

Chapter I

Introduction

Literature is the finest medium to communicate the flavour of life. The literary discourse provides reflections and responses to the social, political and economic conditions of the world by conveying the shared experiences through a vehicle that is particularly personal and individualistic. The authors suggest genial means of creating an ideal place for the future by resorting to events of the past and present in their fiction. They point out the existential crisis faced by the fellow human beings and signify that by rectifying the follies and foibles of mankind, they can pave way for the maintenance of a tranquil state of life throughout the world.

Commonwealth literature is an umbrella term which denotes literature that is produced in the commonwealth countries. The countries' literary output primarily shares some of the unique experiences they faced during the period of British colonisation. They reflect the enormous impact of colonisation on the socio-cultural condition of the colonised countries and thereby examine its influence on the life of the people even after the period of colonisation. Canadian literature is the robust field among the commonwealth literature as the writers share some of the ordeals they faced during its colonial rule by French and British, and at the same time exposes its vulnerability to the domineering American culture.

Canadian literature has endured endless turmoil to achieve its current stature. The literature of the country has evolved from its colonial phase to its universal status with the remarkable contribution of writers from different cultural background who came to the country during the colonial rule. Literature of Canada is subdivided according to the two

major languages of the country namely French and English. Faye Hammill in the book entitled *Canadian Literature* considers that “Canada’s involved history of colonisation, immigration and federation” is reflected in the literary production of the country. To him, the term “‘Canadian literature in English’. . . generally refers to all anglophone literary writing produced in what is now Canada, including the work of immigrant writers and certain temporary residents, as well as literature from regions which in the past were politically separate from Canada, such as Newfoundland” (4).

Canadian literature achieved a new identity when Canada became a democratic nation accommodating people of different races, classes and religions. The oral voices of the native people who settled in the temperate regions of the country are considered as the harbingers of the growth of Canadian literature. Pauline Das in the dissertation entitled “The Politics of Survival in the Novels of Margaret Atwood” comments that “Canadian writing began with the usual early literature of exploring, pioneer settlements, collections of folk tales, and poems on Canadian landscapes, stories of immigrant life, local colour sketches and historical romance” (120). The country had a rich oral tradition, where the refined songs and stories were refined and then handed over to the succeeding generations. The aboriginal writers of this phase discussed about the general issues they witnessed around them as they had not confronted any significant events like wars or any other audacious incidents during their life time.

The oral literature was followed by the literature of the first explorations and entrepreneurial ventures. The white explorers and settlers who traversed the country’s unexplored parts of the world recorded their experiences in a form of writing that had served the beneficial attitude of assisting the future explorers. The significant signs of

literary activity can be discerned in the records of those explorers and travellers whose writing went beyond rigorous materialistic aims. The explorative writing had strong experimental undercurrents and was written in the form of accounts or diaries in which palpable signs of a Canadian literary tradition are evidently found.

The dearth of explorative tendency in the beginning of the seventeenth century declined the production of literary works. However, this silence was broken in the second half of the seventeenth century when another phase of writing originated owing to the literary works of the garrison writers who settled in the country. They wrote of their experiences in the new land in a manner that eulogised literary conventions and traditions of foreign countries. The writers' strategy of imitating the literary works forms a significant mark on the Canadian literary scene. This development shows that the emergence of literature is closely linked with the foreign literary culture, and that the Canadian setting remains incidental and superficial.

The Anglophone Canadian writing manifested itself in prose form. Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769) is acclaimed as the first Canadian novel and it epitomises the phase of literary importation. She has written her novel in epistolary form modelling on Samuel Richardson's *Clarrissa* in a series of 228 letters exchanged among a set of friends and lovers. The novel is considered as the Canadian counterpart of the British novel of manners concerned with the experiences of courtship and romance. Ameena Kazi Ansari in *English-Canadian Literary Canon* suggests that this novel "addresses itself to a British audience for whom Canada was the exotic locale to be savoured; the work is 'best described as an English novel that happens to exploit Canadian subject matter'" (117).

The phase of literary approximation was then replaced by the emergence of works which sought to come to terms with the environment in their creative milieu. The writers' focus on the Canadian settings and local events added colour to the imagination of the writers. The most prominent writers of this phase include John Richardson, Thomas Chandler Halliburton, and Susanna Strickland Moodie, who belonged to the English gentry and were set on preserving their imported values based on family, education, property, and propriety. The imitation of British models remained as the characteristic feature of these works, yet they attempted to imbue their works with a spirit and environment that is markedly Canadian.

Richardson's *Wacousta* (1832) or *The Prophecy: A Tale of the Canadas* is historical novel which is modelled on the works of Sir Walter Scott. The narrative begins in the Scottish Highlands, and then shifts to Canada against the backdrop of Pontiac's attacks on British garrisons around the Great Lakes. Marta Dvorak in the article entitled "Fiction" remarks that the novel is filled "with its sensational descriptions of violence and savagery, targeted the European appetite for exoticist discourse, and the taste for the abnormal and monstrous that can be traced as a constant feature from the Jacobean revenge tragedy to the Gothic novel and Romanticism" (156).

Halliburton's works reflect his loyalist antecedents and deep distrust of the United States. *The Clockmaker* or *The Sayings and Doings of Samuel Slick of Slickville* (1836) is the first fiction to use the regional dialect to portray the life of the Nova Scotians through the eyes of two outsiders such as a Yankee and an English squire. The author satirises Yankee verbosity and farcical British gentility with an aim to undermine and denigrate Canadian mores and customs. He has employed a bizarre mode of discourse to subvert the

realistic discourse by blending intricate rhetorical devices with the oral idiom and the ordinary with the extravagant.

Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* (1852) is a melodramatic tale focusing on the psychological tensions that prevail in an emigrant's mind when they confront a new environment. She bases the context of her novels from her own perceptions and feelings in the new land. Moodie like Hailburton has interpolated the lofty, declamatory style with transcriptions of the authentic speech of the writer's uneducated neighbours, in which the errors in pronunciation and grammar are emphasised to mock their pretensions to social equality. Robert Thacker in the book *English-Canadian Literature* identifies that as Moodie's "memoir progresses, the aesthetic principles that had first informed its style give way to the hard realities encountered in 'roughing it'. Here we see the English romantic convention . . ." (10).

The beginning of the twentieth century brought up a noticeable change in the literary output of the country. The writers completely broke away from the influence of foreign culture and sought materials that would awaken the nationalistic spirit of the Canadians. They consciously moulded a native tradition in which the themes specific to Canada forged the imagination and channelised the writing of the century. The Imperialist Movement began to recommend a strengthened Empire in order to counteract the influence of America. Sara Jeannette Duncan and Hugh MacLennan are some of the leading figures who propagated the nationalistic fervour among the Canadian citizens.

Duncan's novel *The Imperialist* (1904) is one of the most prominent postcolonial works of fiction and reflects Canada's emerging sense of national consciousness. Duncan criticises the social and political institutions of England by mocking the institutions such as

the House of Lords, the press, and their educational system that turns the young men to reticent and passive individuals. The novelist revolts against the imperialistic sensibility of England by pointing the inability of the coloniser to balance the dwindling economic condition of the country. He focuses on the local issues of Ontario along with the protest against the imperial centre.

MacLennan similarly makes a dramatic inquiry into the social position of Canada within the context of the great struggle in Europe. His concern over the condition of the Canadians after the period of colonisation makes him an emissary of Canadian culture and society. *Barometer Rising* (1941) is set in the Canadian city of Halifax, during First World War on the occasion of the collision of two ships in the harbour. The novel focuses in detail on the largest man-made explosion prior to the advent of the atomic bombs. He regards that the demolition of the harbour symbolises the destruction of established Canadian identity.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Canadian literature demonstrated the influence of leading figures of realistic fiction like Zola. The realistic fiction of Canada is set on the prairie terrain. Frances W. Kaye in “Literary Traditions” remarks that “Canadian Prairie literature rejects the themes of the Western—the noble savage, the rugged individual, the two-gun man—in favor of community and to some extent of women and family. . . . The themes of Prairie fiction are heritage and community.” The leading figures of the prairie novel include Frederick Philip Grove, Morley Callaghan and Sinclair Ross. The Canadian prairie fiction is replete with pastoral overtones and depicts the human failings and social flaws. They experimented with innovative story telling activities representing the range of physical environment and social condition.

Grove initiated the realistic vein of fiction writing in Canada. He migrated from Poland and settled in the prairies of Manitoba. He reflected his experiences as a teacher in rural Manitoba on the eve of the Great War to write his psychological novels that is imbued with the philosophical foundations he has taken up in Europe. His first novel in English, *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925) is considered as one of the first works of prairie realism. The novel marks a decisive breaking away from the influences of England and France. Meanwhile, he deviates away from the cultural impact of the United States by representing the life of the pioneer immigrants in Canada who arrived in unsettled territory and struggled with uncleared and hostile environment.

Callaghan foregrounds the urban scenario of Toronto by discussing the impact of the Depression years on the industrial development of the country. His realistic novels are replete with extensive religious symbols so as to demonstrate the Catholic humanist ideals. The novel, *Such is My Beloved* (1934) is a parable that is replete with echoes from scripture underscoring the sweet and generous nature of Father Dowling. Callaghan elevates his characters and settings with the deliberation that it rises beyond the specificity of location onto a universal plane. He is intent on addressing the social problems he finds around him and about people who have been caught in the trauma of the thirties. He believes that by reviving the teachings of Jesus Christ, he could offer a new hope and courage to people around the world.

Sinclair Ross's *As for Me and My House* (1941) is another landmark in Canadian fiction. The novel is set in the Economic Depression of the 1930s when the disaster of the great drought engulfed the American plains from the prairies in the south to the Texas in the south western region. Ross describes the lives of Mrs. Bentley, the narrator, her

husband, and a minister who arrive in the fictional town known as 'Horizon.' The novel records the collapse of religious belief, the hollow existence and the barely suppressed torment of these characters as they experience an indifferent attitude from people of the small town in which they settled. This work is a typical prairie novel in which the reader is invited to make a subjective interpretation of the plot as it is based on the theme of nothingness and meaninglessness.

The process of realistic writing that continued till the 1950s ushered in the phase of modernism in Canada. The younger generations blended the issues related to the physical realities of the new land with their own personal responses and interpretations of this reality. Madan Sarup in *An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism* states that "modernism developed in conscious opposition to classicism; it emphasized experimentation and the aim of finding an inner truth behind surface appearance" (131). In Canada, the creative writing which followed the classical formulations compiled by aestheticians like Aristotle, and Longinus in respect of content and form was specified as modern literature. The works of Ernest Buckler and Mordecai Richler foreshadow a new trend of writing that surfaced in Canada during the 1950s. The significant attempts made by the modernist writers to conform to the classical norms of fiction writing placed their novels as seminal works in the annals of Canadian fiction.

Buckler's *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) portrays the life of its protagonist by patching the memory of David Canaan between the ages of eleven and thirty in the course of narration so as to universalise mundane individual experience with poetic sensitivity. He explores the social ties that bind the community together by questioning the place of the individual within society. His novels explicate his zeal for strong ethical concerns.

Buckler's texts are in fact at a crossroads between the old and the new, connecting Canadian literature to modernism, yet paving the way for postmodern concerns.

Richler is one of the English-speaking Canadian writers who is best-known internationally. His masterpiece, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* (1959), highlights the moral ambiguity of its protagonists who desperately seek prosperity in the capitalist scenario of Canada. The novel exposes the experience of a young man named Duddy Kravitz who grows in a working-class Jewish neighborhood in Montreal, on the margins of both the powerful Anglo-Saxon Protestant community and the Francophone Catholic community during the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s. He foregrounds the urbane with all its tensions and travails so as to assert the need for evolving an equalitarian society where Jews will be given equal rights and treated with humanitarian spirit. Kirubahar and Rosalene in the article entitled "Displaced Diasporic Identities – A Case Study of Mordecai Richler's *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*" considers Richler as "an icon of Canadian culture, who won all of Canada's most important literary awards and one of that culture's most withering critic" (166).

Canadian literature written in the second half of the twentieth century witnessed a remarkable and substantial transformation from the trend of modernism to postmodernism. In the 1960s, Canadian fiction broke free from the fetters of imitation and at the same time overcame its obsession with the formation of cultural or national identities. It was marked by a spirit of self-confidence, and vitality which underlined the change from its earlier trend of realism and modernism. During this phase, the creative milieu symbolically transmuted the common experiences of life to gain contemporary relevance. It is this

quality that transcended the merits of these works from limited and narrow confines of national recognition to world recognition.

The fictional forms and modes multiplied rapidly during the second half of the twentieth century as writers strove to espouse suitable ways of literary expression. The postmodernists realised that a work of art cannot be divided into form and content, and therefore they aimed to liberate creative writing from conventional rigorous rules of composition. They hoped to transcend literature from the constricted boundaries of the Victorian modernism to attain the boundless heights of postmodernism by freeing itself its colonial identity. L.D. Gautam quotes the words of Robert Krotesch who in “Post-Modernism in Canadian Literature” observes that “Canadian literature evolved directly from Victorian into post-modern” (117).

The term Postmodernism was first used by Charles Jencks in 1947 to describe a new style of architecture that emerged in the beginning of twentieth century. It was then used to describe politics, international relations, arts, philosophy, popular culture, and cyber culture. Pramod K. Nayar in the article, “Postmodernism” defines that the term postmodernism began to be used in literary criticism in the 1950s and 1970s “to describe the complex work of authors like Donald Barthelme, John Barth, Samuel Beckett, Thomas Pynchon, Kurt Vonnegut and even James Joyce” (216). He considers that the term was then gradually popularised in literary criticism “during the 1960s and 70s by critics like Ihab Hassan, Irving Howe, Leslie Fiedler and others” (216).

The concept of postmodernism is considered as an intellectual and theoretical enterprise that attempts to understand the historical, social, cultural and psychological condition of the contemporary society. It is radically interdisciplinary in nature as it breaks

through the traditional distinctions between different subjects and interpenetrates all areas of knowledge. The postmodernist literature is regarded as a significant reversal of the dominant literary socio-cultural conditions of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries as it enables to look at the real world from a fresh perspective, instead of becoming strongly entrenched in the superannuated views of society and life. Barry Smart in the book *Modern Conditions, Postmodern Controversies* regards that a postmodern work of art certainly examines

. . . postmodern forms of life, or a condition of postmodernity, are conceived to be articulated with radical transformations in the structure and organisation of Western economies, the introduction of new information and telecommunications technologies, and related changes in culture and society, the idea of postindustrial society has continued to remain on the agenda for discussion and analysis. (142)

The idea of a postmodern historical era is introduced by Arnold J. Toynbee. In the book entitled *A Study of History*, he states that “A post-Modern Age of Western history . . . had seen the rhythm of a Modern Western war-and-peace broken . . . by the portent of one general war following hard on the heels of another” (235). He insinuates that the outset of First World War is regarded as the beginning of the postmodern general war as it disrupted the cosy complacency and fake security promised by the modernist social theories. He believes that the postmodern era emerged with the perpetuation of a series of transitions and radical changes in the social setup.

The globalisation of the world, the transformations in the power structures of the world and the rise in the capitalist mode of production are regarded as the main attributes

leading to the changes in the postmodern world. Some of the significant changes include the migration of people and other resources from one country to the other; the rapid growth of scientific knowledge and technological innovations; the increase of industrial working class people; and the emergence of various political organisations and movements.

The prospect of change that is perpetually present throughout the world has brought in both promises and threats. The globalisation of world has increasingly eroded the economic, political, and cultural autonomy of the world in recent decades. Moreover, the emergence of capitalistic policies generated unacceptable forms of inequality and exploitation as it stimulated individual or private interest instead of public or community welfare. They contribute to the disorganisation of communities and destruction of the society.

The driving forces of capitalism and its reterritorialising processes induced migrations of desert explorers, invasions, enslavements, and other multicultural deterritorialisations. The bourgeois tendency of the capitalists hastened several major and minor wars throughout the twentieth and twenty first centuries. Some of the other striking effects perpetuated as a result of capitalism include social turmoil, increasing nuclear threat, the technologising of the workforce under multinational capitalism and the breakdown of religious belief leading to a kind of nihilism and anxiety about the future.

The unprecedented problems arising from the accelerating pace of technological changes, the impact of associated innovations, and the persistent political and economic inequalities have great impact on the life of the common man. The destructive use of atomic energy has threatened the entire human species with its mass threatening capability. The complexities of the postmodern world along with the chaotic events of the world such

as the two world wars and the holocausts provoked the postmodernists to discontinue themselves from the Enlightenment notions of truth and progress.

The postmodern writers deterred from the optimistic belief of the past, that reason would provide a foundation for human progress. For instance, the Canadian postmodern writers such as Timothy Findley and Anne Michaels in the novels, *The Wars* (1997) and *Fugitive Pieces* (1996) focus on the psyche of the characters who experience the feeling of forlornness and depression as a result of the destructive world war and the holocaust. These writers express the pessimistic attitude that is developed within the postmodern individuals as a result of the imminent despair they experience during the suffering of total war, the loss of faith and the growing disillusionment in the value crunching modern age. Evelyn Cobley in “Postmodernist War Fiction: Findley’s *The Wars*” suggests that his novel constitutes

. . . a postmodernist disruption of the ideological assumptions of modernity which the First World War writers, adopting the strategies of nineteenth-century realism and high modernism, continued to uphold in spite of the fact that the war itself was in the process of showing that modernity failed to deliver the promise of universal human emancipation. (99)

The horrific events of the world prompted Findley and several other postmodernists to subvert some of the social and moral principles of the modernist theories which advocated the Enlightenment policies of the colonisers. Callum G. Brown in the book *Postmodernism for Historians* has affirmed that the movement “is a reaction to the modernism of intellectual thought that dominated from around 1800 to 1960—a period of dominance known as modernity” (12). The postmodern writers criticise as to how in the

name of Enlightenment, capitalists and imperialists developed scientific justifications to attest their materialistic attitude and prejudices.

The novels like Douglas Glover's *Elle* (2003) and Guy Vanderhaeghe's *The Last Crossing* (2003) explicate the process of colonisation of the European countries who colonised Canada across different time periods, ranging from the sixteenth century explorations of St. Lawrence River to the late nineteenth century settlement on the western plains of Alberta and Saskatchewan. They express as to how the history of world witnessed the increasing instances of European expansion during the nineteenth century as the Europeans steadily extended their power across the globe. Pedro M. Carmona Rodríguez in the article, "Beyond the Edge of the Century" states that Glover's novel "disrupts the myth of the early foundation, the male explorer and his taming of the wild as the first step for civilisation and progress in North America" (39).

The European nations freely claimed and possessed the geographical territories of the world by expanding the empire with the notion that they are progressing with the improving movement of the human condition. They exclaim that, they have the task of civilising the people of the colonised countries, but in reality, they utilised the raw materials like crops, woods, and cheap labour of the colonised countries for their material prosperity. They looted their wealth and in fact marginalised them owing to the socially and economically disenfranchised and impoverished condition of the inhabitants. They justified their deeds by proclaiming it as an act of benevolence and also adverted it as their ardent effort to create order and prosperity in the non-European world.

The postmodern novels of Glover and Vanderhaeghe highlight as to how the Enlightenment policy of the elite people became the strong intellectual form in European

nations and acted to the detriment of the world and its societies. The modernists justified the Enlightenment policy of the colonisers with the belief that they are necessary for the proper functioning of the society. They encouraged racial prejudice that justified whites as superior to other races on medical and religious grounds. They entertained capitalists and marginalised the impoverished sector of society. The exasperating consequences of the domination of the Enlightenment policy include: the modern class system; European empires that exploited people of colour by converting them to Christianity, and industrialism and despoiling of the planet earth.

The Enlightenment and modernist social theories are considered as the source of the contemporary world's massive problems. The coloniser's attitude of evolving hybrid environment in the colonised countries endorsing the economic and social inequalities between different social groups is considered as the main reason behind the ethnic conflicts of the postmodern world. In addition, people who migrate to meet up to the demands of the colonisers face threats like economic, racial and social discrimination in the migrated land.

The postmodern novels such as George Bowering's *Caprice* (1998) and *Burning Water* (1980) propose the abolition of social class, rank, racial, religious or equivalent vestiges of the society as it effectuates conflict between different nations. The marginal position of Indians in the novels similarly orients the postmodern individual to the need for developing the ability to take moral decision. The novels propagate against the discrimination of people and are based on the desirability of social, gender, racial, and religious equality. Terry Eagleton in *The Illusions of Postmodernism* recognises that the respect for cultural difference is necessary for the evolution of a just society. He shares his observation:

In contrast to the ethic of compassion, solidarity, loving kindness, mutual cooperation, this hymning of difference as an end in itself shows up as peculiarly one-sided and impoverished. Differences cannot fully flourish while men and women languish under forms of exploitation; and to combat those forms effectively implicates ideas of humanity which are necessarily universal. (121)

The extensive and intensive processes of social, cultural, economic, and political change that emulated in the world constituted an increasingly prominent aspect of postmodern life. These transformations have a great impact upon the everyday life of the postmodern individuals. Jameson in the book *The Cultural Turn* states that “Postmodernism as an ideology, however, is better grasped as a symptom of the deeper structural changes in our society and its culture as a whole . . .” (50). The vicissitudes of identity have changed over time as it increasingly mirrors the turbulence of the postmodern world.

The identity of an individual is the product of self-perception of the individual and perception of other members of a community on a particular individual in the society. Therefore the identity of the individual is constructed within its social and cultural environment. This social construction involves an interaction between culture on one hand, and the individual’s mental and physical experiences on the other. Stuart Hall in the article “Ethnic Identity and Difference” considers that “Identities are a kind of guarantee that the world isn’t falling apart quite as rapidly as it sometimes seems to be. It’s a kind of fixed point of thought and being, a ground of action, a still point in the turning world. That’s the kind of ultimate guarantee that identity seems to provide us with” (10).

The identity of the postmodern individuals is threatened by the atrocities endured during social and political turmoil; the proliferation of nuclear and chemical weapons; the sense of alienation based on the differences in race, class and gender; the feelings of displacement in the migrated land; the increasing depletion of natural resources; growing environmental pollution; and the prospect of global climatic changes. These social and cultural uncertainties of the postmodern world displaced and decentered the stable sense of identity. Identity, being both a social product and a social force, gets affected as it responds to the numerous facets and fluxes of its embedded society. The idea that individuals are in possession of a core, rational, unitary self, endowed with an unchanging nature and an independent consciousness, is considered simply a political artifact left over from the European age of Enlightenment. The postmodern self is considered to be the direct consequence of power and individual's experience of the same.

In the contemporary world, the identity of an individual is basically multiple rather than a single coherent identity. The individual's identity that is often referred to as contested, uncertain, and in flux is symptomatic of society as a whole. It reflects the society full of tensions, conflicts and contradictions. In *Explaining Postmodernism*, Stephen R.C. Hicks states that the "violence is also experienced by the poor at the hands of the rich and by the struggling nations at the hands of the capitalist nations" (4). The healthy, favourable circumstance that is necessary for the well-functioning self is completely void during this period. Stuart Hall in the article entitled "Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities" opines that:

. . . the fact is that none of them is, any longer, in either the social, historical or epistemological place where they were in our

conceptualizations of the world in the recent past. They cannot any longer be thought in the same homogenous form. We are as attentive to their inner differences, their inner contradictions, their segmentations and their fragmentations as we are to their already-completed homogeneity, their unity and so on.

They are not already-produced stabilities and totalities in the world. They do not operate like totalities. If they have a relationship to our identities, cultural and individual, they do not any longer have that suturing, structuring, or stabilizing force, so that we can know what we are simply by adding up the sum of our positions in relation to them. They do not give us the code of identity as I think they did in the past. (45-46)

In the postmodern world, the large scale displacement of people as a result of colonisation and globalisation has aroused new concerns over identities. The mundane intercultural interactions with people of different cultures in a multicultural social scenario lead to the identity crisis. James Clifford in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the late 20th Century* describes how “Cultural action, the making and remaking of identities takes place in the contact zones, along the policed and transgressive intercultural frontiers of nations and people” (7). The sense of displacement in the hybrid arena along with the severance from the ancestral ties has created ambiguous cultural entities. It is these complexities faced by postmodern individuals that have ensued in fragmented identities.

The postmodern novel, *Disappearing Moon Café* (1990) by Sky Lee emphasises the importance of evolving a heterogeneous view of the world as she does not view a culture as inferior or superior. Nicole Falkenhayner in “Identity in Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan*

and Sky Lee's *Disappearing Moon Café*" affirms that Lee "links the experience of her protagonists to the First Nations People and to the Canadian land as a purveyor of an alternative identity" (37).

The modernist faith in social and cultural unity gave way to the notions of social and cultural pluralism in the postmodern world, since it enabled the blurring of national boundaries and allowed various individual cultures to be welcomed by the whole world. The main reason for this shift in ideologies is due to the breaking up of the colonial empires all over the world. The colonised countries became both physically and mentally exploited by the colonisers. They did not liberate themselves from the imperialists even after gaining their physical independence as they feel imprisoned by the mental colonisation that had occupied their spirits since their domination. The people living in colonised countries can attain their complete liberty only when they shed off the influence of the imperialist culture and expose the virtues of their own culture to the world.

The postmodern novels like Rudy Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* however, do not lament over the hybrid and fragmented state of contemporary society, instead they celebrate the same in their works. Wiebe believes that as the world itself is meaningless and chaotic, the relentless pretention and attempt to make life meaningful is futile and impossible. The implication of this is that instead of abandoning the utopian thought with cynical attitude, alternative future should be envisaged to balance utopian ideals with realism. The mental anguish of the postmodern individuals stresses the need to reconstitute utopian thought as a means of countering both despair and disappointment. This can be achieved only by analysing the present and by exploring existing patterns of social life.

The policy of framing potential alternatives with a view to construct healthy living conditions is the only way for forming a hopeful future.

Postmodern novelists such as Joy Kogawa, Margaret Atwood, Robert Krotesch and Rudy Wiebe suggest ways of constructing an equanimous society where an individual becomes the highest determinant of right and wrong and is given the freedom to act according to their own will. They consider that culture and history are not objective facets of any society that can be stated and believed unanimously by all people. They often do not consider their actions in light of the larger social order, but rather they contemplate how their experiences can be contributed to the overall social experience of individualism. They reject the existence of and reference to master narratives of the history and culture composed by the conventional historiographers as they are suspicious of authority and of the hierarchy that lies behind the historical account.

The conventional historiographers convert past events into facts by opting events according to their degree of perception. They give priority to certain real events and omit the other events which they consider as trivial. They do not stop with the narration of events that have happened in the past, but go beyond it and make a rigid assertion of what must be considered as truth. The postmodern novelists attack the social theories that lay claim to represent the entire social scenario by detecting social conditions truthfully guaranteeing historical progress, and facilitating progressive social change. They consider these as grand narratives that legitimise political subjugation and cultural homogenisation.

The totalising features of modernist social theory have affinity for centralised systems of power and social planning that efface and negate the experiences of the incapacitated individuals. The hierarchy in society discredits the exertion of the

disempowered sector of society, and with this exclusion the capitalists and the imperialists get benefitted and empowered. The empowered class of people includes—men, the colonisers, the elite class of people, and the rulers of the country; and those who are disempowered include—women, the racial minorities, colonial subjects, and the proletariats as they are politically unrepresented.

The discourse of imperial understanding of non-white cultures during their domination was biased and prejudiced. They claimed justice and emancipation as the two key terms linked to metanarratives, yet the narratives that aim to enact justice are at times manifested against the common man by its inhumanity, violent upheaval and spiritual desecration. The colonised nations and cultures struggled for freedom from colonial and neocolonial denigration and exploitation but they were disempowered in their struggle as they were not given the power to articulate the need for an affirmative identity of the self and of the nation. The dispossessed people hoped for a more equitable distribution of power and discourse but they were deluded by the discourse of the dominant ideologies. The principal implication is that the promise of the project of modernity to facilitate the emancipation of humanity from poverty, ignorance, prejudice, and frustration is no longer feasible in the postmodern world.

The postmodern novels of Kogawa, Atwood and Krotesch such as *Obason* (1981), *Alias Grace* (1996) and *Badlands* (1975) resist empty conventions that lie behind the master narratives and instead are concerned over the plight of marginalised people. Jean Francois Lyotard argues in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, that the advent of postmodernism marks the “decline of the unifying and legitimating power of the grand narratives of speculation and emancipation” (38). Fredrick Jameson defines the

postmodern episteme as the decay of metanarratives in the foreword to *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, where he states that “The narrative function is losing its functors, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal” (xxiv).

In the postmodern era, knowledge is not legitimated or sanctioned according to the grand narratives that have shaped Western knowledge. Postmodernists are hostile to any overarching philosophical or political doctrine, and are strongly opposed to those dominant ideologies. They voice in favour of people who do not fit into the larger stories, the subordinated and the marginalised against those with the power to disseminate the master narratives. In local narratives, the knowledge is only partial, fragmented and incomplete. There is a radically new form of epistemological freedom which helps to resist the dominance of overarching patterns which ignore the details and experiences of the suppressed class of people by neglecting the dominant patterns which make the sense of the world on a grand scale. Marcel Cornis-Pope in the article entitled “Postmodernism” purports that postmodernism aims at “retrieving ignored events and shifting attention from ‘winners’ to ‘ordinary people’ or the ‘historically displaced’” (183).

Kogawa, Atwood and Krotesch verbalise the silenced histories of the marginalised groups by means of subverting the already accepted interpretation in order to reveal the decentralised histories of the ex-centric ‘others’ to the centre of the discourse. The political and other minorities like women and the colonised who have long been denied an official voice by hegemonic ideologies become the narrators of the novels. They supposedly turned the modern social theories as obsolete discourses. They considered that the social structures like class hierarchy, gender structure, complex organisation and patterned social processes such integration, domination, exploitation as conceited and obdurate.

The postmodern fiction of Wiebe coalesce with the scheming of the postcolonial critics in the rewriting of history as he attempts to create alternative histories of the colonised as opposed to the official history of the coloniser. The official history is seen as a monologic discourse representing only the viewpoints of the dominant ideology which in turn creates history as a monumental discourse. He believes that traditional history is used by the colonial powers in a discursive way as an instrument to construct reality on behalf of the coloniser; and such history inevitably leaves out the histories of the colonised.

Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* stresses the cultural clash that enveloped the country as a result of imperial domination. He makes references to the coloniser's version of historical facts so as to highlight their materialists' designs and meanwhile destroys the hegemonic accounts of the past by means of introducing the suppressed voices of others whose histories are silenced under the monology of coloniser's history. Ania Loomba in the book *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* comments that the subaltern history is "concerned with recovering the histories and perspective of marginalised people—be they women, non-whites, non-Europeans, the lower classes and oppressed castes . . ." (231). The postmodern novelists have subverted the traditional way of discourse and have lead to the new ways of perceiving the world. They suggest that one cannot change the world and so one must change one's perception so as to view the world in a unique way.

The postmodernists replicate the arena of the contemporary world by subverting the generic traits of traditional fiction writing. This is also considered as one of the major features of postmodernist fiction. Modernists confronted with the uncertainties of self, history, chaos and fragmented human life as they believed that literature is capable of imposing order, coherent structure, value, and meaning on chaos and fragmentation but

this faith lapsed after the Second World War. The distorting experiences made the postmodern novelists like Timothy Findley, George Bowering, Robert Krotesch and Robertson Davies to forsake faith in the concept that literature has the ability to give order and meaning, and make sense of life in an otherwise chaotic and absurd world. They express their dissatisfaction at the dominant prevailing art and tried to bridge the gap between the art and the entertainer by moving away from modernist's belief in evolving an established state.

The significant literary critics during this period such as Leslie Fiedler, Susan Sontag, George Stainer and Irvin Howe refer to this significant growth of postmodern writing and suggest it to be the end of the traditional Western concept of art and literature. This new sensibility uses art as a vehicle for exposing its traditional pretensions and for showing the vulnerability and fragility of art and language. It rejects the dominant academic tradition of analytic, interpretative criticism, instead they approve of the rationalistic mode of interpretation of texts. They adopt an ironic view of its traditional pretensions to truth, high seriousness and profundity of meaning. Munir in the article "Paradigmaticity of Postmodernism" remarks that the postmodernist writers view "literature in general and fiction in particular as a 'free consciously false construction' after having realised the ultimate futility of the realistic 'slice-of-life approach'" (166).

The postmodern novels of Findley celebrate the state of anarchy, where the reader evolves multiple interpretation of the same text. He relinquishes the idea of providing meaning and structure in the chaotic world by disregarding old concepts of characterisation and plot structure. Instead the novels, confide in the never ending pursuit of meaning. Findley's *The Wars* explicate the tendency of the postmodern novels to question the

presumptions of modernism by transcending its limiting frontiers. The narrative of the postmodern novels does not unfold a traditional story as they prioritised the medium and the mode of narration of the message rather than the story. They displayed their own suspicion of certain literary conventions that have been followed for ages like coherent narrative point of view in the fiction.

The postmodern novels give multiple perspectives on the protagonists' actions and intentions; and demand the readers to solve the loose ends by filling in the unnarrated events. Findley has introduced multiple narrators to explicate the numerous ways of approaching the narrative strands in the novel. The novel, *The Wars*, has two narrators, where one is an I-narrator who is also a historian, and the other is an impersonal third-person narrator. The prologue and the first sections of the novel introduce the two narrative strands and hint the pattern of how the two strands are related to each other within the novel. It is the protagonist, Robert who is considered as common focus of both these narrations and unifies the narrations into a single whole.

The Canadian postmodern novel has relied on the impulses of both realism and self-reflexivity. The postmodernist fiction challenges the conventions of realism. The realist novel is not completely void in Canada, rather it is a defining base upon which the postmodernists challenge. Linda Hutcheon in the book *The Canadian Postmodern* observes that

. . . for many Canadian novelists, from Timothy Findley to Audrey Thomas, the act of making fictions is an unavoidably ideological act, that is, a process of creating meaning within a social context. Along with the novels of Salman Rushdie, Gabriel García Márquez, Umberto Eco, and E.L.

Doctorow . . . much Canadian fiction presents itself an investigating relationship between art and what we choose to call ‘reality’, between the discourses of art and the structures of social and cultural power. (10)

Postmodernist fiction delves indepth to focus not on reality but on the imagination’s response to reality—a response that is recognised as the only aspect of reality which could ever be known and expressed. M.K. Choudhary in the article, “Postmodernism and Fiction” quotes the words of Matei Calinesu to explain the guiding ideology of postmodernism, “to get to the truth one must unmask or demystify the deception of native realism, tear up illusory appearances and identify the hidden reality” (11).

Canadian postmodernism designates art forms such as literature as fundamentally self-reflexive. The self-consciousness of art as art has enabled the writers to acquire a new involvement with the social and historical world. This has also led to a general questioning of forming rigid distinctions between different forms of literature as they formerly aimed at reflecting the life and reality. The borders between the novel and what has traditionally been considered non-fiction and other fields of knowledge such as history, psychology are constantly being disregarded. Marie Vautier in the article entitled “Canadian Fiction Meets History and Historiography” comments that “Contemporary fictions in English-speaking Canada and Quebec, then, continue to be intertwined with history and historiography. . .” (22).

The classifications of genres that are paradoxically built upon the impossibility of firmly defining genre boundaries are obsolete. The contemporary Canadian fiction challenges the boundaries of specifically ‘high art’ genres by blending several popular

cultural forms like comic books and movies, detective stories and sports tales into fiction. They have a growing passion towards the gothic, the grotesque and the horror story. They follow eclectic approach by utilising quotational references, pub talk, pop songs and advertising slogans.

The postmodernist novels of Krotesch parody both the high and popular art and challenge them by undoing their status and power. The postmodernists reflect the art forms instead of imitating the natural beauty. They incorporate texts from other works but these intertexts are presented either directly or indirectly to the reader. The intertextual references in the postmodern texts use parody and pastiche to echo past works that signal its awareness that literature is made first and foremost out of other literature. The strategy of incorporating intertextual references challenges the notion that art forms should be necessarily considered as original and unique.

The intertextual references are cited by the postmodern writers in the foot notes so as to illustrate the points that are claimed in the text. These notes do not disrupt the readers' attention. Instead, they direct the reader to other texts that inspired the writer to cite it in his fictional work. They employ the novel within the novel technique to ask questions about the use of representation rather than focusing on what is being represented. This technique draws attention to the particularity of both the tense employed and the time narrated. The novel that uses intertextuality technique, fragments a text into different sections, so that each sections can be integrated later. This technique in turn questions the nature of a given text as a unified whole.

The Canadian postmodern novelists such as Robertson Davies make reference to historical myths in their works to infer the events of the past. They deconstruct British

social and literary myths to redefine their colonial history. Robertson Davies' *The Lyre of Orpheus* (1998) which is a parallel to the Arthurian legend reinforces the nationalistic self-conceptions of the Canadians. He has described the ambition of the Canadian characters like Simon Darcourt, Arthur Cornish, and Mary who are extremely adventurous by nature. In fact, they reflect some of the characters in the Arthurian legend like Arthur, Guenevere, and Lancelot.

The Canadian postmodern writers have adopted different techniques of postmodernism in their works. Some of the prominent and influential postmodern authors include, Leonard Cohen, Robert Kroetsch, George Bowering, Rudy Wiebe, Margaret Atwood, Margaret Laurence and Michael Ondaatje. The works of these novelists are illustrative of the concept of postmodernism as they are characterised by the postmodern forms of scrutinising the conditions of the world. They believe that reality is not subjected to any predictability and so they affirm that the modernist attempts to reflect its nuances failed to convey the deeper aspects of reality.

Leonard Cohen is the forerunner of the postmodernist fiction of the seventies and eighties. His novels foreground the colonialist historical patterns of power in both national and gender terms. He has employed metafictional texts with parodies of texts ranging from the Bible to the Platter's songs in his novels to depict the impact of colonisation on the country's language, religion and literature as a whole. He emphasises the condition of women, in particular, during the colonial environment as they were subjected to frequent distortions and violence.

Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966) establishes and subverts the authority of both conventional historical writing and art. He self-consciously counteracts the life history of

the real historical character Catherine Tekakwitha with the fictional account of the characteristics portrayed in Edouard Lecompt's textual interpretation of her character. The novel presents the existential agonies of identity formation and alienation instead of focusing on the moral conflicts between good and evil. He signals the textual nature of his portrait verbally and through his description of the portrait of Catherine that forms the facade of Lecompt's book. In the article "*Beautiful Losers: All the polarities*" Linda Hutcheon appraises that "Cohen plays with the novel structure but the essential unity of the work lies outside the temporal and spatial confines of plot and character, in the integrity of the images" (42).

Robert Kroetsch has been considered as the father of Canadian postmodernism. His novels explore issues of Canadian identity by challenging the canonical notions of literature of certainty, comfort, stability, and security. His works are rooted very firmly in the geographical, historical world of Alberta but he problematises the historical knowledge and historical narrative by questioning the existence of a single historical truth. His work plays on the borders and the boundaries of genre by challenging the distinction between fiction and nonfiction, between fragment and totality, between general and the particular. His fiction is a parody of classical myth, either of individual figures or the Homeric and Virgilian epic notion of the quest. His forte lies in juggling meaning, form and language in a deconstructive fashion so as to create new interpretations.

Kroetsch's novel *The Studhorse Man* (1969) deals with the odyssey of the horses through the streets of Alberta. He presents a macroscopic view of the wider world surrounded by automobiles by exploring the legacy of the horses and at the same time, traces down the feeling of restlessness, desire, and perpetual movement towards madness

as a part of the horses' DNA. He symbolises the cusp between their vanishing world and the current world of thoughtless, gas-guzzling highway transportation which is considered as the very life-blood of this province. Aritha Van Herk in the introduction to *The Studhorse Man* has remarked that the novel "celebrates the monstrous imprimatur of exaggeration, of comic violence. The opportunities for misbehaviour provided by loud and large communal events subvert structure, enabling anarchic release, and provide Hazard with an appropriate accident or *deus ex machina* to shift direction yet again" (XI). This novel enfolds the life across the enormous landscape, from the Aegean seas to western Canada and deals with events from recent history to a future beyond imagination.

George Bowering is another leading postmodern writer as his novels are set in the postcolonial era, where he scrutinises about the process of exploration that was perpetuated as result of imperialist and expansionist endeavours in the Northwest Passage. In the article entitled "Finding Narratives: George, Vancouver and the Process of Discovery" Michelle Hartley infers that Bowering's novels "creates a space to turn to idiosyncratic individual histories that comprise the larger fiction of westward expansion as a civilizing mission. His own larger enterprise thus constitutes regionality, rather than regionalism" (99). His narratives blend ponderous themes with exuberant comedy. The self-consciousness of his novels and the historical reconstruction of his novels make him an exponent of postmodern techniques.

Bowering's *Burning Water* (1980) is an unconventional historical novel that questions the historically accepted facts. The novel revolves around a ninety-nine foot British warship, HMS Discovery, which was on a four and a half year mission to expedite the Nootka Agreement as per the treaty signed with Spain. Captain George Vancouver, the

ship's commander was believed to have been included in the task to chart the coastline of the Pacific Northwest and to seek the fabled Northwest Passage. In this novel, Bowering casts doubts on the universal fact that Vancouver had discovered the north-western part of America in the period 1791-1794.

Rudy Wiebe is a Mennonite writer who has published a large amount of work to bring about a significant change in the treatment of people belonging to the Mennonite heritage. His works typically explore his personal religious beliefs, aspects of modern society, and the traditional values and character of modern Canada. The didacticism and moral seriousness which pervade his works explicate his strong belief that the strict adherence to the moral values will pave way for the upliftment of the life of Mennonites. His writings employ myth image within realistic settings, and thereby attempt to develop and transform tradition rather than deconstructing it altogether like Kroetsch.

In *The Temptations of Big Bear* (1973), Wiebe captures the oral skills of the historical character, Big Bear. Wiebe has conveyed the rhetorical and ritualistic power of Bear's Cree speech in the English language though he did not acquire any existing records of his speeches after his death. He has ingeniously invented and fictionalised a set of lyrical and metaphorical speeches. In telling the story of Big Bear, Wiebe gives multiple perspectives on his hero's actions and intentions and then leaves the readers to conclude the novel. By overtly presenting his novels as novels and by the variety of historical perspectives infused in the novel, Wiebe makes his novels distinctly postmodern.

Atwood is one of the best writers of her generation. She is characteristically described as a postmodern female writer, who constantly experiments with different genres like historiographic metafiction, dystopia, crime fiction, Gothic fiction etc. In her works,

she distorts the view that language depicts the reality by employing several postmodern metafictional devices. Rūta Dlapkauskaitė in the article “Postmodern Voices From Beyond: Negotiating with the Dead in Margaret Atwood’s *The Penelopiad*” states that Atwood’s “writings are also acutely aware of the relations of power that construct our social roles and organise the discourses through which we imagine ourselves and others and through which we make sense of the present and the past” (142).

In the novel *The Penelopiad* (2005), Atwood employs the myth of the faithful Penelope and the wise Odysseus to speak the unspeakable and thereby reveal the secrets of the living and the dead. She contests the official account of the Grecian myth by exposing the power relations that structured the social hierarchies of Grecian society: the enslavement of female servants, the silencing of aristocratic women, and the glorification of male heroes. The novel actualises that it is only after death, that Penelope gains the liberty to criticise her father, husband and son and to contradict the grand narrative of history.

Margaret Laurence is a prominent fiction writer in Canada after Second World War. She acknowledged the isolation experienced by the middle-class white women of United States in the 1950s and 1960s. She makes a profound picture of the condition of women in the imaginary prairie town, Manawaka in her novels. Her persistent effort to sketch the lives of the suppressed women folk like that of Atwood ranks them as postmodern women writers of Canada.

Laurence’s *The Fire-Dwellers* (1969) has given voice to the women characters whose lives have been unrecorded from the conventional fictional writings. The novel deals with the life of the protagonist, Stacey and shows how the women’s movement helps

to educate the public. Laurence asserts that it is this education that makes it possible for Stacey to experiment with ways of subverting oppressive patriarchal structures. To her, the modern city lacks the feeling of communal solidarity that is essential for liberation and transformation of women.

Philip Michael Ondaatje, born on 12th September 1943 in Colombo, Ceylon, is one of the most popular and critically acclaimed Canadian writers from Sri Lanka. He is a Sri Lankan Burgher, who is also known to have belonged to an Eurasian ethnic group as his family ancestry has been described as a polyglot mixture of Dutch, English, Sinhalese, and Tamil. He has been raised in a multicultural background and his works demonstrate his affiliation with several countries including Sri Lanka, London and Canada. He was initially educated in Sri Lanka but after moving to England with his mother, he continued his education in London for eight years and has been living in Canada since he was nineteen.

Ondaatje is a poet, editor, and author of several novels, screen plays and critical works. He is known for his renowned lyrical prose and unusual blending of genres. His works have been translated into a dozen languages including Italian, French, Portuguese, Turkish, Spanish and Catalan; and have also garnered numerous awards and honours. He was awarded the Ralph Gustafson Award, 1965; the Epstein Award, 1996; E.J. Pratt medal, 1966 and the President's Medal from the University of Ontario in 1967; Canada Council grant in 1968, 1977; Books in Canada First Novel award, 1977; Governor-General's Award for Poetry, 1979; Toronto Book award, 1988; and Literary Lion award, 1993; Giller Prize (Canada), 2000; Prix Medicis, 2000; Kiriya Pacific Rim Book Prize, 2000; Scotiabank Giller Prize, 2007. In addition, Ondaatje was the recipient of the Canadian Governor-General Award for Fiction in 1971, 1980, 1992 and 2000. He was

awarded the Canada-Australia prize in 1980 and in 1992. He was presented the most prestigious, Booker McConnell Prize for his novel *The English Patient* in 1992 and he was again shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize in 2007.

Ondaatje's literary career began with the publication of a series of poems. He has produced thirteen collection of poems—*The Dainty Monsters*, 1967; *The Man with Seven Toes*, 1969; *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left-handed Poems* 1970; *Rat Jelly*, 1973; *Elimination Dance*, 1978; *Claude Glass*, 1979; *There's a Trick with a Knife I'm Learning to Do: Poems, 1963-1978*, 1979, also published as *Rat Jelly, and Other Poems, 1963-1978*; *Secular Love*, 1984; *All along the Mazinaw: Two Poems*, 1986; *The Cinnamon Peeler: Selected Poems*, 1989; *Handwriting*, 1981 and *The Story*, 2006. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek in his "Introduction to Comparative Cultural Studies and Michael Ondaatje's Writing" remarks Eluned Summers-Bremner's observation that Ondaatje's poetry "engages nature continually, in a dynamically architectonic fashion, as a world at once embodied and infused with cultural and linguistic losses, a field of structural liminality whose correlatives are memory, love, and desire" (5).

Ondaatje's films include *Sons of Captain Poetry*, *Carry on Crime and Punishment*, *The Clinton Special* and *Royal Canadian Hounds*. His critical work on Leonard Cohen was published in 1970, and as editor of *Mongrel BroadSides*, he has also published poems written by James Reaney, Margaret Atwood and others. Ondaatje's edited collection of verses is *The Broken Ark*, (1971) which was revised and published as *A Book of Beasts* in 1979. He edited short-fiction anthologies such as *Personal Fictions: Stories by Munro, Wiebe, Thomas, and Blaise* (1977) and *From Ink Lake* (1990), *The Faber Book of Contemporary Canadian Short Stories* (1990). His editorial work of poetry includes *The*

Long Poem Anthology (1979) and *An H in the Heart* (1994). Ondaatje has excelled in diverse fields, he has edited a book on film editing, *The Conversation: Walter Murch and the Art of Editing Film* (2002). Catherine Ross in the review “Mystery and Manner” acclaims Ondaatje’s editorial skill, “he undertakes his editorial task with more flair and imagination” and he “. . . solves the problem of range by a judicious selection of his authors” (88).

Ondaatje has acquired an indelible position in fiction writing besides having achieved a significant presence in poetry. His fictional oeuvre includes *Coming Through Slaughter*, 1976; *Running in the Family*, 1982; *In the Skin of a Lion*, 1987; *The English Patient*, 1992; *Anil’s Ghost*, 2000; *Divisadero*, 2007 and *The Cat’s Table*, 2011. He has acknowledged in his interview with *More Intelligent Life.com*, about his preference for prose over poetry and justifies as to why he believes, the presence of ultimate truth in fiction writing, “I like the landscape of a novel, so that rather than building a big room, you are building a big house. In poetry it is one voice, or one intimate whisper, and I love that element to it, but I try to take some of that element into my fiction.”

Ondaatje’s novels have gained global recognition for his contemporary definition of human beings, and for his postcolonial and transnational writings. He is a great social commentator who has utilised historical events and facts for writing his works. His stress on multi-voiced narratives and his self-consciousness about different art forms are indicative of his creative genius. The luxurious energy of his imagination, the exuberance of his story telling and the gem-like intelligence of his language have drawn many critics towards him. His novels have received a panoptic reception where many critics praise his writing styles. John Bayley in the review “A Passage to Colombo” has accredited Ondaatje

as “a state-of-the-art writer who has created his own combination of experimental techniques . . . but at the same time his prose-poetry is well ballasted with sober and factual reference and on-the-spot data” (45).

The setting of Ondaatje’s novels is not limited to particular geographical terrain. He has dealt with the social life and cultural practices of people living in different parts of the world including New Orleans, Sri Lanka, Italy, Africa, Canada, United States, France and England in his novels. He has captured the moments of social crisis by depicting the horrific events followed by the destructive world wars, civil wars, gulf wars in his novels like *The English Patient*, *Anil’s Ghost*, and *Divisadero*. Similarly, he has focused on the economic and cultural clashes that arise as a result of the disparities in race and class in his novels such as *Coming Through Slaughter*, *Running in the Family*, *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The Cat’s Table*.

Ondaatje examines the internal workings of the characters who struggle against the oddities of life and attempt to define an identity of their own. He has introduced several fictional characters like Hana, Caravaggio, Kip, and Almásy in *The English Patient*; Patrick and Nicholas in the novel, *In the Skin of a Lion*; Anil in *Anil’s Ghost*; Anna, Claire and Coop in *Divisadero*; and Michael in the novel, *The Cat’s Table*. His fictional characters represent men from different walks of life. They are basically immigrants, political agitators, outlaws, saboteurs, researcher, spies, and thieves who defy fixed citizenship as they do not want to limit themselves to particular locality.

In his novels like *Coming Through Slaughter and Running in the Family*, he has made use of biographical and autobiographical characters respectively. He has dealt with the biographical account of African American musician, Bolden in *Coming Through*

Slaughter, whereas, in *Running in the Family*, he has made an autobiographical record of his family ancestry. His novels are not crowded with characters except, *The Cat's Table* which relates to the stories of many characters who appear in just one or two pages. His women characters like Nora, Hana, Katherine, Alice, Claire, Anna and his own mother and grandmother are given equal prominence in the plot of the novels as that of his male characters.

Ondaatje conjoins his experiences with the rocky geography of the character's inner lives who are set against some historical figure or event. His novels foreground issues concerning with the confrontation of people who have been affected by the imposition of a dominant power on them. The characters like Hana, Caravaggio, Kip and Anil are disempowered and shattered by external events. They remove themselves from the chaos of the world but remain functional to operate within the community to improve the situation of the people around them. Santhosh Gupta comments upon the political and social violence in Sri Lanka in his article "Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*: A Post colonial Review of Modernity" and "call for a reexamination of the validity of political ideology of modern democracy in the face of militant fundamentalism and ethnic competitiveness" (233).

The novels of Ondaatje have demonstrated preoccupations with post colonial issues of displacement and alienation in his novels. The individual and collective traumas that the immigrants face in a foreign land crumble their sense of community and make them alienated. They suffer from the varying outcomes of this process: cultural displacement, loss of language, disempowerment, loss of a sense of identity, memories of past, marginalisation and negation of voice. He also suggests the possibility of recovery,

acceptance of difference and the bridging the crisis in his novels. In the article, “Memory, Identity, Patriarchy” Sangeetha Ray posits Ondaatje’s “arduous task of representing reconstruction of identities denied, displaced, disabled, and disavowed by the forces of personal and historical migrations and cultural relocations” (38).

Ondaatje does not demonstrate the nostalgia of the immigrants for home places. Instead, he suggests them the means of developing a sense of place for them in new environment. He acknowledges the numerous experiences of his characters like Patrick and Nicholas and allows them a flexibility of movement towards connection with immigrants belonging to different countries. In “Displacement and Self-Representation” Joanne Saul notices that Ondaatje like other immigrant writers poses his “questions about cultural difference and national belonging while writing about their own lives and their own personal experiences of displacements” (259). Ondaatje shows how these immigrants gain insight and strength from adjustment to new locations and the building of new communities which embrace elements from different cultures. They re-define themselves and their place in the world by recognising and accepting their own differences.

The novels of Ondaatje offer recommendations for leading a contented life. However, he leaves his novels open ended expecting the reader to assume the future course of events. Illustratively, In *Anil’s Ghost*, he ends the novel with the belief that the social atrocities in Sri Lanka will be terminated with the submission of Anil’s report to the International authorities in Geneva. He does not focus on the events following the revelation of the condition of the country to the world. Rather, he expects the reader to relate the novel with the current state of the country.

Ondaatje's novels remain unique when compared to other postmodern novelists like Kurt Vonnegut, Robert Krotesch, Arvind Adiga and several other novelists due to his distinct writing style. He challenges the traditional genre conventions and distinctions between fact and fiction; prose and poetry; real and the imaginary in his fiction. His work has the startling effect produced by the combination of disparate formal and thematic elements. He prefers lies, rumours and unverifiable stories and historical facts in his account of historical figures, his family and himself. John A. Thieme in the article "Historical Relations': Modes of Discourse" states that his "investigations of language and form and his attempts to break down generic barriers in texts which mix various modes of prose and poetry with visual and documentary material all make him one of the most typically Canadian writers of the contemporary world" (40).

Ondaatje's novels self-consciously reflect the process of receiving historical evidences from various sources. He employs the paratextual modes such as footnotes, subtitles, prefaces, epilogues, epigraphs, illustrations, songs, episodic narratives, interviews, white spaces and photographs to incorporate the references. He uses paratexts as a means to insert historical data into fictive design and thereby, he directs the attention to the very process by which history and fiction are interpreted through textuality.

The intertextual references which are avowedly incorporated into the fictive context offer authenticity to the incidents mentioned in the novel and at the same time retain their historical documentary status. In the novel *Anil's Ghost*, he makes frequent intertextual reference to the reports of Amnesty International so as to relate the mass scale violence in Sri Lanka to the occurrences of the real world. Similarly, he makes reference to the reports

of *Royal Geographical Society* and Rex Daniel's Journal in his novels *The English Patient* and *Running in the Family* respectively.

The repetitious motifs in his novels that connect and conjure the memories of the characters are taken from other literary or art works so as to reveal the influence of literary texts on their lives. Almásy in *The English Patient* relies on the copy of Herodotus' Histories as a source of companionship during his desert explorations; it also offers him mental solace even in his death bed. This connotes that intertextuality serves the most important role of shaping the characters' identity. In "Being and Representation in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*" Rufus Cook shares his observation that the works of art such as novels, paintings, murals and frescos, function to establish the characters' identification, "helping them to define their identities, their purposes, their relationships with others" (36).

The writings of Ondaatje frequently make reference to myths in addition to the historical reports and literary works. He grounds his stories in myths and legends so as to reveal the oral history and communal beliefs of particular culture. In *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje makes reference to the myths of Kabaragoyas and Thalagoyas to relate to the oral history of Sri Lanka and at the same time revive his memories of his Uncle in his homeland. A. Clare Brandabur in "Pastiche and Archetypal Symbolism in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*" avers that, "far from serving merely as local colour, or providing a metaphor here and a symbol there, these literary and graphic works of art spring into life, enter into the story itself and serve as mirrors in which characters understand themselves and their inter-relationships" (94).

Ondaatje parodies the metafictional pretence of objectivity by creating the textual awareness of the process of recording the oral history. For instance, In *Coming Through Slaughter*, he captures the oral history related to the life and music of the Jazz musician, Buddy Bolden as he could not find adequate references of his life in the official history of Jazz music. He interviewed some of the close associates of Bolden so as to delve deeper into the social condition of New Orleans during Bolden's times. He has transcribed the oral version of the interview in written form by mimicking an electronically reproduced oral culture. This technique heightens the reader's understanding of the life of an unorthodox and unrecorded individual. It is also used as a means to defamiliarise and create a gap between the reader and the text's world. Instead of identifying with any character, the reader by means of his own experience of building a meaning through the oral history shares the pleasure of creating infinite interpretations.

Ondaatje deliberately employs experimental strategies to construct new fictional forms through self-reflection. He subverts the fictional rules and systems that have become conventionalised. The presence of the author in the fiction destroys the illusion of reality. He stresses the fictionality of the text by narrating the fiction in third person or first person narration. He crosses the divide between the fictional world and real world by overturning not only the established relations between story and discourse but also the identity of the author as the creator of the text. Coomi S. Vevaina in the article "Hanging on a Question Mark" underlines the autobiographical element prevalent in Ondaatje's novel, he "seems to identify completely with Bolden. . . . The differences between them are further erased. . ." (60).

The novels of Ondaatje are replete with striking imagery, characterising his preoccupation with romantic exoticism and its vividness. His work is also notable for its cinematic qualities in its frequent use of montage techniques and fewer dramatic dialogues. In *Running in the Family*, he has appended almost about eight photographs and a map of Sri Lanka to evoke a more meaningful visual experience for the reader through a collection of images. In “Well-Lit Road and the Darkened theatre” Deborah Bowen coerces Ondaatje’s use of photographs, act as “a symbol of theatres, a dynamic and playful version of control which always recognises its own duplicity” (46). He affirms that Ondaatje’s photographs are “paradigmatic of what he is doing in his fictional memoir: they defy explanation, they enclose impossible contingencies in dramatic silence” (45).

In *Coming Through Slaughter* Ondaatje attempts to capture Buddy Bolden’s thought process by factually and fictionally recreating the setting of New Orleans in the heyday of jazz. He explores Bolden’s relationship to his music and to other people in the context of that setting. The novel shows the extreme alienation of Bolden, a Southern Jazz musician whose music has never been recorded but is hailed as a great and powerful innovator. Ondaatje frames the little-known facts of Bolden’s life into a fictional account so as to present an objective account of Bolden’s musical career that began approximately in 1900s and ended in 1907 as he becomes insane while playing in a parade. Thereby, he charts the life of a great legend who spent the last years of his life in an asylum until he died in 1931.

In *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje turns away from the setting of America and Canada in order to interrogate his own life and family history by focusing on his homeland, Sri Lanka. The memoir which is a blend of autobiography and fiction examines

Ondaatje's childhood and family life in Sri Lanka across several decades. It reconstructs Ondaatje's identity as a member of family and community from the perspective of a man returning to a homeland he has left as a child. Ondaatje blends different genres in a fragmentary collage of photographs, poems and stories in the novel.

The novel *In the Skin of a Lion* is largely concerned with the lives of immigrant and working-class Torontonians of the twentieth century who are silenced by the official histories of Canada. The novel portrays the conflict between the immigrant workers, especially Macedonians and Italians against the more dominant rulers of British ancestry. Ondaatje also delves on the capacious extent of work, labour, and energy that is invested in Canada by those settlers who are imagined as outsiders. He explores the pulse of physical labour and the life of an immigrant neighborhood in Toronto and Southwestern Ontario from 1900 to 1940, and reveals its sense of community, solidarity, and hatred of the elite class of people.

The English Patient projects the background of the post World War period in San Girolamo villa of Italy and suggests the unique bond that is developed among four migrants who are all shell shocked and secluded in a nunnery that is turned into a hospital at the time of war. It is the war that becomes more prominent in the novel as it is the war that has brought them together. The novel is filled with various small stories of pains and wounds from the overwhelming invasion of war and the trauma that resulted from it. It reveals and narrates the personal stories that are neglected by the official history of Western hegemony, emphasising that war has distorted the lives of individuals besides disrupting the social conditions of the world.

Anil's Ghost depicts the predicament of Sri Lanka that is caught up in the conflicts between three forces namely the ethnic conflicts between the Tamil and the Sinhalese, and the state's military force that tries to control them. Ondaatje does not bombard with a kaleidoscope of dark atrocities in the novel; instead he selects incidents emphasising the historical and political upheaval of Sri Lanka. He focuses on the horror of the disintegration of the country through ethnic conflicts, violence and the crumbling of cultural traditions and practices. The innumerable casualties of the war itself replicate the amount of injustice that is meted out to the people in the country. He projects the condition of the victims of the Sri Lankan civil war, who experienced the most extreme forms of torture even after their death.

The novel, *Divisadero* raises questions about the human search for love and demonstrates how the present life is preoccupied by the memories of the past incidents. The novel takes its name from a street in San Francisco and concomitantly locates the genitive domain of the family as a site of violence and loss. The author offers various forms of affiliative connections between the characters to portray the intense emotional and physical destruction they face during their life time. The characters in the novel are emotionally affected and enigmatic but they try to sustain their life with the hope that they can retrieve their lost life and happiness by forming an intimacy with the loved ones. Ondaatje intensifies the essence of the novel by revealing the bondage between the characters through self-revelatory and storytelling techniques.

In the novel *The Cat's Table*, the principal characters are set on the backdrop of a sailing ship that has been loaded with immigrants from Ceylon to England in the 1950s seeking better opportunities in the new land. They are the humble, ordinary passengers

whose lower status alienates them from the rest of the passengers in the ship. The novel portrays how these characters are segregated based on their class differences and are made to eat their meals far from the table of the captain and other royal members of the ship. The child protagonists of the novel experience their own moments of revelation as they explore every inch of the ship and cognise the hidden wonders and secrets of the ship.

Ondaatje's novels have been canvassed from various perspectives including its post-colonial context, ethnic issues, and the treatment of women characters. The comparative cultural studies have been conducted on his fictional terrain so as to explore the multicultural themes like diaspora. The study of his narrative strategy, use of maps, myth and legend in his works, symbolism, subtextual richness, poetic weaving of the past and the present, blending of memory and silence and above all his treatment of history have attracted several critics. The thematic and technical richness of his works have been widely discussed by several critics.

The present research on the select novels of Ondaatje such as *Coming Through Slaughter*, *Running in the Family*, *In the Skin of a Lion*, *The English Patient*, and *Anil's Ghost* intends to assess Ondaatje as a foremost practitioner of postmodern elements who has utilised his fiction as a powerful weapon to bring about reforms in the society. His novels offer a precise account of the condition of the postmodern world so as to assuage people from the anomic condition of living.

A congenial living environment is essential for the social well-being of the people in the postmodern world. The grand hopes associated with global or totalising forms of modernist social theory have lost credibility with the realisation that the scientific knowledge, socio-economic, cultural conditions and human experiences are subjected to

the changes in the world. Therefore, the study purports to the asperities of the postmodern world explicated in Ondaatje's novels imparting a profound knowledge of the social extremities that should be vanquished to attain a propitious living arena.

The disoriented condition of the postmodern world exacts an imperative need for a rigorous scrutiny on the state of society. The study aims at deciphering the condition of the protagonists in Ondaatje's novels with reference to their social, political, cultural and historical conditions and thereby examines the impact of the zeitgeist of the postmodern world on the psyche of an individual.

The study of select novels of Michael Ondaatje intends to explore how his novels consider violence, poverty, marginalisation, and sense of displacement as the major threats to mankind in the postmodern world. It stresses the effort of Ondaatje's protagonists to grapple with the convulsions and the hybridisation in the society to live a balanced life. The research proposes to affirm exquisite reorientation in the political scenario of the present society by demanding recognition and equal status of his characters belonging to diverse races and class. Moreover, it offers hope and courage to the future generations by advocating a democratic form of governance with the evolution of amiable society.

The sociological aspect of postmodernism in Barry Smart's *Modern Conditions, Postmodern Controversies*; the psychological aspect of postmodernism in Stuart Hall's *Questions of Cultural Identity*; the historical aspect of postmodernism in Jean Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* are few among the many books that substantiate the research and help in comprehending the condition of Ondaatje's characters in the postmodern world. The research follows the methodology recommended

by *MLA handbook for writers of Research Papers* for the purpose of documentation, end notes, quotation and bibliography.

The present study entitled “A Study on the Disoriented Postmodern World in Select Novels of Michael Ondaatje” scrutinises Ondaatje’s novels from an interdisciplinary perspective. The research analyses the condition of the postmodern world from the sociological, psychological, and historiographical aspects of postmodernism. The study is divided into five chapters where besides introduction; each chapter deals with the examination of Ondaatje’s novels based on the three aspects of postmodernism and ends with the conclusion that sums up the argument and suggests the means of acquiring favourable social arena.

Chapter I titled “Introduction” deals with the study of Canadian literature focusing on the novelists belonging to different literary trends. The examination of the characteristics of Canadian novels across different time periods helps to understand the factors leading to the emergence of postmodern literature. It discusses some of the most prominent Canadian postmodern authors and scrutinises the unique characteristics that are adopted by these writers. This enables to identify the remarkable characteristics of Ondaatje’s writings and his tremendous contribution to both Canadian literature and world literature. The review of the research that is carried out on his works endows the platform and research design for the present study.

Chapter II entitled “The Zeitgeist of the Postmodern World” focuses on the ambiance of the contemporary world which is highly shaped by the imperialistic policy of the colonisers. Ondaatje criticises the capitalist ideology of the colonisers which incited economic imbalance and hybrid environment in the colonised countries. He underlines the

social condition that has prompted people to move from one country to another in search of work, money and education. He ascertains that their bourgeois attitude and the hybrid environment have resulted in war between countries like Second World War and interethnic conflicts like civil war in the postmodern world.

Chapter III entitled “The Fragmented Self of Postmodern Individuals” analyses how the zeitgeist of the postmodern world has conspired to destabilise the sense of self in Ondaatje’s novels. He sums up that the fragmented self of the postmodern characters is due to the conflict between order and disorder; making and destroying; fear of uncertainty; feelings of displacement and struggles of assimilation experienced during the times of war and migration. He contemplates on the psychological trauma of the characters who constantly struggle to reconstruct their identity amidst the conflicting forces within their psyche.

Chapter IV entitled “The Discourse of the Marginals: An Inquiry” analyses Ondaatje’s novels as weapons against the orthodoxies of the dominant discourse. He challenges the acceptance of historical narratives that privilege the powerful and negate other marginalised voices. He self-consciously constructs alternate stories surrounding disempowered, displaced and marginalised people. He gives his marginalised characters a voice and a place in history by acknowledging the experience and contribution of the unsung heroes. He correlates the predicament of the subaltern characters so as to contrive how the dominant discourse negates the experiences and contributions of these subalterns.

Chapter V entitled “Conclusion” concludes with the examination that Ondaatje is a great social critic who has utilised his novels as a splendid tool to bring about rapid transformation in the condition of people. He considers that people can attain a stable self

when they nurture their self to adapt to the changes in the world. The characters like Hana, Caravaggio, Kirpal Singh, Anil, Nicholas and Patrick seek out a way for overcoming the dilemma in which they were placed substantially due to the process of migration and social turmoil by confronting the crisis boldly instead of hovering over the lost world.

The characters liberate out of the distressed state of life and decide to cling to the loved ones instead of alienating from the community that plays a major role in shaping their identity. They realise that they should maintain their ties with their homeland even when they move to distant lands in search of work and education. They take up the resolution to cherish their bonds with their kin and relatives in the homeland. The characters' decision to identify themselves with the homeland and yet assimilate themselves to the adopted land symbolises their transference from the uncertain and disordered self to a stable self.

The study stresses that the historians have a great role in promoting the condition of living of an individual. The discrimination of people based on the differences of class, race and language will only decelerate the path of progress. Moreover, the preconceived notions of the historians will lead to the partial judgments of people and country to the outside world. The research encourages the policy makers and the rulers of the country to ensure an equanimous society where the contributions of each and every individual is recognised and applauded. The effort undertaken by Ondaatje integrates the discourse of the subalterns in his novels and demonstrates his desire to expose their endless travails and desires to limelight. He incites the historians to be impartial while recording the events of history so that a true account of the life of the people will be known to the entire world.

The select novels of Ondaatje have focused on the marginalised section of people like unrecorded musicians, immigrant workers, war victims, and colonised subjects. The characters like Bolden, Patrick, Kirpal, Ananda and Anil bring out their own version of history as opposed to the falsified version projected by the dominant historians. They voice against the politically powerful persons and finally succeed in drawing the attention of the rulers of the country towards their denigrated position. The self-realisation of the marginalised characters and their struggle to attain a unique place for themselves in the history of the country offers hope for the upliftment of the condition of people.

The study supports the belief that the democratic form of governance will lead to the establishment of equitable society as the imperialistic ruling of the country will only lead to inter ethnic and inter country conflicts. The bourgeois tendency of the capitalists will pave way for violence and chaos in different parts of the world. Therefore, the study calls for a reformation in the colonising attitude of the imperialists thereby assuage people from poverty and other social threats that arise as a result of colonisation. The unassailable will of the people to fight against the capitalists and the crisis enable them to face the changes in life.

The scrutiny of the select novels of Ondaatje endows an insight into the social, cultural and political conditions of the postmodern world. He is a great social critic whose sole aim is to reflect the condition of society consistently. The research proffers hope for the attainment of a promising future to the people. The study anticipates the evolution of a social system where people of all cultures and classes are given equal recognition and status for such a well-disposed scenario of the world will ensure the mental and physical welfare of people.