilities of achieving and possessing a stable, private self. He regards that predictability would be inimical to his kind of creativity and this eventually makes him to be almost completely governed by fears of certainty, “watching me waste myself and wanting me to step back into my body as if into a black room and stumble against whatever was there. Unable then to be watched by

others. More and more I said he was wrong and more and more I spent whole evenings with him" (94). Ondaatje adverts that Bolden's fervent passion towards his art drives him to the verge of madness and consequently his art enriches his madness until it gets completely destroyed by his frenzy. He exclaims that the energy of creation is also destructive, "The making and destroying coming from the same source, same lust, same surgery his brain was capable of" (55).

Bolden's mind is incapacitated to confront the realities of life. He resides in Storyville, where the majority of African Americans lived. His life amidst prostitutes, hustlers, gamblers, alcoholics and drug addicts deteriorates his static self. He becomes frantic as his music band begins to rive apart when Frankie Dusen, the famous trombonist of the time takes over his band and renames it as Eagle band. Duesen has made several changes in the band including replacement of Bolden with another player. Bolden crumbles down as he witnesses their performance in the Lincoln Park as it has despoiled his main source of income along with his ambitions and passions. The financial tragedy sobers him and in this cauldron of human depravity, he begins to drink heavily and gradually gets afflicted by paranoia.

Bolden's unstable self eclipses over his stable self as his soul encounters frequent conflicts between certainty and anarchy, love and violence. Coomi S. Vevaina in the article, "Erasing Edges: Michael Ondaatje's *Coming Through Slaughter* and *Running in the Family* as Postmodernist Fiction" draws attention to the Bolden's "warring forces of peace and violence, order and disorder exist simultaneously in the protagonist Buddy Bolden and in all the characters in the book" (48). He leads a maverick life disregarding the conventions of the society. In Webb's interview with Bolden's neighbours, he realises

that Bolden "had lived a different life with every one of them" (64). Nora Bass, his wife constantly attempts to instill some degree of 'structure' to his chaotic world yet he fights to get away from it throughout his life.

Bolden's friendship with Webb helps him to retain his sanity, "Even at the start you set out to breed me into something better" (91). Webb removes Bolden's immaturity and helps him to regain his energy by drawing him back to the stable self. Bolden longs to embrace the path of order as suggested by Webb but he realises his inability to comply with the fixed path. He avouches that,

> All the time I hate what I am doing and want the other. In a room full of people I get frantic in their air and their shout and when I'm alone I sniff the smell of their bodies against my clothes. I'm scared Webb, don't think I will find one person who will be the right audience. All you've done is cut me in half, pointing me here. Where I don't want these answers. (91-92)

Bolden's wife, Nora and his friend, Webb stimulate him to infuse a sense of order in him, but on the other hand, his friends Bellocq and Robin Brewitt digress him to the state of disorder and chaos. Bellocq has lived a life of disorder and he feels at ease in leading an unstructured life. He exhorts Bolden to gradually move away from "the edge of the social world" (65) so that he can remain unaffected by the norms of the society. Bolden consorts with his friend's view that the society imposes an unforeseen threat on the artist's state of mind. Robin, his friend helps him to escape the fixed boundaries of life by offering abode in silence.

Bolden is constricted between the combat of order and disorder. Bellocq and Robin pull Bolden out of the public world of jazz and improvisation into a solitary world of

silence; Webb, on the other hand, pulls Bolden out of solitude back into the improvisational world of jazz. The conflict between his fragmented self transmutes him into a psychotic person. The utter chaos and the meaninglessness of his existence haunt his state of mind. He is frequently tormented by the images of death and destruction. In the article, "Reflections of Paranoid Anxieties in Ken Kessey's *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*" S. Lavanya also agrees to the fact that in the postmodern world "the alienated, rootless individual withdraws from real human existence and finds solace in hallucinations and ends up as a schizophrenic" (119).

Ondaatje reckons that Bolden's paranoia is engendered as a result of the fragmented nature of his psyche. He reckons that Bolden surpasses his chaotic state of mind by playing an anarchic and elemental music that predominate the mood of the song instead of the conventions of the society. His performance at the Liberty-Iberville exemplifies his transcendence from his fragmented consciousness to an exalted state of life. He succeeds in playing an unrestrained music and thereby transposes from the state of aberration to the moment of self-satisfaction.

Ondaatje's novels *Coming Through Slaughter, Running in the Family, In the Skin of a Lion, The English Patient* and *Anil's Ghost* divulge the impingement of postmodern scenario on the life of the individuals who are caught between the changing scenario of the society and culture in which they live. He suggests that the transfiguration from nomadic existence into the state of rootedness will help the individuals to sustain themselves at the time of crisis. The communal solidarity between the immigrants in multicultural environment would help them to face the crisis and eliminate the feelings of displacement and alienation. The migrant individuals should try to assimilate the new culture and at the

same time maintain their ties with their homeland to have an identity. The nurturing of one's self to meet the unforeseen changes in the world would help them to endure the crisis and make them stable.

In the novels *The English Patient* and *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje's female characters like Hana and Anil Tissera confront the most tumultuous events of war but they overcome their psychological trauma by reasserting their ties with the homeland. They become physically and mentally distorted as a result of the continuous exposure to death and devastation around them. Their physical state abduces their shell-shocked state of existence. They transmute themselves from an innocent to a matured person by the end of war. They become sapless and dismayed by the turbulence of the dark ambience and so they determine to change the condition of the society by utilising their healing power. Ondaatje suggests that Hana's role as a nurse and Anil's involvement as a forensic scientist helps them in utilising their skills to soothe their inner self that gets bewildered by the outside world.

The war victims can overcome their state of helplessness as they attempt to evade their memories of war. Hana decides to leave with the realisation that she can regain her previous self by establishing contact with her motherland. Anil, on the other hand, attempts to bring about a change in her motherland by exposing the condition of people of her homeland to the entire world. The affinity towards one's language and social scenario reawakens within the consciousness of the migrants when they feel that their homeland is in the state of crisis as in the case of Anil. She initially feels estranged in the new land after emigrating from Sri Lanka but gradually accustoms to the new land. She remains in alien land for a decade but when she comes to know of the mass tortures and killings; her

suppressed accounts of nationalism enkindled within her prompt her to bring out a possible change in the social scenario of Sri Lanka. She achieves a composite identity by identifying herself with the people of her homeland.

Ondaatje counterpoints the predicament of the female protagonists with that of the male characters like Caravaggio and Almásy in the novel *The English Patient*; and Mervyn Ondaatje in *Running in the Family*. These male characters endure utmost physical trauma besides witnessing the endless violence of war. Caravaggio's fingers get mutilated by the Fascists; Almásy loses his contours as a result of allied invasion, and Mervyn gets afflicted by paranoia when his perception of reality gets disillusioned as a result of the possible threat of invasion by the Japanese troops. They gradually lose their individuality and recede to the confined domain of desolation and depression. The distorted self of Almásy and Mervyn drives them away from forming a unique self, whereas Caravaggio decides to accompany Hana and thereby attain a sense of identity by adopting a new role as a father. He validates that the memories of detriment prevent them from nourishing a stable identity; he decides to restore his self by affixing ties with his homeland.

Ondaatje reiterates that the migrants possess an emotional attachment with the people of the homeland even if the migration is forced or voluntary. He relates that like Anil, he too has experienced the feeling of being insecure in the alien land, but by reasserting his bond with Sri Lanka as mentioned in the novel *Running in the Family*, he acquires the strong sense of rootedness and bonding with his homeland. He opines that the migrated individuals will not have a feeling of completeness even after securing a good job with high qualification unless they develop some links with their roots as it nourishes the

growth of any individual and provides mental strength at the time of social and emotional turmoils.

The aloofness from the homeland fills the consciousness of the migrants with tenacious reveries of their country. Ondaatje embarks upon a journey to Sri Lanka so as to revive his past life. His father becomes a central figure in the exploration of his ancestry and the past. John A. Thieme reinstates in the article, "'Historical Relations': Modes of Discourse in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*" that the "personal odyssey on which the writer sets out in *Running in the Family* is both a public and a private quest: an exploration of the past of Sri Lanka as well as an investigation into his own personal past" (41).

The immigrants from European countries and Africa who settle in the countries like Canada and New Orleans similarly face mental agony as they strive to adapt to the new land in the novels, *In the Skin of a Lion* and *Coming Through Slaughter*. Ondaatje has illustrated the plight of immigrants like Patrick Lewis, Nicholas Temelcoff, and Buddy Bolden who encounter extreme torments due to the feelings of estrangement and isolation. He considers that in a social system with cultural diversities, one must be able to balance life by attempting to meet changing circumstances. John W. Berry in the article, "Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation" considers that psychological acculturation is influenced by various factors including,

> . . . national immigration and acculturation policies, ideologies and attitudes in the dominant society, and social support. . . . But even in societies that tend towards assimilation policies, there was evidence that immigrants and

> ethnocultural group members generally prefer integration, and when they do, they tend to make more positive adaptations. (26-27)

Solidarity between members of the community helps the migrants to ascertain their identity. Patrick and Temelcoff initially struggle to assimilate themselves to the new atmosphere but the limitations in the language make them socially alienated. However, they overcome the experiences of anxieties of being uprooted and dislocated in the alien lands by redefining their identity. The social ties that they establish with other immigrants enable them to transgress the uncertainty of the strangled self. In the article entitled "Ethnic Identity, Immigration and Wellbeing" Jean S. Phinney et al. remarks that the immigrant policy of the host country determines the identity of the individual, "in particular, the extent to which a country supports the process of integration by respecting cultural diversity. National policies supporting multiculturalism would be expected to allow immigrants the option of being bicultural, and choice of this option should have an impact on wellbeing" (499).

Ondaatje proclaims that in the process of constituting a collective identity, the migrants become convoluted by the conflict between the two contradictory forces: certainty and uncertainty. Bolden's allurement towards leading a transfinite and indefinite life stands in stark contrast with the society's precept of leading a definite and structured life. Bolden's struggle throughout his life suggests the dangers of marginalisation that takes place when an individual attempt to participate in the larger society. The interminable torment he encounters makes him anxious and despondent but by playing a unique performance at the parade, he surmounts the fixed limits of music and life. Bolden's self-complacency helps him to acquire a synchronic self. The stress associated with

assimilation can be reduced only when the policy makers attempt to improve the condition of migrants by framing several welfare schemes in various fields such as education and health.

Ondaatje has made a scrupulous study of the interconnection between the socio-cultural condition and the identity of an individual. He believes that as the stable self represents the psychological wellbeing, the individuals should strive hard to strengthen themselves mentally and thereby play a significant role in the social development of the country. He contrives that the individual identity can be reinforced by conforming themselves to the audacious milieu. He avers that the recourse to the safe domain alleviates them from their desperate existence and helps them to develop a stable identity.