

Chapter VII

Trauma of Dislocations and Parody in *Divisadero*

Divisadero was published in the year 2007, seven years after *Anil's Ghost*. The novel was published a few weeks after the announcement of the Man Booker international award in 1992 for his novel *The English Patient*. Ondaatje was awarded the Governor General's literary award for fiction for *Divisadero* and he was honoured with this prestigious award for the fifth time. The novel is a collage of various art forms like parody, pastiche, intertextuality, memory, photography, history, multiculturalism and diaspora. This novel is different in form when compared to Ondaatje's oeuvre.

Divisadero is a Spanish word for division or to gaze from a long distance. *Divisadero* is a street in France which divides the civilians and the military base. It is situated in the border between California and San Francisco. The families present in the novel are divided and the novel is given an appropriate title 'Divisadero' meaning division and gazing from long distance. Anna who is a biographer has her new abode in *Divisadero* street and narrates:

I come from *Divisadero* Street. *Divisadero*, from Spanish means division the street that one time was the dividing line between San Francisco and the fields of Presido. Or it might derive from the word 'divisar' meaning 'to gaze at something from a distance.' (There is a height nearby called El *Divisadero*).

Thus a point from which you can look far into the distance. (DIV 142)

(paranthesis as per original).

The novel's structure has mini narratives, different interesting characters divided by time and space but united in theme. Half of the novel is purely fictional and the second half is the parody to the biography of Lucien Seguera. The novel transgresses between fact and fiction, and mingles personal history with communal history. The novel has fragmented, non-linear and disjointed narratives typical of postmodern fiction.

The novel has three layers of mini stories. The first part entitled Anna, Coop and Claire is narrated by the first person narrator Anna. Erica Wagner in his book review on *Divisadero* opines “The first section is the longest, effectively the first half of the book, and is a bleakly moving rendering of lives disrupted by brutality and loss” (n.p). The second part entitled “The Family in the Cart” shifts the narrative to south of France and is in non-linear style. The second and third part has third person narrative voice. Then the narrative shifts to “The House in Demu” where Ana becomes the historian of a famous French writer Lucien Segura. The initial stage of the novel is highly emotional in tone where the narrator Anna recounts the childhood memories of their lives in a farm at Petaluma, a beautiful place south of California. The setting is in sylvan surroundings of mountains, rivers and valleys. The children along with the father lived in a pastoral setting exposed to the noise of foxes and orioles, milch cows and hens.

The farm was established by Anna’s grandfather who was a Spanish immigrant. It was a time of gold rush and many Spanisners migrated to the place. Her grandfather owned a large piece of land which is inherited by his son. Anna’s mother Lydia Mendez died at the age of twenty three during child birth. Anna became motherless. On the same week in the hospital Claire becomes an orphan and she is adopted by Anna’s father. The widowed father is offered a wife at a field hospital on the outskirts of San Fransisco but he remains a widower and brings up the children.

Cooper, a hired farm hand is an orphan and is able to recall Anna’s mother Lydia Mendiz. Coop’s parents were killed by a hired hand and the four year old boy had witnessed his parent’s murder. Coop hid under the wooden planks when his parents were murdered and later was adopted by Anna’s father. Anna was the only blood related daughter of her father and she had developed a lot of love and intimacy with her father and Claire also was equally loved by her surrogate father. “Anna would lie like slim dog in his arms” (DIV 11). The girls

were brought up by the widowed father like twin daughters. Coop replaced their mother when he defended the girls from the belligerent father.

Coop was employed as a farmhand and the girls taught him language. He is similar to that of Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights* who was not educated and his passion for Cathy is similar to that of Anna's love for Coop. Coop could swim and seal the giant hose from leakage in the large tank. He used to dive deep down the pond to sift the mud and search for gold. "Coop loved risk and could be passive around danger" (DIV 24). The craze for gold called gold rush during his time is obvious through Coop's avarice. He used to narrate stories to the girls and has a "moderating role as a mother" (DIV 22). It was a typical farm with noise of cows, pails and horses. Claire was good at horse riding and she became lame when an angry horse overthrows her. She does not mind about her deformity when she is on horseback.

Lydia Mendis their mother was known only to Coop. When she got married to her father the Petaluma farm had as many as hundred laying hens. They had a great time in protecting them from the foxes. She used to tell stories of how a good man halted his sheep fold in the farm and they ate the thistles. The cows did not digest the thistles after mastication. This kind of sylvan and immaculate life went on till the place was surrounded by the immigrants who ransacked the place for gold.

The novel thus records the history of the characters lives and the backdrop of history during the Second World War. The history of each character's past is recounted with brilliant, evocative caricature in detail. Through Anna's and the third person narrator Ondaatje voices the histories of Anna, Claire, Coop, the stoic widower Father, Lucien Segura and Marie-Niege's into a mosaic where the past and present are constructed; the centre and margin merge together into an unanimous history of mankind.

Anna is a historian who records the life of Lucien Segura. “Those who have an orphan’s sense of history love history,” (DIV 141). She buries herself in archives, “Where art meets life in secret” (DIV 141). What attracts Anna about Lucien Segura is his pathos filled voice with bitterness. Segura’s wounded, annihilated self keeps haunting her and she therefore prefers a new identity in the garb of an archivist or a historian. The plot rambles between the past and present, self and the other and the exploration of identity. The novel has historical background of American intervention of Gulf wars which took place in 1991 and 2003. Caravaggio and Segura’s role in World War II form the back drop of the novel. Coop is rescued by Claire; this incident takes place during Gulf war.

The novel has many intertextual references. The author borrows quotations and allusions from another text for referencing and thus forms a pastiche. The history of Lydia Mendis is known to the girls through the essay available in the archive entitled ‘Interviews with Californios: Women from the earlier times to the present’. Archivists wanted to record the lives of the characters from early 1800’s to the present through ‘The Dictation of Eulalia’ to ‘The Dictation of Lydia Mendis’. The black and white photograph is the only proof for them to witness their mother. Photography is a technique adopted in most of the novels of Ondaatje to transport the readers from present to the past and from memory to identity. “There was a sense of history around them and not with them” (DIV 10). This was the only detail they knew about their mother and the rest of the queries regarding their mother lurked within them unanswered. The reality being buried in a distant past their mother’s photograph was the only evidence left behind.

The father photographed both the sisters every Christmas and New Year and kept in the album as a proof of time lapse as the sisters grew up. In the house in Demu, in the kitchen two photographs hang; one is Lucien Segura’s blurred picture taken by the thief Caravaggio and the other is Anna’s childhood picture where she looks like a Boticilian Nymph. Anna

becomes a writer and an archivist and quotes Nietzsche “We have art –Nietzsche said-so that we shall not be destroyed by truth” (DIV 267).

The music of Reinhardt and Grappelli by Pagnol and Segura’s colourful tales of Claudile echoes the second part of the book. Lucien is fond of reading *Three Musketeers* by Alexander Dumas which serve as an intertext. While Coop is at work Anna reads stories of Musketeers’ by Dumas. Segura’s ruined love affair leads to the creation of Claudile modeled after Marie -Niece. Coop’s book on how to become an expert in gambling serves as an intertext. When Anna flees from her father’s truck she meets a truck driver who allows her to travel with him. He quotes a line from Dickens *David Copperfield* instilling hope in her that there are many openings and possibilities for a man’s livelihood and quotes “Whether I turn out to be the hero of my own life or whether that station will be occupied by anybody else, these pages must show” (DIV 152). Steinbeck, Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, D.H. Lawrence and Cormac Mac Cathy serve as intertextual references. Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* serve as intertext to show the family’s relationship in the village.

Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* and Nabokov’s *Lolita* echo Anna’s character and also Lucien’s relationship with Marie -Niece, the American Beat generations Jack Kerouac and Mark Twain’s *Hucklebury Finn* appear in the novel. Coop once visits a game shop and picks up a book *The Expert at Card Table* which becomes a Pandora’s box for him. When Coop enters at the Jericho Army base, a suburb he gets self realization that he is competent enough to read other’s mind but like Tolstoy he could not read himself:

Tolstoy was able to walk into a room that held a group of small people and understand everything about them in fifteen minutes. The only person he could not understand in the room was himself. That’s what a good professional is like. (DIV 53)

Dorn's wife Ruth tells Coop about a novel *Sophie's Choice* written by William Styron. The novel *Ivan the Terrible and His Son Ivan* by Painter Ilya Repin serves as an intertext in the novel.

The theme of immigration is explored by Ondaatje in the novel. At the time of Californian gold rush the Spanish immigrants arrived and many hotels were set up. They came in search of gold and were stranded in the mountains sometimes and had to depend upon grouse rabbits, cattle and bear they hunted with shot guns and pistols. The author narrates the plight of the immigrants:

And many headed civilization arrived. Gamblers, water entrepreneurs, professional shootouts, prostitutes, diarists, coffee drinkers, whisky merchants, poets, heroic dogs, mail order brides, women falling in love with boys... old men swallowing gold to conceal it on their return journeys to the coast balloonists, mystics, Lola Montez, opera singers-good ones, bad ones, those who fornicated their way across the territory. (DIV 13)

The story is traced back to a century before the time of Californian gold rush. It was a part of Alta in upper California named by the natives as valley of the hills. Later people immigrated from all over the world for a better living and in search for gold. The place is currently called Petaluma.

Coop was interested in searching for gold and the girls knew the dangerous encounter he is up to; they maintained his secret when he came with some sprain or the other. "During Coop's gold rush obsessions he sees that gold mining offers him euphoria and chance a tall story that included a murder or a mistaken identity or a love affair" (DIV 15). Coop was taciturn in manners and refers to his "tentativeness about words" (DIV 9) just like their father. The sisters when they grew up reflected each other and competed with each other.

Claire disappeared on her horse and Anna into her book. Anna was fourteen and Coop was eighteen. She says:

Everything is biographical, Lucien Freud says. What we make, why is it made how we draw a dog, who is it we are drawn to why we cannot forget.

Everything is a collage, even genetics. There is the hidden presence of others in us, even those we have known briefly. We contain them for the rest of our lives, at every border we cross. (DIV 16) (Italics as per original)

Life went on smoothly until one day a heavy storm changed their lives. Anna and Coop develop a sort of intimacy which later on turns into a sexual encounter and were caught red handed by the father. Anna recalls the incident and uncertain whether what happened was a sin or a natural act of togetherness. The father's ire was too much that he beat Coop almost to death and Anna in turn plunged a piece of glass on her father's neck. The father carries her in his arms like a sheep and puts her in the truck and leaves the farm without saying a word. The father is a man of few words and usually does not allow much intimacy with the daughters and would be reticent when he does not find them nearby. He never speaks loudly of Anna's misbehavior even to his younger daughter Claire and shows his wrath by beating Coop terribly without saying a word. The father has plans for his daughter's betterment and takes her to a place not mentioned. But Anna chooses her own path by fleeing from him. Anna is sandwiched between her love for Coop and her father and within a fraction of a second tries to kill her father with a splinter. She escapes silently with guilt and avoids confrontation with her loved ones. So she believes in engulfing her past with a newly identified present which is a transformation, for she becomes the biographer of Lucien Segura.

Once when he stops Anna makes her escape and travels in a truck driven never to come back to Petaluma. This one incident set fire to the rest of their lives. She travels to San Francisco and from there towards south of France where she befriends Branka who takes her

to the farm house of a famous French writer Lucien Segura. The father remains a man of few or no words for the rest of his life. Coop too leaves the place never to come back. After his expulsion from the farm he becomes a professional gambler.

After migration and transformation Anna starts a new life and carries along with her past memories in all her endeavours consciously or unconsciously. Anna meets an architect friend Branka and they travel past a belfry. The belfry had been constructed like a screw or a coil and it reflects every part of the landscape. Anna became a historian writing the biography of Lucien Segura who had peculiar love for nature. Anna changes her identity by taking an unknown name not revealed to the reader and also signs with a pseudonym. She admires Lucien for he too had a sad unfulfilled love affair. Anna encounters few gypsy robbers and has a narrow escape. She meets a young man Raphael who is the son of a thief Astolf or Liebard. The thief travels with his Romani wife Aria and his son Rafael on horseback. The war has made the characters suffer both physically and psychologically. Aria, Rafael's mother has false name and does not wish to have a permanent relationship with him. Lucien wants to find a new place as a sort of escape from his married life and does not want to go back. He finds a house in Marsellie.

The thief also had been married before the war started and after Second World War does not want to lead civil life and starts roaming. The thief is Caravaggio who appears in the earlier novels *In the Skin of a Lion* as Patrick's friend and in *The English Patient* as a war time spy in Italy and later seen in the villa with Hana. He is an infamous and never photographed survivor of war times and is also a thief. Raphael is a good soul and Anna loves him because he replaced Coop. Rafael is like a guardian angel that has come to heal the wounded heart of Anna. Anna feels that he is an angel and "there appears to be no darkness in him" (DIV 73). He is a singer and a guitarist. Anna meets him in a forest amidst grass playing his guitar.

The story of Coop also is parallel to the narrative structure. Coop escapes from Anna's father and invents a new history as a professional gambler. He forms a circle of friends with other Casanovas. A cowboy of the Petaluma farm, a farm hand enters the city of Tahoe in Las Vegas and manipulates the situation. Coop gets a book about card games and casinos and becomes an expert gambler. At twenty three Coop migrates to Nevada and starts a new life as a professional gambler. His childhood experience as a careful watcher and observer at Petaluma farm develops his skill as a gambler. He joins Dorn, Mancini and the Dauphin who form a close relationship but it does not last long. "The Dauphin is the nick name because the person was reading a European novel and a few months later Dauphin dies. They all would enter the gambling hall like "royalty from Wyoming" (DIV 43). His gambling group views him as a compulsive risk taker because he was the youngest of the lot. Coop meets an old master 'The Gentile' and learnt the art for three weeks. He wanted to confront the Dorn, a notorious group and bets the brethren gaining a huge amount. After much training and experience Coop is able to win the notorious Casinovan group led by the brethren, the powerful Pounce Autry. He as a contented man thinks of quitting the game once and forever.

Coop falls in love with a singer and drug addict Bridget which leads to his downfall. Bridget helps Coop forget Anna and his traumatic past. Bridget who is a broken woman belongs to an unscrupulous gang of gamblers. She is described as a blond; "a tall ripple of energy linked to gold" (DIV 112) and ensnares him to a fatal end. Bridget leaves him for some time. This time he found that he was crazy after her. He goes in search of her. One day she drops a post card saying that she lives in Tahoe. That minute he sets out to find her. She confesses about her debts to him and that she owed money to a man belonging to a gambling group. They knew of Coop's victory with the brethren. They demand him to play to pay for Bridget's debts. They give him a day to think. However he refuses to play for the group and

they beat him terribly. Claire also migrates and works for a defense lawyer named Veal and also takes care of her father's farm.

When Coop is beaten Claire comes to his rescue. Claire expected Coop's recognition of renewed relationship but his utterance of her sister's name is slightly disappointing. She could understand his love for her sister is deeply embedded in his subconscious mind. She is not annoyed or does not have any hard feelings but still feels sad at his state of affairs. Claire wants to fold the two halves of her life "like the folded map" (DIV 164) which rambles between the past and present. Coop wanted to sever his connections with gambling and perhaps wished to join his childhood companion Claire but unfortunately falls a prey to unhappy circumstance.

Due to his unconscious state the memory of his entire childhood is erased. Claire finds Coop and takes him back to her sad and melancholic father living in Petaluma farm house by crossing the golden gate bridge that separates San Francisco from Petaluma. The most prominent farmland of his childhood, where he had been over eighteen years has become strange to him due to amnesia. He drowns into a river of oblivion. Claire is uncertain whether this reunion would be terrible or generous but so much had been lost in their lives and she did not mind taking the risk and felt it worth to take the risk.

Her father is always reserved and talks few words. She stays with her father during weekends. She is the only companion in the deserted patchwork family and is not a family formed through lineage. Ondaatje probes into the lives of the characters and their associations with the scenic surroundings of hills of California. Anna's secret reminiscence of her past shows her psychological trauma. Anna is the most unfortunate for there is no reunion for her. Her mother dies at child birth. Coop her lover separates from her. She has to leave her sister whom she loves the most. Coop also faces silent suffering due to unfortunate loss of parents,

loss of new found life, loss of love affair. The psychological wound is persistent and traumatic. He is once again broken and lost with the disastrous love affair with Bridget.

Similarly the inner recess of the other character's mind is also probed profoundly by Ondaatje. Claire has understood her sister very well. Anna's love for Coop is understood by her. She neither opposes nor supports her. Their love and bondage for sixteen long years and the sudden separation shatters her. She becomes lame as she was overthrown from horse but when she is on the horse she never thinks of her handicap. Her association with the horse was such that from its smell she can understand the horse's condition. Anna remembers how Claire used to wear bells in her wrists to jangle and frighten the wild animals. Claire remains loyal to her adopted father till the end of the novel. In fact she is the only character who is free from incest or guilt. She is so immaculate she could be associated with Madonna. She is so compassionate that she drags the beaten Coop to the fire place to keep him warm. She goes the next day to meet him. When she found the cabin empty she knew that she is never again going to see Coop.

The sisters described by Ondaatje are like the Japanese screen which looks like shattered glass. From her broken life Anna constructs her identity. Her love and bonding with her sister is so great that Anna feels the presence of her sister always. It is aching to rebuild their lost lives. Both the sisters develop a bond which is incomparable but unfortunately it is not nurtured till the end due to unfortunate incidents that happen. There is no single incident in the novel that shows any streak of indifference of Anna or her adopted father towards Claire. The father's unconditional love towards her being a single parent is reciprocated not by the blood related daughter Anna but by Claire who is duty bound.

Unlike Anna and Coop, Claire does not abandon their farm and loved ones. She observes her silent father who becomes a sort of recluse. She becomes a mediator for a defense lawyer Aldo Vea. She does not stick persistently to her new identity but is so caring

that she stays during the week ends with her father. The work was a sort of research and Veal taught her to interact with people. At this juncture she meets Coop accidentally. Once in a restaurant she takes a wrong pill and in a drowsy state collides on Coop coincidentally; she almost embraces him. He takes her to the hotel room and leaves his number with her. It took two days for her to catch hold of him from the number he had left. She arrives at his Tahoe Chalet and there she finds him in an unconscious state.

Anna and Coop refuse to go to Petaluma farm due to two reasons. One is a breach of trust and the other is a burning sense of shame. They await forgiveness and retribution in some way or the other with only memories that haunt them. Claire helps Coop to reunite with the childhood place and their father. But loss of memories fails him and makes him unresponsive emotionally to the places he is familiar. During their childhood days the sisters used to depend on Coop for guidance in the thick hills but later he cannot recognize the place where he spent his childhood. Anna hides her emotional trauma by not speaking of her childhood to any one and escapes into a newly invented identity of an archivist.

There are many symbols used in the novel. Anna buys few Buddhists' flags. There are flags of every colour pegged in the farm near the cabin occupied by Coop. Yellow is earth, green is water, red is fire and white is cloud and blue is sky which denotes limitless space of the mind. The disappearance of the white flag after Anna and Coop's intimacy symbolizes the loss of innocence. The symbol of red flag is fire from which they must escape. Coop did not want the flags given by Anna to touch the ground. The image of blue table appears thrice in the novel. Once in Coop's cabin where Anna and Coop discover their love for each other and second time in the kitchen of Lucien the blue table appears once again. Third time Lucien lies down on the blue table after nursing the sick bed ridden Marie-Niege. The symbol of black wall shows a temporary triumph from sorrow. River is a symbol that is used throughout the novel; the river is present in the Petaluma farm, near Coop's gambling restaurant, near

Anna's house in France and near Lucien and Marie -Niece's house. The characters are associated with the elements of the earth. Coop is linked to water, Aria to air, Claire to earth, Anna to fire and Rafael to light.

The three stories are completely interrelated through the presence of Anna. Structurally the novel takes a new form. The novel offers no conclusions pertaining to the postmodernist approach. The second story starts with a family of Roman musicians in France, while the final part describes the life of a French writer the great veteran Lucien Segura. Anna says, "I am the person who discovers archival subtexts in history and art where the spiraling among the handful of strangers tangles into a story. In my story the person I always begin with is Claire" (DIV 137). Though the stories are separate they are closely knit. Anna befriends Raphael whose family once travelled with Segura. The novel's major theme is formation and resolving identity crisis and exploring the characters journey towards self-actualization.

Anna remains detached from the trials and tribulations of mundane life and views the enigma of human life from a distance as suggested by the title *Divisadero*. The sisters were like the panels of a Japanese screen autonomous, but reflecting different tones when placed together. Thus it is through Claire that Anna does exist. Anna's identity is in connection with Claire. "I don't know if this is what I am doing, from this long distance, imagining the life of my sister, and imagining the future of Coop" (DIV 137). From the distance she could see her sister on her horse and believes that Claire "is destined to be in charge of the universe someday she will meet and marry a centaur" (DIV 7). Centaur is half horse and half human and is a strange animal. Anna used to leap around the farm like a dog while Claire is a good horsewoman. This is the difference that existed between them. But the separation seems claustrophobic as they are separated for twenty long years.

Separation and alienation are the often recurring themes in the novel. Anna is clear in her decision to separate from the dear ones. The shocking incident in Anna's life changes her identity and takes a different name. She never spoke of her childhood days to any one in Demu but cherishes everything as a memory. Her past is hidden from every one. She has never turned to a lover or a friend for affection or company. She signs with a pseudonym and forms a new identity.

Memory plays a crucial role in the novel. Memory records the fragments of raw truth that lurks inside the subconscious mind. The crossing of boundaries, the narrative shifting from the past and present gives a turning point in the novel. The access to the past is possible only through memory. When Anna thinks of her sister she thinks that she would never forget even the minutest details like the episode with the fox, the cup of wine and the heel of bread, cheese at five o'clock in the morning at Petaluma. The novel's three narrative strings are interconnected. Anna is the narrator and reminisces her story:

For we live with those retrievals from childhood that coalesce and echo through our lives, the way shattered pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope reappear in new forms and are song like in their refrains and rhymes, making up a single monologue. We live permanently in the recurrence of our stories, whatever story we tell. (DIV 136)

Loss of relationship is mourned and nurtured in memory and plays a major role in the novel. Anna finds spatial, temporal distortions in the lives of her sister, Coop and her father everywhere that she draws portraits of them in history especially in the life of Lucien Segura. "It is the hunger, what we do not have holds us together" (DIV 268). She ardently imagines and wishes that her father would suddenly come to her door steps with the muddied shirt and taciturn manners and expressing with few words. Anna's memory travels back to Petaluma

farm where the children watched their father walk around the farm towards the hill and remembers an incident when he was followed by a fox.

Anna has recently read in a monograph a haunting thing about a missing father which makes her think of her own father:

And so I hoped that someone would come, a man, why not my father, at night fall. He would stand in front of the door, or on the path leading from the forest, with his old white shirt, the everyday one, in shreds, dirtied by mud and his blood. He would not speak in order to preserve what he can be but he would not know what I do not. (DIV 273)

Anna's memory is recalled by tracing repeatedly her life with her sister, father and Coop. She questions their future in her retrospection. "And Coop? And Claire? Will these children, in their eventual cities, turn out to be the heroes of their own lives? (DIV 273).

Similarly Coop and Claire's memory of each other and Coop's time spent with Anna is often recalled through memory. Segura's final collection of stories is recorded as memories. *Divisadero* records the memories of the characters and their relationship with those whom they know and love intimately. As the girls grew every year photographs in black and white were taken by the father between Christmas and New Year. This is an yearly practice followed by the father to "clarify the past" (DIV 7). Anna relates that "as sister's we reflected each other. Competed with each other and our shared idol was Coop" (DIV 16). The sisters learned from an "evolving portrait" (DIV 18) and their appearances were competitive. Anna gets very close with Rafael both physically and emotionally to forget her past.

The third part of the story is about Rafael and Aria, Lucien and his childhood friend Marie Niede which forms a parody. Parody is a form of imitation of stories, incidents and characters. Just like Anna's story at Petaluma farm the story of Lucien Segura also has an unfulfilled love affair. Anna becomes the biographer of Segura:

There was a sweet shadow and hesitance in Segura. It was like a ruined love and it was familiar to me... His voice with a wound in it kept haunting me. I travelled to France, to the last house he lived in, during the final stage of his life. I pieced together the landscape he had written about. (DIV 150)

The theme reappears in the next part. Anne Dillard's story of twin ship is ideal to narrate as a form of parody in the novel. Within every story there lies the embryo of other stories. The parallel stories are a proof of this. One story is observed from the girl's silent father at Petaluma farm and the other story of Lucien through Anna. Each character's action is reflected like a mirror upon the destinies of other characters.

Coop, Segura and Rafael have their own past and have reminiscences to cherish in their memories. Anna has doubts of her role as a writer. The third person narrative voice continues "we relieve stories and see ourselves only as the watcher or listener" (DIV 16). Ondaatje makes a self appraisal of his talent by stating that "the writer evolves in writing, so the novel evolves as well. A drummer in the background keeping cadence" (DIV 16).

Anna becomes a biographer historian and escapes into writing to hide her past and invents a new life with Rafael who substitutes Coop's love. Anna decides to conceal her past and says "If you don't plunder the past the absence feeds on you" (DIV 141). She has an encounter with the mime artist Georges Wague and a music hall artist Colette. When she researches on an infamous writer Lucien Segura she comes to rural France and rents his house. She becomes associated with the gypsy musician and her neighbour Rafael. Anna and Rafael are living in a sylvan surrounding. Once Anna encounters a group of Gypsy robbers and escapes narrowly. Anna describes the topography of Demu where the river and the road merge:

River meets a road and covers it forms a perspective where the road has come upon the river and sunk below its surface and it form a life lived to a life

imagine. They merge, the river and the road, like two lives, a tale told backwards and a tale told first' (DIV 167).(italics as per original).

Anna is impressed by Lucien Segura for his story has some similarity and forms a parallel story in the narrative structure. “Sometimes we enter art to hide within it. It is where we can go to save ourselves, where a third person voice protects us” (DIV 142). She learns that art is having the potential to offer camouflage from distance and time: “Just as there is, in the fictional landscape of Paris in *Les Misérables*, that small fictional street Victor Hugo provides for Jean Valjean to slip into, in which to hide from his pursuers” (DIV 142). Anna after finishing her book feels that she had written a most intimate and profound book and she should try to write a difficult genre such as a comedy.

As a scholar visiting the Gers region of France Anna rents the Manor where Segura lived last. Segura was a respected poet and diphtheria survivor of the frontline hospitals in 1917. Rafael knew Segura very well and during his childhood he had travelled along with him. Segura is the author of best selling series of books featuring a small young child Claudile who is adventurous. Lucien has filial bonding with his clock maker step father. Anna’s biological father raises her. Anna comes from rural life and Lucien chooses rural life purposely. Both the writers are emotionally wounded. They are imaginative, secretive and love to write about nature. Anna first knew him as a poet and the writer of the *Jeremiad* about the Great War. Segura was infamous and was forgotten posthumously by his countrymen but this secluded character interests Anna. She depends on Rafael for emotional support and for her new career as an archivist. His family was given a piece of land by Segura for clearing the fields and for all the help they rendered. Rafael knew all the roads and rivers of the place.

Anna explores the place with a map in her hand. The boy was familiar with the house and enters in the attic where there was a dove cote and the wings get pasted on him. These appearances make her think of him as an angel. Rafael is the guardian angel according to

Christian mythology. Rafael is closely associated with nature. It is Rafael who tells her the sylvan surrounding and the lake where the writer drowned himself. Raphael was simple and had coarse hands with an old guitar and she liked him for what he is. Music had the power of language. As a boy he took music lessons with a hope of keeping people around him. Rafael develops a companionship with Anna after his parent's death. Anna finds the love of Rafael at a strange place to hide her past moment of violence that has damaged her relationship with her near ones and a "wall of black light holds her away from it" (DIV 80).

Segura's life is traced with the intention of analyzing the writer's mental poise. Story telling is an art explored in the novel. Segura narrated fragmented stories. His reading of his life as well as others is oblivious. Segura hears stories of various characters as he travels towards Marsellian to Gers. Fame dawns but he prefers to write under pseudonym. Segura was a depressed child as his father died. His Spanish mother married a clock maker. He is very affectionate towards his step father. Like Wordsworth, Segura understands the noises of the sylvan surrounding and read the song of nightingale from the trees to the constellation of stars. He related nature, human life and planets on the same plane. The clock maker's sudden and unexpected demise makes him fatherless once again. He used to read stories to his neighbour and childhood friend Marie Niede which develops into love affair. This story is a parody in the novel. He gets consolation by reading to his childhood companion Marie-Niede.

Segura and Marie- Niede became intimate by reading. When Lucien was a small boy he was attacked by a rabid dog. When he peeped out of the window the dog attacked and broke the window. The glass pane and glass splinter pierced his eye and he was rushed to the hospital. The doctor in order to avoid the spoiling of the second eye had to remove the eye attacked with a splinter. He would never forgive his mother for having allowed the doctor to remove his eye. Marie reads for him. Segura is entangled in love affair with Marie-Niede. But

she develops a passion for Roman whom she meets at a fair. Segura's love affair comes to an abrupt end when she marries Roman. Roman works for a belfry tower and loved every bit of nature surrounding him. Roman's hanging on a tight rope to fix the belfry is similar to the incident in *In the Skin of a Lion* where Nicholas Tamelcoff's flying under the bridge to save the nun. Roman is sent to jail for mistakenly murdering a man.

Later Marie comes with the news of her pregnancy when Roman is in jail. She has a miscarriage a month later and Segura reads for her while she is in her sick bed. After Marie's wedding he gives up his identity as a poet and turns towards a new life and prefers to take up another identity. He becomes a writer of small tales with a childish character. His fond memories for Marie-Niege are reflected through Claudile. Lucien marries and fathers two children Lucette and Therese. "His daughter Lucette is engaged to Henry Courtrade and Therese who is nineteen years old is engaged to a poet Pierre Le Cras" (DIV 229). Lucien found out that his younger daughter was having an affair with her brother-in-law and he had to confront her. However she marries the poet. Lucien Segura travels a lot after his separation from his wife and daughters like a "Pigeonnier flown into from all the realms one had travelled through" (DIV 231). He joins World War II and is affected by diphtheria.

Lucien's family had to shift to France at the time of war. He was given a break and he decided to go to his house. The whole place was devastated and he goes on horseback. When he comes to his house it was ruined and he visits Marie- Niege who was alone. That day they discover their love for each other. After receiving his papers of release he comes home and this time Marie - Niege dies when Lucien returns from war. He nurses her throughout the night when she suffered from very high fever and he fell asleep on a table. When he woke he found her gone from him forever. He makes Marie and Roman immortal through his writings. She is portrayed both as a lover and sister in his stories. "She entered the story sometimes as a lover and sometimes as a sister. And in this way he spent most of his

days with Marie-Niege as an ally in the court, or as a village girl who saves the hero without his being aware of it” (DIV 274). He moves to the countryside carrying the ghost of his past with him and planned not to write. Segura abandons his home, hides his art and gets the help of the gypsy family and seeks a house in Demu. The gypsy family clear his lands for sometime but later they go their own way. Segura becomes very lonely after that. Loneliness is the cause of his suicide. He drowns himself.

Lucien Segura’s broken love affair and the pain in his heart is hidden by his escape into a new realm as a serial and short story writer. Both Anna and Segura assume new names to change identities. Anna’s exploration of Segura’s work is like “a contrapuntal dance with him” (DIV 67). She refers to writing of Segura’s biography as her own history. He is unfortunate after his loss of one eye and loss of Marie- Niege’s love. He had to sacrifice his talent and skills to escape from the past but is haunted by it always. Fond memories and bonding cannot be erased from memory that has formed a lasting impression. The character’s psychological suffering turns out to be claustrophobic. The characters face a sense of alienation and are in a journey towards exploring their identity.

Ondaatje talks about a close bonding that exists between the twins. She regrets for having “smuggled away from who she was and what she was” (DIV 141). She questions herself as “Am I the living twin in the story of our family or is it Claire? Who is the stilled one?” (DIV141). The narrative of Ondaatje ends in an ambiguous manner leaving the reader to conclude. They are open ended and has a novel narrative structure. He uses the term ‘Villanelle’ in the novel. “Villanelle is a genre, characteristically preoccupied with repetition, proves to be of vital importance when interpreting *Divisadero’s* narrative structure” (De Smyter). Ondaatje says that “the inclination of going back to events in our past is associated with the way the villanelle’s form refuse to move forward in linear development, circling

instead at those familiar moments of emotion” (DIV 136). The novel has many repetitions and forms a villanelle.

The first person narrator Anna addresses the readers. The reader gets a clue that the narrator had a bitter incident in the past. The truth is revealed as the novel proceeds in a non-linear fashion. The novel mingles fact and fiction. Anna is the historian of Segura so the novel can be called a historiographic metafiction. Anna’s first person narration is disrupted followed by an omniscient narrator. Coop shifts to the grandfather’s cabin which is surrounded by oak and buckeye trees surrounded by glaciers of mist and Claire also moves to a similar place above two valleys full of mist and these two incidents are parallel and such parallels are repeated in the passage. The italicized passages are often repeated in the novel. Anna as a first person narrator appears once again in the chapter ‘The person formerly known as Anna.’ The chapter ‘La Manouche’ talks of Coop and Claire’s story. ‘The orphan’ talks of Coop’s entry in the farm. In the last chapter ‘Good Bye’ Claire and Coop who go back to Petaluma farm bid good bye to the readers.

Music has become the food of love for many characters of Ondaatje. Rafael and Anna get intimate through music. A jazz musician who meets with a fire accident when his caravan gets burned is narrated by the author. He has partially disfigured hands and had lost some of his loved ones. Music is a kind of metalanguage which appeals to the public and private lives of the characters. Anna had memories of her sister, Coop, her father and the farm haunting her every day. She used to await Coop or Claire to call her one day or the other. There is a possibility for only Anna who can contact them both but she prefers not to do so.

Many characters of Ondaatje face self- annihilation or an urge to escape from reality and invent a different life for them. Loneliness is a repeated theme reflected in Ondaatje’s works. The shattered lives of the characters though traumatic face life in a different lime light with their past echoing within themselves. “As ... we live those retrievals from

childhood that coalesce and echo through our lives, the way shattered rhymes, making up a single monologue” (DIV 176). Cartography is a theme which recurs in Ondaatje’s novels. Anna is a mini cartographer when she explores the topography of Gers region of France topography with a map called La Carte du Tendre Pays “an old map that has emotions that fit into the shape of France .The map is composed by women in the era of male exploration in map making” (DIV 91-92).

The language of Ondaatje and the phrases he uses are poetical and catchy. He is rich in similes such as “Lying like a slim dog’ (DIV 11). He is musical and his poetic prose makes the narrative lucid and interesting. Though there is non- linear circular movement in the narrative the story is comprehensible. The memory of Anna, Coop and Claire come in a circle back to the Petaluma farm. Even minute details are described with musical language. Lucien Segura’s lives with childhood memories, his experience in the World War and frustrated love affair is reflected in the lives of Anna, Claire and Coop. *Divisadero* is not about divided lives but it is a reflection of Ondaatje’s own profound abilities and vision as a poet and a novelist. The novel is a collage of various genres like fiction, biography, music, poetry, intertextuality, historiography, movies and songs, cinema and so can be called a pastiche.

Each character is facing psychological trauma and this damage is persistent throughout their lives. “Ondaatje’s characters have been separated geographically, chronologically and emotionally. They are foreigners to the locations” (Mallet n.p). Ondaatje is a poet first and then as a novelist leaves lot of empty spaces for the readers to fill the gaps with their imaginations. The life and experiences of the writer is definitely reflected through his characters.

The repeated mirror imagery and broken pieces of glass appear in this novel. In *Divisadero* Anna pierces the glass on her father’s neck. A mad dog attacks Lucien and a glass splinter enters his eyes. All the characters do not have their fathers. Anna runs away from her

biological father, Lucien does not have his biological father but a clock maker step father, Coop and Claire are orphans, Rafael mother divorces her husband.

The theme of loss and lost memory is substantially brought out by Ondaatje in the narrative. A sense of loneliness and disparity creeps in the mind of the characters from Petaluma farm after the loss of paradise. The story is told by multiple narrators with multiple point-of-view so that the novel can be called polyphonic. Diaspora is a prominent theme concerning the dislocation of the characters into a new place, culture and identity. Anna, Coop, Claire, Rafael, Segura all migrate to form a new identity and culture.

Gotrashkalana is a term in Sanskrit to call the loved one by wrong name, and means, literally, “stumbling on the name” (DIV 158). The author has probed brilliantly into the psyche of the characters. Coop mistakes Anna to be Claire in the farm and considers Claire as Anna when his memory was erased by head injury. Marie- Niede addresses Lucien as Roman. Lucien and Anna write under pseudonym. Characters choose to hide their names. Cooper becomes Coop, Lucien and Aria change names, the gamblers are given pseudonyms as The Hippie, The Brethren, and The Gentile.

Anna, Claire and Coop story is the original upon which the other story of Lucien Segura is imitated making the text a parody. The last line of the novel reads “Some birds in the almost –dark are flying as close to their reflections as possible” (DIV 273). The characters ruminate upon their memory and the past is carried on to the present through memories. The binary opposition that exists in the novel are past / present, self / the other and biography/ autobiography. Anna is unable to separate herself from the stories she is creating and “Only reading counts: the end is just the beginning” (DIV 136).

The novel at its close reading could be called a fictional biography. While writing the biography of Lucien Segura Anna unconsciously creates her own biography. This helps to bind the fragments and division to some extent. Violent love affairs exist between Anna and

Coop, Marie and Roman, Coop and Bridget that acts as a parallel to the love affairs between Anna and Rafael, Lucien and Marie. The narrative is fixed by the authorial voice and that of Anna's. The lives of all the characters Anna, Claire Coop, Lucien, Marie-Niege and to some extent Rafael is traced from their childhood to adulthood and so the novel could be called a *Buildungsroman*.

Anna forms a niche as a historian, "Where art meets life in secret (DIV 148)." Anna and Claire are focused as two sides of the same coin. The characters go back to their past memory making the moment nostalgic. Jodha narrates how the past comes to term with the present:

Some moments in life leave permanent imprints in the soul, as it is physical scars, with the passage of time, the heat of the emotion blurs out the mark remains as a constant reminder of the moment, something that can be entered into and relived in a more objective manner in the present. (174)

Anna comes to accept that it is her fault that set fire to the rest of their lives. Thus an understanding and acceptance of reality dawns on her:

The discovery of us in each other's arms, under the green sky, a father attempting to murder a boy, a daughter trying to attack a father, is in retrospect something very small... I have come to believe that no girl has had such an intimacy with a father... whatever anger existed; there must have been some grains of fearful love for me. But I did not believe that then. (DIV 146)

Roland Barthes feels that an author has to limit meaning and impose meaning on writings. Ultimately, it is the reader and not the author that shapes the ultimate direction of the text. Ondaatje is no doubt the author of the book but he appears as an omniscient writer and refuses to admit his authorship openly. Roland Barthes in his book *Death of an Author* says once the book is created the author's job is over and the language speaks. The writing is

important and not the author. The reader dominates and interprets the text and the reader is born. Derrida and Foucault are of the opinion that myriads of interpretation for the texts would be born once the novel is complete. Author becomes the past and the reader becomes the present. Ondaatje as a narrator feels that “We relive our stories and see ourselves as the watcher or listener, a drummer in the background keeping cadence” (DIV 176).

The novel *Divisadero* is a perfect example of collage which forms a patchwork made up of small narratives. Each character faces alienation, estrangement from each other physically, psychologically and historically. Though they are divided by placing themselves at various time zones they cross borders by reflecting upon each other and by hiding their identities. The boundary crossing relationships help each character to realize their identities. Even small moments or events attain tremendous significance like construction, desire for community, trauma, and memory in Ondaatje’s narratology. This novel acclaims him as one of the prestigious international writers.

Chapter VIII

Summation

“Postmodernism is an umbrella term which includes postcolonialism, post structuralism, deconstruction, neo Marxism, formalism and feminism” (Taylor 112). Some of the explorers of this kind of art forms are Baudrillard, Derrida, Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Edward Said, Barthes, Sassure, Lyotard, Bakhtin, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. Postmodernists are of the view that a text has multiple meanings and discourse has different layers and shades of meaning. Julia Kristeva has coined the term ‘intertextuality’ to give different interpretations to the text and Linda Hutcheon has coined the term ‘historiographic metafiction’ to fictionalize historical facts. Post structuralists believe in the syntactic and semantic structure of the language. Identity is a postmodern construct which helps the narratives to understand the self. Postmodernism is not the end of modernism but a continuous engagement with modernism.

The research on Michael Ondaatje’s select novels taken for study reflect both postmodern theories and techniques integrated in the novels. The research undertaken on Michael Ondaatje’s fiction prove that the themes, theories of postmodernism and various parallel themes and techniques like postcolonialism, post structuralism and Russian formalism are interwoven like the intricate designs in a richly designed Persian carpet. If one thread in the carpet is removed the entire beauty of the rug is lost. Michael Ondaatje’s works are analysed based on these literary theories and techniques. Michael Ondaatje enters the Canadian literary scene before the Canadian Multicultural Act of 1988. Canada has declared itself as a multicultural country tolerant and acceptable of various races after its declaration of Multicultural Act in 1988.

Michael Ondaatje has a wealth of poetic collections and the novels have postmodern ideologies and characteristics. Ondaatje has applied irony and playfulness in his novels. The

novel *Coming through Slaughter* (1976) revolves around Buddy Bolden, a pioneer Jazz Cornetist from New Orleans. He has taken the historical legend of Jazz pioneer Bolden and has formed a parallel fictitious character, an African- American, barber by profession and also an efficient cornetist. The life of the people in New Orleans who are bereft of culture, morality and rely only on entertainment and promiscuity is brilliantly brought out. Bolden has a band of Jazz musicians who played and entertained the crowds driving them crazy with a new kind of art. Various postmodern themes are brought out like history of legendary Bolden, photography, identity, epigraphs and intertextuality. Bolden is an editor of a magazine called *Cricket*. He has an illicit affair with Robin and leaves home. After his reunion with his wife and children he plays music once again in a parade and goes mad and is affected with a kind of schizophrenia called paranoia.

Running in the Family (1982) is a travelogue and fictional memoir which traces his family saga and his ancestry. The novel brings histories, legends, intertexts, identity, multiculturalism and photography. He traces how the Burghers epitomize the cultural history of Sri Lanka. Ondaatje wishes to establish his cultural roots of Sri Lankan identity through oral narratives, interviews, folklore, anecdotes making the work into a national narrative. The absent father and his mother's exile are the sad personal themes found in the novel. His interview with his sister, aunts and the places he has visited makes an excellent semi autobiography.

In the Skin of a Lion (1987) focuses on the making of the city of Toronto with immigrants who are Anglo Irish, Macedonians, Finnish, Bulgarians and creates an unofficial history in constructing the major places like the bridge, Bloor street via duct and RC waterplant. The title is taken from the myth of Gilgamesh. The novel has many postmodern themes and the novel has a subtitle 'Novel' which shows that the story is purely fictional in form. The novel highlights the long history of racism and discrimination against ethnic

minorities in Canada. There was an influx of many immigrants from various parts of Europe and were called the ethnic race who were labourers belonging to different nationalities. They were mine workers, bridge and tunnel workers and workers who laid rail roads. They formed the lowest rung of the social ladder and were discriminated and treated rudely. In this novel Ondaatje has researched historical records and deconstructed the actual history into a new fiction. History forms the theme of all his novels.

The English Patient (1992) is more advanced in its theme and structure. This novel recounts the lives of four migrants Hana, Kip, Caravaggio a thief, and the titular hero who calls himself as English patient and is burnt beyond recognition. Various themes flow with a discontinuous narratology and non linear movements to construct their identities and realize their self. Many intertexts and particularly the book of Herodotus *Histories* and Kiplings *Kim* run throughout the novel. The novel has Second World War as its back drop and many themes like cartography, memory, identity, photography, mini narratives are skillfully interwoven.

Anil's Ghost (2000) presents a different Sri Lanka contrary to the land of spices and a paradise as portrayed in *Running in the Family*. *Anil's Ghost* is detective in tone. A totally war devastated nation with threat of bombs, murders and lamentations is very clearly depicted in *Anil's Ghost*. Anil Tissera, a Sri Lankan born UNO member and a forensic pathologist is joined by Gamini and Sarath. Anil functions as a detective in finding the identity of a skeleton named Sailor and through that they unravel the government's violation of human rights. The novel explores various themes like history, identity, memory and alienation.

His latest novel *Divisadero* (2007) has many themes and techniques like diaspora, estrangement, memory, intertextuality, photography and quest for self. It recounts the lives of a family brought together due to circumstances with a widowed father, his two daughters and

a hired hand Coop. Due to an unfortunate incident the characters separate, migrate and face loneliness and alienation.

Michael Ondaatje has taken serious subjects like war, history, and conspiracy as his themes. He believes in creating the new narrative voice through intertext or pastiche which involves literary texts from various other sources that form a parallel study. Postcolonial theories operate upon the binary oppositions of the marginalized versus centre, the other versus the evolved self in his novels. The key terms of post colonial theories such as: 'self' / 'other', alterity/ hybridity, east / west, diaspora, multiculturalism, ethnicity, hegemony or the power of the ruling class, language and identity, magic realism, mapping or cartography, pluralism and ethnicity are incorporated in Michael Ondaatje's novels.

As a diasporic writer he records the lives of the ethnic minority and their experience thus reflecting his own exodus in his novels. The intricate narrative structure and psychological verisimilitude has a classic style of its own and is definitely unique. He has conducted various researches and has faithfully acknowledged the sources in the epigraph. He has explored postmodern themes such as construction of bridge, desert exploration, and forensic pathology and bomb disposal. The commitments of the protagonists and the thrilling plots make his novels very exciting. *The English Patient* has cinematic narrative technique and the author has used flash backs. The characters are similar to the ones lodged in real life.

Michael Ondaatje has used a particular way of narratology called non-linear, disruptive narrative movement and the text has an ambivalence of the past and the present. He has employed analepsis or flash back techniques in his novels. The temporal distortion in Michael Ondaatje's fiction reveals Ondaatje's experience as a diasporic writer who has migrated from his home land Sri Lanka to form a new life in England and then to Canada. Many characters in the novels of Michael Ondaatje migrate from their home lands to alien shores willingly or due to circumstances and some are compelled.

In *Coming through Slaughter* Bolden migrates from Orleans to join a dancer as a means of escapism from reality. He leaves his wife Nora and his children to join a dancer Robin. In *Running in the Family* his mother Graetian had to leave to England after divorcing her husband. The author visits his country twice to learn his ancestral history and to explore his roots. In *the Skin of the Lion* Patrick leaves rural Ontario where he is a lumber jack and he then migrates to Toronto for better prospects. Patrick one day finds some immigrant Finnish loggers arrive in his native place Depot Creek whom he meets later in Toronto. This incident shows that Ondaatje's writings are narratives of dislocations. His novels include history and parallels of history.

The novel *The English Patient* has won Ondaatje nine Oscars through Anthony Minghella's adaptation into a film. The character Hana is the daughter of Alice and adopted daughter of Patrick in the previous novel *In the Skin of the Lion* who works as a war nurse posted in Italy to take care of the dying soldiers. The English patient is a German spy Almsy and is a Hungarian national who falls tarred from a burning plane and is taken care of by Hana in a deserted Italian villa. Caravaggio the war time spy found in *In the Skin of the Lion* as Patrick's friend is a thief who escapes the prison by painting himself blue comes to the villa to join Hana. Kip or Kirpal Singh is an Indian sapper appointed by the Italian government for defusing the bombs also joins them. He returns India when he hears the notorious bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In *Anil's Ghost* Anil Tissera is a forensic pathologist who is sent on an assignment to her mother land Sri Lanka by UNO to conduct an inquiry on the inhumanities committed against the ethnic minority and on the terrible war crimes that violated human rights. She finds herself to be an alien in her own culture as she does not know to speak her own language fluently. She is joined by Gamini a government doctor and his brother Sarath Diyasena an archaeologist. Her findings cost Sarath's life when she exposed the war crimes

of Sri Lanka. She makes her escape with the help of Sarath and Gunasena a truck driver to report the reality to UNO.

Divisadero is about migration and geographic dislocation. The Spaniards immigrated to the place Petaluma previously known as valley of the hills by the aborigines. Anna runs away from her father, her sister Claire and her farm when her father discovered her sexual encounter with Coop an incident which set an unforgettable imprint in their minds to the rest of their lives. She goes to San Francisco and becomes the researcher and biographer of a poet Lucien Segura and believes the latent talent of the poet would be brought out by her. She again migrates to the French province of Demu the abode of the dead poet. She meets a gypsy musician Rafael who has led his life as a vagabond. Lucien's migration to Belgian borders for his assistance in the Second World War and his travels to Demu and back home serve as diasporic readings.

Michael Ondaatje has employed historiographic metafiction a concept that blurs the boundaries demarcating history and fiction. In *Coming through Slaughter* he traces the life of historical, legendary and pioneer of Jazz culture and has drawn a parallel character Buddy Bolden. The original historical incidents are brought as parallels through the historical character Almasy who explored the African desert and the fictional Almasy who calls himself as the English patient. The historical figure Gilgamesh expedition and Patrick in *In the Skin of a Lion* shows parallels of history. The memoir *Running in the Family* traces the family's history from his childhood through letters, interviews with aunts, friends and archives of churches.

The history of the war torn Sri Lanka in *Anil's Ghost* goes back to the time of colonization when the Sinhalese and the Tamils lived in peace and how the Tamils came there as tea plantation workers during colonization. The history is not narrated in detail but is underpinned with the narrative in the background. *Divisadero* has reflections of World War I

during the Spanish immigration and World War II that reflects like videogame in the television set kept on the blue table when Coop was discovered by Claire. American Vietnamese war also is mentioned in the novel.

“Music too is a space, has a structure like human body, and when played it opens spaces of the past, extends the present and allows the spaces of the past and future to the surface” (Jodha 111). Music echoes in all the novels of Ondaatje. Bolden is a Jazz musician in *Coming through Slaughter*, Rafael’s music in *Divisadero*, Graetian’s love of music and dance in *Running in the Family*. In *The English Patient* Hana feels bored in the lonely villa and plays the piano. The poetic prose of Ondaatje is mellifluous, lucid and there is cadence in the language. His poems serve as a sort of intertext in his works especially the poems ‘Handwriting’ and sixth century Sri Lankan epigraphist Graffiti in *Running in the Family* forms a metalanguage.

Michael Ondaatje does not provide any solution to the characters lives and the novels are open ended. Hana in *The English Patient* finally decides to go back to her step mother Canada. Anil leaves abruptly from Sri Lanka in *Anil’s Ghost*. Patrick’s decision to blow up the water tank ends in failure. Anna does not meet Coop, her father and her sister whom she loved the most.

Multiculturalism is one of the themes explored in detail in all the novels. Ondaatje comes from a multicultural background of Burgher Sinhalese and Tamil lineage. In *Coming through Slaughter* a new kind of music which is a combination of rag time music with blues attracts the crowd of Ontario invariably comprised of rich and poor, high and low, the white and the black. *In the Skin of a Lion* has a detail description of multicultural aspect in the novel. The expatriates through their multiple locations have experienced cross- cultural encounters due to imperialism and discrimination. The novel has Marxist ideologies of disparity between the capitalists and labourers. Patrick joins a group of fellow workers who

express their agony through mime shows. Patrick along with the tannery workers voices his protest against the capitalists. Alice lost her husband in the protests. The novel has many characters from different geographical locations. Immigrants abound in the novel are Finnish loggers, Macedonian labourers, Greeks, Italians who form the working class of the country. The immigrants and people of varied cultures join to fight against the capitalists

In *Running in the Family* Ondaatje researches the multiracial and multicultural ethnic hybridities prevalent in Sri Lanka. The Burghers epitomize the colonial history of Sri Lanka in their multicultural lineage. The Dutch Burghers were of European ancestry. His mother was of Dutch origin and his father was a Tamil. There were inter racial marriages and the author calls Sri Lanka as a wife of many marriages as the country was courted by the invaders, plundered, ravished its wealth of spices. His grandmother Lalla was of Dutch origin. His father had a countryhouse in Kegalle where he lived like a demi god and followed the western culture and disowned the native culture. His life style was similar to the colonizers. After Independence and as a result of Sinhala only Act in 1961 the Burgher population migrated to Australia and to other European countries and the population dwindled drastically. The Burghers spoke originally Dutch and after British invasion spoke English. They were part of the the ruling class and socially on the higher rung of the ladder. They were affluent and held respectable positions as doctors, lawyers, and were presbyters. They were good horse men and spent money on drinking and alcohol.

The novel *The English Patient* has a confluence of various cultures represented by four characters who became refugees and form a conglomeration of various races during the second World War. Hana and Caravaggio are from Canada, the English patient is a Hungarian and the sapper Kip originally Kirpal Singh is an Indian Sikh from the Punjabi province. Kip gets his name from his master who calls him kipper grass. As an orientalist Kip felt keenly the brutality of bombing Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Being upset with the prevalent

inhumanity and realising his identity he decides to disown the English. Kip comments about racism, “English or French I don’t care. When it comes to bombing they do it on the brown races” (TEP 304). He relinquishes his English culture forever and comes back to India, becomes a doctor, and is married and has two children. Ondaatje in an Interview with Amitava Kumar when he came to Jaipur says, “He has brought Kip in the forefront in order to bring the marginalized to the center”.

The novel *Anil’s Ghost* reflects the two cultures; the Sinhalese and the Tamils. Anil travels with a British passport and is a Srilankan. The Sri Lankan dress code of Sarong appears in *Running in the Family* and in *Anil’s Ghost*. The ritual of bathing in the well by Palipana and Sirrissa shows Asian culture. The Buddhists believe in the wheel of fortune where the spokes of wheel never remain constant but it is constantly rotating the good and bad fortunes dawn on the devotees. The epigraph of *Anil’s Ghost* discusses the symbol and meaning of the wheel of fortune.

Blessed be the scaffolding deep down in shaft

Blessed be the life wheel on the mine’s pit head

Blessed be the chain attached to the life wheel.

All the novels have exergue or intentional prologue in the beginning. In *Coming through Slaughter* the sonograph of the sounds of Dolphins form the prologue to show Bolden’s musical power. Dolphin’s sound is different than the sounds originating in the ocean. The reproduction of the sounds of ocean through music instruments is one of the advancement of technology. There is the sonograph that records the sound of the dolphins which is the epigraph of the text. Bolden’s music is unique and never improvised by anyone else. Bolden’s music is made immortal through Ondaatje’s novel. But Bolden’s music was never recorded. He strived to become popular till he became insane. In *Running in the Family* two epigraphs are presented. One is by Oderic a Fransiscan friar of 14th century who says “I saw

in the island fowls as big as our country geese having two heads.... And other miraculous things which I will not here write of” (AG n.p). Another by Douglas Amarasekara of *Ceylon Sunday Times* “The Americans were able to put a man on the moon because they knew English. The Sinhalese and Tamils whose knowledge of English was poor, thought the earth was flat” (AG n.p.).

In the Skin of a Lion John Berger’s epigraph and italicized intentional prologue is given. The story is narrated by Patrick to Hana in a car on the way to Marmora to meet Clara. John Berger a Marxist philosopher says, “Never again will a story be told as if it were only one” (ISL Epigraph). In *The English Patient* the prologue is an excerpt from the minutes of geographical society meeting of November 1942, London stating the tragic death of Clifton and the mysterious disappearance of Katherine Clifton in 1939 desert exploration at Gilf Kebir. In *Divisadero* Anna writes a prologue which says the words of Nietche. “*We have art, Nietzsche says, “so that we shall not be destroyed by time”* (DIV 1).

The Tamil culture of planting the three crops mango, guava and pomegranate in their garden for medicinal use is discussed. The Asians believe in curative property of herbs and they use some of them as medicine. In *Running in the Family* the food stuffs like crab curry and tea served by Ondaatje’s aunt in the big Dutch house and in *Anil’s Ghost* the Tamils habit of eating crab curry with murunga are delicacies which are believed to neutralise poisons. Gamini finds the Tamils eating raw pomegranate during diarrhoea is noteworthy. He had heard this from his Tamil Ayyah as a small boy and implements it to save a dying child from cholera. Food is considered as a metaphor of culture for diasporic writers:

It was legendary that every Tamil home on Jaffna peninsula had three trees in the garden. A mango, a murunga, and the pomegranate. Murunga leaves were cooked in crab curries to neutralize poisons, pomegranate leaves were soaked

in water for the care of eyes and the fruit eaten to aid digestion. The mango for pleasure. (AG 240)

Divisadero caricatures people from different life style vacillating from rural life and urban life. The farm house with the stoic widowed Spanish father and the orphans Coop and Claire whose origins are not discussed form a patchwork of multiculturalism. They lead a peaceful immaculate farm life till Anna flees from Petaluma to an urban culture at San Fransisco. Coop joins a multicultural gang of Casinovans in Las Vegas. Anna again migrates to Demu and becomes sexually involved with Rafael who is a gypsy musician. Lucien and Marie-Niege belong to different cultural background.

Cartography is a technique in postcolonial literature which is employed by Michael Ondaatje in most of his novels. Maps serve as guidelines that are used to explore the unexplored places and trace the locations. The postcolonial writers have a fascination for cartography. All the novels of Ondaatje have cartographic inscriptions to show the geographic space and location in colonial history. This probes the way to question the concept of history. The colonial map represents the writer's space in history. Maps become a metaphor to define nationalism and patriarchy.

The English Patient explores extensively on cartography for the English patient is a cartographer who has explored the Gilf Kebir and the unknown deserts. The historical Almasy and the Hungarian both are employed as explores for the English geographical society. Ondaatje has researched journals in the English geographical society, London to get some details of desert explorations between 1930 and 1939. Count Ladislaus Almasy the historical figure along with other cartographers has explored and found the lost oasis Zerzura in 1930. Caravaggio tells Hana about Almassy who is a cartographer:

There was a Hungarian named Almasy who worked for the Germans during the war...In 1930s he had been one of the explorers... he knew all about

desert... Between the two wars he was always on an expedition to Cairo. One was Zerzura the lost oasis. (TEP 163)

In his fictional memoir *Running in the Family* Ondaatje refers to a map of Sri Lanka in Canada before his journey to Sri Lanka. Both old map and new maps are discussed in the novel. Sri Lanka is a tear shaped island that hangs like pendent in the ears of India in the Pacific Ocean. In the novel *In the Skin of a Lion* Patrick refers to a map in the Atlas to trace his little place called Depot Creek. In *Anil's Ghost* seventy three versions of the island is given.

The national Atlas of Sri Lanka has seventy three versions of the island- each template revealing only one aspect, one obsession: rainfall, winds, surface water of lakes, rarer bodies of water locked deep within the earth. The old portraits show the produce and former kingdoms of the country. Contemporary portraits show levels of wealth, poverty and literacy.”(AG 39-40) (Italics as per original.)

Ondaatje's experience as a writer of poetry and fiction is reflected through his novels. As a voracious reader he has used extensive use of intertexts from various sources. Collage is one of the techniques followed by Ondaatje in his novels by including music, paintings, poems, religious texts, and his own collection of poems serve as intertext. Hana has the habit of reading books. The novel has many voices and multiple narratives and makes the novel polyphonic and the text is dialogic in nature.

All the novels have a wealth of quotations from many sources which serve as an intertext in the novels. The major interxts used are the magazine *The Cricket*, Herodotus *Histories* and Kipling's *Kim*, *The Three Muskateers* by Alexander Dumas. Many epigraphs and myths from various books are brilliantly caricatured by Ondaatje. The novel gives rise to many interpretations. There are many mini narratives in *Divisadero*. The story of Anna,

Claire and Coop on one hand and Anna's and Coop's life on the other forms layers of mini narratives. The story of Lucien Segura is a parody which imitates the previous story of Anna. The novels have many voices making it heteroglossia or polyphonic. Postmodernists believe that a text cannot exist in isolation instead it has relation between one text and another text. Ondaatje as a postmodern author has employed a lot of parallel texts in all his novels.

Parody is a postmodern construct to show that a work of art imitates the original story, history, legend and the author uses his imagination and creates parallel art forms. The fictional characters represent the original. *Coming through Slaughter* is a parody of the historical legendary Bolden and Almsy in *The English Patient* is the parallel of the historical Almsy the cartographer. Patrick in *In the Skin of a Lion* is a parody as he represents Gilgamesh in the Sumerian Acadian Babylonian myth and *Divisadero* has Lucien Segura's story almost similar to Anna's story. The intertextual parody is used in historiographic texts to bridge the gap between the past and the present.

Quest for identity is one of the themes in the novels since the characters suffer from lack of a sense of belonging in a postcolonial phase where multi racial scenario prevails. The identity of the English patient is traced by Caravaggio by administering morphine. He does it with a good intention of saving Anna from marrying a corpse. Patrick's identity as a labourer gives him scope to fight for the proletariat in a multilingual country. The identities of Ondaatje's family members are traced in *Running in the Family*. Buddy Bolden's quest for identity makes him paranoiac. Anna, Claire and Coop are searching their identities by migrating to different places. Anil asserts her identity as a Sri Lankan when she screams in the armory building. She constructs the identity of one skeleton naming him as Sailor as this one evidence will speak for gross human rights violation.

Postmodernism is characterized by advancement in science and technology.

Photography is the technique used to identify the characters and as a tool for remembrance. In

Coming through Slaughter Bolden's life is reconstructed by the author through the black and white photograph of Bolden's band which is the only evidence he collects from the archival record. The blurred photograph of Bolden taken by Bellocq is the only proof of the artist's past fame as a cornetist. In *Running in the Family* many photographs of the author's parents, their ancestors are presented in the family album which are used as historical evidence to trace his lineage. The author has travelled twice to Sri Lanka to collect photographs and details of his parents.

In *Divisadero* the father takes pictures of his daughters during every Christmas as it would serve as a record of their youth. In *Demu* the photographs hang on the walls of the kitchen. Anna comes to know about her mother whom she has seen only through the black and white photograph in the archives of the library. Ondaatje has used epigraphs in his novels to acknowledge the research and historical evidence he had collected and has thus combined fact and fiction. He has used ellipses in the novels. In some novels like *Anil's Ghost* the page numbers are missing. The readers at a first reading of Ondaatje will hunt for coherence in story line but the reader has to participate to construct the interconnectedness between the various plots in the text. In *Anil's Ghost* and *Divisadero* many pages in the novels are in italics. The sonograph of Dolphin sound, the Buddhist theory of wheel of fortune, the epigraph of John Berger shows Ondaatje has a different style peculiar to enrich his strategy of story telling.

Memory is one of the key elements used as a technique in the novel. The characters ramble between the past, present and future which is an aspect of temporal distortion; a characteristic features of Michael Ondaatje's fiction. Bolden wants to escape from the existential dilemma of this orderly world. So he engrosses deeply in music and loses his memory in the parade where his past life is completely erased. In *the Skin of a Lion* Patrick's childhood, his memory of Alice and the circumstance in which his father dies in the

Asphaltum pits are some incidents and aspects of memory which are used to reconstruct the past. In *The English Patient* Hana's memory of her father's fire accident, her husband's death and the abortion she undergoes are reflected as memories. Kip and Hanna reflect upon each other after their separation. Anil's father and her childhood achievement as a swimmer, Gamini's childhood are all memories quoted in the novel. Their reminiscence help in historical reconstruction of Sri Lanka during peaceful co-existence of various races. Anna and Coop think continuously of their past in Petaluma and Coop delves into oblivion when his cerebrum gets damaged. Lucien's memories of Marie-Niege and his childhood life with his clock maker step father are some of the incidents of going back to the past.

The concept of 'the self' versus 'the other' which is an aspect of postcolonial literary theory is widely used by Ondaatje to explain the issues of racism, sense of alienation, the pangs of adaptation in a multiracial and multicultural milieu. The subaltern or the marginalized figures are referred to as 'other'. Edward Said in his book *Orientalism* says, "Orientalism is a style of thought based on the ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient and the Occident" (20). *The English Patient* is the best example of orient and the occident where Kip and the patient are represented as orient and the occident. *In the Skin of a Lion* makes clear distinction between the capitalist elite as the 'self' and the marginalized working class labourers as the 'other'. In a racist society Jazz is the music of the marginalized and Bolden is the representative of the 'other'. Homi.K.Bhabha in his *Location of Culture* says, "The desire for the other is doubled by the desire in language, which splits the difference between self and other so that both positions are partial; neither is sufficient unto itself" (72). In *Running in the Family* the binary opposition between the colonizers versus the colonized is brought out as the 'orient' and the 'occident' represented by the white imperialists and the native people.

In *Coming through Slaughter* the binary oppositions of past / present, good / evil, fact / fiction, history / literature, prose / poetry are present. In *Running in the Family* the native country of the author is presented through binary opposition of the colonial society versus postcolonial society. In the colonial society the opposition was between the colonizer and the colonized; in the post colonial phase the opposition operate between the ruling native majorities versus the ethnic minority. The author feels he is a prodigal for he had migrated to Canada to escape the problems of his native country. The author goes to Sri Lanka in search for his roots. The cold and misty Canada is compared to the tropical heat of Ceylon when Ondaatje observes the map in his brother's house. It possesses good spices to entice the colonizers and at the same time it possesses poisonous herbs too. The paradox of Sri Lanka or the binary opposition is present in the spatial level as well.

In *the Skin of a Lion* the chosen land Canada where the author himself is an immigrant delineates the problems of 'self' and the 'other', through the themes presented in the novel. Patrick, the protagonist feels as 'other' which is referred to the immigrants for they are dominated by the upper class elite ruling class Canadians. "The immigrant marginalized fight in order to dissolve the center so that margin and center would merge and centre no longer would exist" (Wakchaure 27). Canada itself is a multicultural nation which is faced with binary oppositions of Anglofile / Francofile, colonizer / colonized, bilingual / multilingual.

In *The English Patient* Kip is the symbol of the east and oriental philosophy. He used to ape the ways of the British when he was posted in the bomb disposal squad. He is nicknamed as Kip. When the nuclear bomb was dropped on Japan he hated the west. He becomes hysterical by visualising the inhumanity prevalent in the war. He recalls his brother's words. "Never turn your back on Europe. The deal makers. The contract makers. The map drawers. Never trust Europeans he said. Never shake hands with them" (TEP 302). He is

so belligerent that he goes to the extent of shooting Almasy as a representation of his hatred against the English. When he was told that he is not English he replies, “American, French I don’t care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world you’re an Englishman” (TEP 302). The nuclear holocaust makes Kip flabbergasted with the western colonial attitude and goes back to India thus asserting his identity.

Sri Lanka in *Anil’s Ghost* is depicted as a land devastated by ravages of civil war between the Sinhala Government, the Sinhala insurgent groups and the separatists from the north. Ondaatje has combined memories of past and present, east and west and has fictionalized the traumas of civil war in his country making it a historiographic metafiction. *Divisadero* explores two major historical moments of the Gulf war and World War II. The novel gives the history of the characters in Petaluma farm and the parallel history of Lucien Segura which forms a parody in the text. The novel is a mingling of actual history and fictionalized biography thus making it historiographic metafiction.

The discontinuous, fragmented, non-linear discourse is the special technique of Ondaatje. Ondaatje’s narratology has a unique style. First person and third person narrative voice form ambivalence in the novel. Language reflects the culture of a particular nation. *In the Skin of a Lion* Patrick finds it difficult to speak English language as they were not allowed to speak their native tongue. The multiracial community of labourers found it very difficult and communicated in gestures. The Sri Lankan script is so artistic and has Sanskrit origins; ‘Gotrashkalana’ a term in Sanskrit means the false name or identity given to people. In Sri Lanka people spoke, Sinhala, Tamil, Dutch and French. In *Anil’s Ghost* Anil spoke only English and when she gave a speech warning the snake bite people looked at her with scorn. She forgot both Sinhala and Tamil as she had stayed in the west for a long time.

Almost all the characters face estrangement or alienation due to their social status or circumstances. Bolden, Belloq, Patrick, Ondaatje’s parents, the English patient, Hana ,

Caravaggio, Anil, Anna, Coop, Claire and Lucien all face alienation and estrangement at various phases of their lives.

Magic realism is a popular postmodern discourse which is also referred to as hyperrealism. It gives a detailed imaginative description of certain narratives such as dream which is also an aspect of cinematic techniques. The narrator imitates mythical archetypes. The English patient's fall from the burning plane with Herodotus *Histories* unburned, Nicholas Tamelcoff's flight from the rope tied to the bridge to save "the nun who fell from the bridge as a black garbed bird" (ISL 33) and few hours later his refreshment in the hotel after breaking his arms, Lalla's magical ride in the floods in the familiar places of Sri Lanka "My Grandmother died in the blue arms of the Jacaranda tree" (RIF 117) are instances of magical realism. In *Divisadero* Roman's hanging a tight rope to repair the Belfry on top of the steeple in the novel are some of the impossible probabilities recorded in the novel which can also be accounted as magic realism.

Bildungsroman traces the evolution and growth of characters from childhood to maturity. Hana In *the Skin of a Lion* is a child who is represented as an adult in *The English Patient*. In *the Skin of a Lion* Patrick's growth from childhood with his father tending the cows in Depot Creek to manhood in Ontario is portrayed. The author's birth in Sri Lanka and his migration to England and then as an adult writer to Canada is an instance of Bildungsroman portrayed in *Running in the Family* making the novel a semi-autobiographical fiction. Anil's childhood and her emergence as a forensic pathologist, Anna, Claire and Coop's growth from childhood to adult, Lucien and Marie's growth from childhood to adult life in *Divisadero* are instances of Bildungsroman.

Psychology plays a vibrant undercurrent in analyzing the psyche or inner recess of the character's mind. The psyche of Bolden reveals him as an escapist who could not fulfill the wishes of the audience who want variety. This makes him traumatic and alcoholic and

finally becomes schizophrenic. Loneliness makes Patrick inarticulate and the mime show makes him courageous and he starts revolting against the capitalists. He goes to the extent of blasting the RC water tank. The author's alcoholic father faces dipsomania. Alienation and estrangement of the characters in *Anil's Ghost* makes them paranoiac. Gamini, a surgeon in government hospital is obsessed with his work to forget his personal sorrow and the large scale death that occurs during the civil war.

The story telling tradition of recounting popular stories, myths and legends form a collage or montage in his works. Michael Ondaatje is a lover of myth and myth making which is obvious as he has submitted a project entitled 'Mythology in poetry of Edwin Muir: A study of the Making and Using of Mythology in Edwin Muir's Poetry' (1967) PG Degree. In an interview he says:

I am interested in Myth. Making, remaking it, exploding. I don't like poems or works that cash in the cliché of history or personality.... Myths are only of value to me when they are realistic as well as having other qualities of Myth.

Another thing that interests me about myth is how and when figures get caught in myth. (Qtd in Jodha 27)

Running in the Family has the popular belief of Kabrogoya or Thailagoya's tongue's medicinal, magical properties of curing stuttering voice. He humorously narrates an incident of his mother watching these peculiar sea reptiles or aquatic sea monitors in Sri Lanka which resembled crocodiles or iguanas. The tongue of kabrogaya was given to the children who stutter and stammer to be swallowed raw kept in between the slice of bananas. There was a belief in Sri Lanka as the legend goes that if people consumed it they will gain the gift of the gab and also it cured stammering. The novel is a fictional memoir. It transgresses the confessional element of a biography. The legend and myth of Gilgamesh *In the Skin of a Lion* highlights the story telling technique of Ondaatje.

The novels have many symbols and images that are interwoven. Mirror imagery repeats in all the novels. Edward Soja, Foucault and Berger are postmodern geographers who talk about the importance and interplay of time and space in human life. “A call for an appropriate interpretative balance between space, time and social being, or what may now more explicitly be termed the creation of human geographies, the making of history, and the constitution of society’ (Soja 23). Human life has a constant interplay of time and space. Carl Berger states that “We hear a lot about the crisis in the modern novel. What this involves, fundamentally, is a challenge in the mode of narration. It is scarcely any longer possible to tell the story sequentially unfolding time” (qtd in Jodha 100).

Ondaatje’s fictions reverberates the geographical dislocations and the distance and the plot is placed in different epochs. “The present epoch will perhaps be above all epochs of space. We are in an epoch of simultaneity: we are in an epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of near and far, of the side-by-side of the dispersed” (Foucault 22). Most of the characters are victims of war, of deliriums and unfortunate and embarrassing events and few out of necessity become victims. The characters experience temporal and spatial distortion under different geographical locations and situations. In *Coming through Slaughter* the setting is New Orleans which is the seat of Jazz, in *The English Patient* presents the war torn Italy and particularly a villa, in *Running in the Family* the Sri Lanka during 1930s and 40’s is reconstructed. In *Anil’s Ghost* Sri Lanka which is devastated by war is portrayed. In *Divisadero* the plot shifts from Petaluma farm, a village in California to Demu in France. In *the Skin of a Lion* he talks about his adopted land Canada.

Literature of the present cannot be considered as traditional and objective. It has broadened its scope and it encompasses various themes. Many literary theories, approaches and movements are applied to analyse postmodern literature. Self realization and parody form a part of their narration. Many concepts like the subaltern, marginal, immigrant and

feministic themes are employed by Ondaatje. The writings of Barthes and Foucault serve as an eye opener for postmodern writers who employ reader response theory. Death of an author brings out the birth of the reader:

The Death of an author, the absolute subject of literature means the liberation of the text from the authority of a presence behind it which gives it meaning. Released from the constraints of a single and univocal meaning, the text becomes available for production, plural, contradictory, capable of change.
(Belsey 134)

Ondaatje's writing is reader centered and he leaves most of the novels to the readers to conclude. Bakhtin's polyphony is echoed throughout the novels when multiple voices reverberate combining different languages and codes. The author has passion for cinematic techniques and this has been fulfilled when the movie *The English Patient* was awarded nine Oscars making the author world renowned. Bakhtin says discourse is language in a text. "Language is like the living concrete environment in which the continuous-of the verbal artist lives –never unitary" (Bakhtin 288).

Silence is one of the discursive strategies employed by Ondaatje in *Coming through Slaughter* and *In the Skin of a Lion*. These novels can be termed as an experimental fiction. Bolden is silent and there is irony behind his madness. Bolden feels paranoia to be a gateway for peace and the only way to escape the maddening existential reality of the present. The paranoiac Bolden and dipsomaniac Mervyn Ondaatje are violent and self destructive in nature. Ondaatje is a master in developing a narrative into an ambivalent non-linear plot structure. Irony is employed by Ondaatje as a postmodern intertext. There is doubleness in discourse that opens up multiple meanings which make the plot complex and difficult to comprehend. Postmodern art forms questions cultural binaries. Ondaatje's writings have doubleness, parody and instances of colonial myth.

Michael Ondaatje writes with a new vision of destroying old forms by using strategies like silence and self reflection. Dialogism and polyphony has been constantly used in his fictions. Bakhtin draws connections between dialogism and polyphony. The phenomenon that Bakhtin calls polyphony is another name for dialogism. "A text is said to be dialogic when it has multiple meanings and is open to many interpretations" (Bakhtin 243). Dialogism according to Bakhtin is the process by which meaning is evolved out of interactions among the author, work and the reader and the listener.

Ondaatje's novels have many narrative voices thus making the text polyphonic. Barthes and Foucault have focused on the importance of writings and the writer as intertexts decenter the author. Bakhtin's polyphony changes the author's voice. Polyphony is basically "a new theory of authorial point of view" (Bakhtin 3). Polyphony literally means multi-voicedness. Polyphony arises in fiction when the special position of the author allows great freedom of interaction to the characters. The characters in a polyphonic novel are allowed maximum freedom so that they could argue with each other and even with their author. In polyphonic novels different centres of consciousness are allowed interaction in the plane of the novel.

Social concern is the quintessence of Michael Ondaatje's fiction. He projects himself as a mature artist by including historical research in his fictional narratives thus creating metafiction. In his fictional memoir *Running in the Family* he has combined fact and fiction while creating an account of his genealogy. The first person narrative creates intertextual parody to fictionalize history. All the novels of Ondaatje drift between past and present, fact and fiction, memory and imagination. As a Sri Lankan Canadian he has constructed his own ethnicity and identity. Multiple words of various languages occur in the novels making his novels polyglossic.

Canadian Literature consists of artists who are non- natives of Canada. Many writers like Ondaatje, Neil Bissoondath, Rohinton Mistry, and Nino Ricci are immigrants who have integrated into Canadian culture. Ondaatje's earlier writings were based upon personal and internal struggles and his later novels are based on socio- political issues. He makes the characters socially committed. Hana's commitment for the wounded patients and Patrick's struggle for the underprivileged workers who constructed Toronto are instances that prove that they are socially committed. Patrick becomes a revolutionary by joining the Macedonian immigrants.

Ondaatje has used irony as a postmodern device and has employed it as a counter discourse in order to fight traditional story telling technique. He portrays the immigrants who are marginalized and segregated as ethnic minorities rather than merging them into main stream culture. Ondaatje's characters experience trauma of dislocations. Ondaatje's personal experience as an immigrant is voiced in the novels by the presence of an omniscient narrator. The conflict between the high culture versus subculture and suppressed minority versus powerful majority is very faithfully delineated. In 1920s and 1930s Canada faced a wide gap between the rich and the poor which lead to outbreak of violence among the underprivileged in Toronto. The Bloor Street via duct is constructed by the marginalized immigrants who are suppressed and remain unknown in history. Ondaatje has researched the archives for the photograph of the nun and other details to familiarize the unofficial history in his fiction.

Ondaatje's novels are the products of the author's dreams, visions, hard work, and research in archives, voyages, photographs, newspaper clippings, letters, and tall tales. He has based his stories on these findings. Ondaatje's characters are constantly haunted by memory. Each character is in search of something or someone. He is an observer of classical allusions that serve as an intertext to his themes. There are Christian mythical elements in his novels. In *The English Patient* Caravaggio's paintings of Biblical David and Goliath, the chapel in

Italy, the symbol of cross made by the soldiers with two pieces of wood are some of the biblical references made. In *Divisadero* Roman and Marie- Niedeck roam like brothers and sisters and this is compared to Abraham and Sarah who pretend to be brothers and sisters to safe guard their lives.

The central theme that is explored in Canadian writings is quest for identity. Canada evolved from bicultural society of Anglophone and Francophone into a mosaic of multiculturalism. Ethnic writers use heteroglossia. “Heteroglossia once incorporated in the novel whatever the forms for its incorporation another’s speech in another’s language is seeking to express authorial intention in a refracted way. Such a speech constitutes double voiced discourse” (Bakhtin 234). The works of Ondaatje are multidisciplinary, diverse and reflects the complexity of postmodern society.

Ondaatje’s migrant status and his fame as a renowned Canadian writer, his Sri Lankan Burgher background has drawn critics’ opinion. Stephen Scobie opines that, “focus on the inevitability and potency of images in Ondaatje’s works. Ondaatje’s sensibility as a writer is grounded in poetry and all his novels may be described as poetic novels.”(qtd in Jodha 17). Though he has placed himself with the west he has never forgotten his roots and that is his hall mark.

Michael Ondaatje is a brilliant writer whose literary text has become a communal art. His style is unique; his ideas and ideals are thought-provoking and concentrated. He deserves all the appraisal to the core for his poignant delineation of characters. Writing is an art; and this world renowned celebrated author fulfils all the necessary ingredients of an artist. Very faithfully Michael Ondaatje depicts the feelings, anxiety, anguish and longings of humanity in a touching and poetic manner. His works are an eye – opener to the world society as it throws light upon the pathetic position of the marginalised people who are longing for freedom and dignity. His poetic prose, humour, and the wealth of symbols, images, brilliant caricature of

scenic descriptions and rich themes of mythological characters and his cinematic style of triggering emotions of joys and tears is unique and nonpareil and indeed he deserves to be deemed as a world class writer.