

## Chapter VI

### **Socio-Political Scenario and Alienation in *Anil's Ghost***

Ondaatje's acclaimed novel *Anil's Ghost* represents the tensions of ethnic war between the Sinhalese government and the Tamil guerrillas on the northern part of Sri Lanka. *Anil's Ghost* is set in the mid 1980's and 1990's. The novel tells the story of Anil Tissera, a Sri Lankan –born USA based forensic anthropologist working for an international human rights organization. Anil Tissera has been sent to Sri Lanka to bring to limelight the atrocities committed by the Sri Lankan government during the civil war. She happens to identify an exhumed skeleton, which is a representative of the victims of war. Ondaatje has acknowledged that before writing the novel he had interviewed many politicians, civilians at the Nadesan centre, and interviewed forensic scientists in different parts of the world, read Amnesty International reports almost daily. The book *King and the Corpse* inspired Ondaatje to construct a detective postmodern novel with the background of recent civil war in Sri Lanka.

Ondaatje in an article *Pale Flags: Reflections on Anil's Ghost* says “Inventing a novel I begin from the ground up a scene, then a landscape, eventually a vista and social context. If there is an idea for the book it will emerge now” (62). Sri Lanka depicted in this novel is not the personal one he has portrayed in *Running in the Family*. It is not the Sri Lanka during the 30's and 40's but it is the contemporary world torn to pieces with racial conflicts that is depicted in the novel. Though the characters are fictional, the incidents realistically portray the war torn country. Ondaatje through Anil expresses his own concern and empathy for his native Sri Lanka. He further states in the article *Pale Flags: Reflections on Anil's Ghost* that “even though I was in no way Anil or Sarath or Gamini, I had such affection for them by the end of the book that they were in essence part of my real family” (62).

The story centers around two central characters Sarath and Anil but as the novel progresses there are four central characters. The characters Ananda and SIRRISSA were an inspiration from his poetry collection *Handwriting*. This gives an emotional, painful and personal touch in the novel. The initial title given to the novel was *Pale Flags*. This was taken from the line “Pale flags of death” from *Romeo and Juliet* Act V Scene iii. Anil is the name of a famous detergent in Brazil. The novel was published in Brazil as *Bandeiras Palidas*. This inspired Ondaatje to name his novel as *Anil's Ghost*.

The protagonist Anil Tissera is appointed by the UN Human Rights organizations as a forensic specialist to detect the crimes committed by the government against the anti governmental organizations. She travels with British passport. She is accompanied by Sarath Diyasena also a forensic specialist in Sri Lanka to work along with her. Sarath and Anil take three skeletons and investigate. She names the skeletons in order to identify them. She does a dual role as a forensic specialist of UN and also as a detective in finding out the atrocities committed by the government. Ondaatje is neither biased nor prejudiced towards any faction; he is like a middleman in recording the ethnic situation in Sri Lanka. After writing his semi autobiography *Running in the Family* in a humorous way the narration is focused on a different Sri Lanka with racial tensions running high. The civil war in Sri Lanka has hidden many truths cordoned off the official record. The quest for truth forms the basis of the narrative in the novel. Ondaatje makes use of many postmodern themes and techniques to bring out history, identity, archaeology and intertextuality in the novel.

Sarath who is working in Sri Lanka knows the real situation in Sri Lanka. Anil who though a native of Sri Lanka is an expatriate now. Gamini challenges Sarath saying that trying to research the truth would be like watching a horror story. “She will go back to write a bestselling book and the circuit of a fawning liberal press” (AG 286). Anil is overenthusiastic in being a detective realizing less of the dangers that lurk for an outsider like her. Sarath is

able to understand their plight but Anil misunderstands him. Sarath also is unconvinced about her commitment and worries that “ she will end up like one of the journalist who file reports about files and scabs while staying at the Galle Face Green Hotel” (AG 44). There are many misunderstandings and many animosities that brew between them. Sarath tries to protect her. They both work under mysterious conditions. Anil is shocked to find the animosity and danger that exists in her own motherland which comes as a shock to her. She is further shocked to find that the government did not like her in poking her nose into its secret affairs.

*Anil's Ghost* published in 2000 is a war novel set in the author's homeland tormented and ravaged by civil war. The protagonist, Anil Tissera , the Sri Lankan anthropologist struggles to maintain her goals and assignment despite terrible brewing of political rage. She becomes totally susceptible to the inhuman situations and atrocities that happen around her.

The novel opens up in early March as Anil arrives in Sri Lanka after fifteen years of absence abroad. There is an increasing death rate in Sri Lanka from all the warring sides in the 1980s civil war. She is assigned to join the archaeologist Sarath. She notices that the bone of a certain skeleton is a recently buried one. She has taken three other skeletons and gives them the identity as Tinker, Tailor and Soldier. She names the recently buried skeleton as Sailor. She is a dedicated forensic pathologist. She wants to do an arduous and untiring task of investigating the mystery behind the death of Sailor. She believed that unraveling one mystery will help her to find out the cause of many millions of murders in which the government has an under hand in it. Sarath assists her and wants to help her.

The Oronsay a passenger liner in the old days had been gutted of all valuable machinery and luxury furnishings. It had once travelled between Asia and England from Colombo to Portsaid – a vessel that could survive the heat of

Asia, and still contained the smells of sea water, rust and soil waft of tea in a cargo. (AG 18).

Since the hospitals in Colombo were crowded with people the King's hospital used the abandoned ship as a laboratory. This is the lab given to Sarath and Anil for their forensic work.

Anil is determined to work day and night untiringly in a deserted coast liner named Oronsay an abandoned British vessel. Here Anil, Sarath and their fellow forensic workers investigate the bones of the skeletons. Sailor's broken bones are the symbol of atrocities and violations of human rights. Anil is moved with compassion when she saw a woman who wailed in the grave for her missing son. The victims are tortured and murdered. They are burned beyond recognition that no one could recognize the dead person. When Anil and Sarath go to identify the skeletons the local people help the team. But at the same time they are inquisitive about the mystery behind the skeletons.

She is skeptical of Sarath and suspects that he would be a betrayer and she does not trust him at first. She felt "Forensic work during political crisis was notorious ... for its three dimensional chess moves and back-room deals and muted statements for the good of the nation" (AG 28). Anil trusts the Sri Lankan authorities while Sarath points out those true facts have become powerless due to political power. Sarath Diyasena's intentions are really good and at last he even pays his own precious life for Anil's sake. In the beginning she prepares to work with him not wholeheartedly but out of compulsion. "Sarath can read a bucket of soil as if it were a complex historical novel. But his experiences during the last unspeakable decade have taught him circumspection in drawing elaborate political conclusions from fragmentary empirical evidence" (AG 151).

Anil and Sarath go on an expedition to the mountain to identify the so called skeleton of Sailor. Since she is suspicious she begins questioning him and thinks Sarath has a

hand with the Sri Lankan army in plotting Sailor's murder. The skeleton has been taken from one of the archeological reserved burial ground of the government. Upon closer inspection it was revealed that there was evidence of transverse cracking or possible signs of violence which suggest the body has been tortured, killed, buried then disinterred and removed to its present secluded location. Anil entreats Sarath to notice Sailor's skeletons. "He must have been buried somewhere before. Someone took precautions to make sure the skeleton was not discovered. This is no ordinary murder or burial. They buried him, then they moved him to an older gravesite" (AG 51).

To find out the identity of sailor Sarath takes her to the forest cave temple where they meet his teacher and an epigraphist Palipana. They hoped Palipana would give a solution to solve the unsolved mysteries related to Sailor. Palipana is in exile in the forest called 'Grove of Ascetics' to save his life from the insurgents. Palipana's brother Narada is killed in a mysterious manner. He is a Buddhist monk and was involved in political killing. Rumours go about that he was killed by a novice and the relationship between the insurgents and involvement of monks in political killings is apparent. Palipana narrates the story of how Buddhists monks were chased and killed by King Udaya the third. History repeats but it happens vice versa: the Buddhists are killing the Hindus. There is no end to racism and no scope for humanism.

Anil and Sarath enter the forest cave monastery in Arankale and spent a few hours there. A corrugated overhanging protected the Buddha temple from heat and rain. There was a bathing pool. The monk swept the dry leaves away. There existed a sand path and a foot path. Both of them felt it a kind of meditation to walk upon the path. Anil did not hear any sound. It was calm and serene. The calls of orioles and parrots broke the silence. Sarath was lost in his own thoughts. They were followed by a dog. She thought of a myth in Tibet where

they believed that people who did not meditate properly became dogs in their next birth. They were all enclosed by lushy green vegetation including the statue of Buddha.

The novel has themes of overwhelming separation, of human beings fenced apart from each other, each inhabiting their personal island of pain. Cut off from the nourishing roots of family and community all of Ondaatje's characters seem to live in a state of numbness and shell shock of the mind.

(Gupta 23)

Anil carries with her broken relationships, frustration and anger which prompt her inner self to name the nameless skeleton as Sailor. Anil's quest to unearth the truth leads many people who try to help her in trouble. They are guided by Palipana to meet Ananda who is an artist skilled in designing the human form from their skeletons. He is a sort of a creator. Ananda is employed in recreating the statue of Buddha. Both of them go to Galapiligama. Ananda personally suffers from the loss of his wife Sirissa. He helps them to reconstruct the head of Sailor. He is so frustrated that he destroys what he constructs thrice. Anil becomes emotional by hearing the story of Ananda's wife Sirrissa. Many students go to school and they never return and Sirissa is one of them. Three years have passed and she has been missing mysteriously. In the cave Ananda does the construction successfully. Anil and Sarath find out the identity of Sailor in a nearby village. It is the skeleton of Ruwan Kumara a toddy tapper and a worker in the mines. They found a mother crying near the grave of an unknown person. In Sri Lanka many mothers hold any one of the dead bodies and cry for they cannot recognize whose body it is.

After identifying Sailor, Sarath leaves Anil at the country estate in Ekineligoda in Walawwa where operations relating to her forensic research were conducted. Sarath returns to Colombo to search for Ruwan Kumara's name on a list of government records. She was not contacted by Sarth for one week. She becomes sick and helpless. She feels lonely and

miserable. She calls Dr.Perera her father's friend and takes his help to reach Colombo. She is asked to give a report of the forensic findings to the hostile crowd consisting of army and anti insurgent trained police personal. She finds the skeleton of Sailor missing. She makes her presentation with the rest of the skeletons. Sarath hides behind unobserved. He suddenly comes and refutes her views. After she leaves he speaks soothingly to the audience. She is so shocked that she goes to Oronsay lab controlling her emotions. The officers remove all her evidence and papers of her study. She finds the skeleton of Ruwan Kumara removed by Sarath from a van and kept on the table. There is a hidden tape recorder kept by Sarath inside the ribs asking her to make a note of her study fast and leave Colombo taking the next flight.

*I'm in the tunnel of the armoury building. I have just a moment. As you can tell. This is not any skeleton but sailor. It's your twentieth – century evidence, five year sold in death.Erase this tape. Erase my words here. Complete the report and be ready to leave at five tomorrow morning. There's a seven o' clock plane. Someone will drive you to the airport. I would like it to be me but it will probably be Gunasena. Do not leave the lab or call me. ( AG 284) ( Italics as per original)*

Sarath saves her and wants the report to reach UN Human Rights authorities through her. She leaves the place hoping to bring to limelight the secret involvement and atrocity of the government. But Sarath had to suffer for her. He is killed by the government. He is brutally assaulted and the bones are broken which is typical of the perpetrators of violence. When Gamini saw the body of his older brother there were acid burns, mark of a spear and twisted bones.

Ondaatje portrays the real political turmoil and violence which is prevalent throughout Sri Lanka. Gamini, Sarath's brother is a doctor who works in government

provincial hospital. He is frustrated as he is continuously treating various cases and conducting numerous postmortems daily. He is so fed up with the violence that he wants to relax in the children's ward. He shows them a patient who is crucified and various other kinds of atrocities faced by the civilians. Everyday a brother is missing, a woman becomes a widow, many children become fatherless and there is crying and hooting throughout. People go out for work and they never come back home in the evening. Ondaatje has recorded the trauma of the people. Politicians use unacknowledged witnesses to rationalize their random murders. Government bears no witness to the atrocities and human rights violation during the war.

A list of missing people during their simple everyday activities is recorded in the Amnesty records. As per the record in 1989 forty six students attending school in Ratanpura and some of the staff disappeared. The vehicles that picked them up had no number plates. A yellow Lancer had been seen in the army camp and had been recognized during the patrol.

*Kumara Wijwtunga, 17 6<sup>th</sup> November 1989. At about 11.30 pm from his house.*

*Prabath Kumara, 16 7th November 1989. At 3.20 am from the home of a friend, Manelka da Silva, 17. 1 st December, Weeratunga Samaraweera, 30<sup>th</sup> July At 5.00 pm while going for a bath at Hulandawa panamura".(AG 41)*  
*(Italics as per original)*

The novel is about the research conducted by Anil. The identity of one skeleton proves war crimes. "*One Village can speak for many villages. One victim can speak for many victims*" (Italics as per original) (AG 275). This is the mantra of the forensic scientists Anil and Sarath. Anil untiringly with courage and fortitude finds out governments' hand in Sailor's murder. She prepares a report as a representative of the UN Human Right's commission. She is very confident to prove the death of Sailor's murder in a presentation arranged at the auditorium. She is shocked to have found Sailor missing. With great mental



agony she presents before the officials her reports. She is disproved, insulted and all her findings and research materials were confiscated. Even the test tubes were removed from her coat pocket. But she very boldly bursts out aloud saying “You have killed hundreds of us” (AG 272).

The novel is about a great historical, political turmoil in Sri Lanka. In an archeological preserve owned by the government Sailor is discovered. Anil tries to get justice for the affected civilians. She faces the government boldly and challenges to expose the human rights violation. The continuous war in Sri Lanka is relentlessly present as secret murders, bombings, school boys killed and bloodshed becomes the norm all over the country. Many villages and towns, homes, families and tall buildings are destroyed due to war.

There is violence and bloodshed throughout the country like shooting, crucifixion and tortures which are heart rending and there is fear psychosis in the country. Ondaatje records Srilankan history and its hundred year’s war with modern weaponry. The perpetrators of the war stay safe while the civilians suffer. “This is terrible war sponsored by guns and bombs, drug runners ... the reason for war was war” (AG 43). On her return to Sri Lanka, Anil ponders over the atrocities she came across in her native land:

She pushed the sheet down to the foot of the bed and lay there in the darkened room, facing the waves of air. The island no longer held her by the past...The darkest Greek tragedies were innocent when compared with what was happening there. Heads on stakes. Skeletons dug out of a cocoa pit in Matale. (AG 11)

There are spies present everywhere, even when Anil makes a presentation in the auditorium. Sarath confirms the presence of spies and if anyone overhears him in the empty auditorium he would be murdered. Fear and suspicion is present everywhere and many people disappear in a mysterious manner. They disappear during bath, while going out for a

walk and while returning from work. Amnesty international has such records of missing persons. But there is no use complaining about those disappearances. The story of Ananda's wife who is missing is the only intimate history of loss in the novel. This is very important for the turn of events in the novel. "Sirissa was missing exactly at six thirty in the morning when she was crossing the bridge" (AG 172). She recognizes the faces. "She begins running forward, past their eyes her own shut dark until she is past them. Up the hill towards the school she keeps running forward and then she sees no more" (AG 175). She crosses everyday to the work in the little village school there are four heads on the stake. They belong to a group of local teen agers, young men she greets everyday as she goes to school.

Anil believed that by revealing the truth she can make the UN bring an end to war and bring peace to people. Sarath says that "it is like setting fire on a sleeping lake of petrol" (AG 156). Anil suspects Sarath in the beginning and does not know which side he belongs. In a room when three persons are there nobody knows who heals whom or who kills whom. This is the real plight of the country. Sarath openly tells Anil that he is bothered about their safety more than the quest for truth.

Sarath tells her an incident where he happened to witness the insurgents abducting a captor. He is not sure what crime the man had committed. He was blindfolded and taken in a bicycle. No one knows the whereabouts of the abducted person. A man in the motorcycle carrying a gun with him followed the abducted person. This kind of kidnapping has become a sort of ceremony or a ritual in Sri Lanka. The kidnapped person sitting in the bar of the bicycle has to hold one hand on the cycle bar and the other hand on the captor. Ondaatje asks ironically about what intimacy exists between the captor on the cycle bar and the one who rides the cycle. Nobody knows what would happen to him. He might have betrayed or killed or have committed any other kind of atrocity. They might kill him or threaten him without killing or torture him. This is the real political situation in Sri Lanka. There is another blood

curdling incident of an employee going to office in a train. He was pushed from the running train and murdered.

Two or three cases of cruelty are narrated to make one realize the authentic situation in Sri Lanka. Gunasena the truck driver was found crucified on the road and saved by Anil and Sarath. They bring him to the provincial medical Hospital. But Gamini tries his best to suture the wounds on the broken limbs. A man with a sarong and a caged bird in it entered a slow train passing through the rocks. He sat down with the bird cage as there was no place. Many windows were opened to avoid suffocation. It was dark when the train passed through the tunnels. The man with a bird cage moved where the government official was. He strangled the man's neck with a chain until the man died and fell on his shoulder. He pushed the official from the running train into the dark tunnel.

Ondaatje records Anil's childhood in Sri Lanka where she recalls her swimming prowess in her youth a memory that becomes dull as time passes. Sarath when he first meets her in Katunayaka airport in Colombo asks "*so you are the swimmer*" (AG 2) (Italics as per original). She recalls her own history and realises that she actually belongs to Sri Lanka. She owns her country now. In an outburst of anger at the end of the novel she says, "you killed hundreds of us" (AG 272). Sarath is happy when he thinks "Fifteen years and she is finally us" (AG 272). She is forced to leave her motherland in order to save her life. The novel ends with a hope that her research would be instrumental in bringing solace to the suffering multitudes.

The novel's narrative is discontinuous, but with a formal ending. The story is narrated in fragments. There is a third person omniscient narrator in the novel. Ondaatje juxtaposes past with the present through a young woman Anil Tissera, who returns to her native country after fifteen years in America. The novel can be termed as a detective novel or a political thriller and also as a historiographic metafiction.

Language is one of the postmodern tools which depict the culture of the land. Sri Lanka consists of the Tamils who spoke Tamil language, the Sinhala populations which form the majority speak Sinhala and they are Buddhists.

Sinhala belongs to the Indo- Aryan family of languages. Tamil is a language that belongs to the Dravidian group of languages. “Ondaatje has included many Sinhala words “ rakshabandana”, makamkruka”, and “madanaraga” and Spanish words such as cubito, omoplato and occipital. There are many languages like the language of the insects, human language, language of touch, sound, astrology, anthropology is all amazing. (Ganapathy 54)

Gamini is posted in Polannaruwa, a village where many people suffer due to lack of proper medical facilities. The disinfectants, soap powder and water gets exhausted. They had to treat under unhygienic conditions. Once when people were infected with diarrhoea the Tamils suggested the juice of raw pomegranate as medicine and it stopped. Every Tamil house had mango, murunga and pomegranate. The murunga leaves were added to spicy crab curry; it was a delicacy.

Anil struggles to ascertain her own identity though by birth she is a Sri Lankan. She struggles to get accustomed to her own culture and language. She no longer can speak Tamil or Sinhala which is only a trace in her memory. Her visit to her Tamil Ayah Lalitha shows her sense of gratitude and memory. Currently she has become familiar with many words to survive in the chaotic world. “Anil needed to comfort herself with old friends, sentences from books voices she could trust” (AG 54).

Quest for identity or search for an ideal is one of the predominant themes in postmodernism. “For Ondaatje identity – personal or public, individual or national – is always provisional and shifting; his work crosses and recrosses the boundaries between real and fictional identification” ( Cook 8). Anil is the name of her grandfather and is inherited by

her brother. He does not use the second name. Despite requesting her parents the name is not given to her. At last the siblings enter into an agreement. She offered to support him in all his family arguments. Thus she had this name in her passports, school reports and application forms. “Later when she recalled her childhood, it was the hunger of not having that name and the joy of getting it back that she remembered most” (AG 67). Names and identities are cultural and ideological constructions.

The main theme of the novel is introduced through Anil. In this novel the details of action, landscape and character are presented in a series of measured fragments. The beautiful country which is described by Ondaatje in his memoir *Running in the Family* is now differently pictured with lots of political turmoil and chaos. Anil has opted to be a professional forensic pathologist and now she is a human rights worker. The violence is too atrocious that even the statues of Buddha are not spared. Not only human being but even the statues of Gods are buried and found when excavated. She has a quest to unearth the crimes perpetrated by the Sri Lankan government and to expose them. “Truth bounced upon gossip and vengeance. Rumour slipped into every car and barber shop” (AG 54 ).

As a forensic pathologist Anil makes a detailed study of the bones of Sailor. The ligaments are still attached to the bones. The broken femur reveals that the victim was tortured to death, killed and burnt beyond recognition. Sarath tells her that he must have been a sympathizer of any insurgent groups. The government had problems with both the insurgents and the guerrillas fighting in the north. To get rid of the problems the government involved in secret killings. By identifying one skeleton she believes that she could detect a mass murder in Sri Lanka. By constructing these skeletons she tries to reconstruct their history, in the process she also happens to reconstruct her own personal history. She explores her own identity and understands where she belongs actually. She feels to have lost her mental and emotional balance amidst the inhuman situation in Sri Lanka.

Anil has established a place in the west through her hard work and studies. In Sri Lanka she is adrift. She has no access to the equipment she requires for her work. The very work she is doing is cast in doubt in a fearful chaotic environment. But in the midst of such events she realized there could never be any logic to the human violence without any distance of time. “Now it would be reported, filed in Geneva but no one could ever give meaning to it. “She used to believe that meaning allowed a door to escape grief and fear” (AG 55).

If Anil wants to continue her work in Sri Lanka which is currently alien she has to do something and find a way out. Thereby she can acquire some meaning to the work she does. She wants to do something to help the people of her own country. She strives to achieve peace knowing very well that it would be an arduous task. It is highly impossible for a young forensic scientist to repair the damage in a country devastated and ravaged by war for so many years. She understood that the crimes are committed in broad day light. It was a horrible situation from which she wants to save all the victims of war, violence and death.

Estrangement is one of the main themes of postmodern literature. The political discord due to civil war seems to disrupt the individual lives of the characters. The characters face alienation from one another and from others. The novel has a vision of melodrama. Anil no longer speaks Sinhala or Tamil. She has divorced her husband. “She transgresses the conventional notions of identity and boundaries of gender and position” (Cook 7). Anil has a vacillation between national culture and multicultural.

The novel *Anil's Ghost* discusses the recent history of Sri Lanka. The background for the war is not very clearly given by the author. He leaves it to the readers to find out the backdrop of the civil war. The author has given a fore note very briefly:

From the early 1980s to the 1990s Sri Lanka was in a crisis that involved three essential groups. The government insurgents in the south and the separatist's guerillas in the north. Both the insurgents and the separatists declared war on

the government. Eventually in response legal and illegal squads were known to have been sent out to hunt down the separatists and the insurgents. ( AG n.p).

The Sri Lankan populace consists of Buddhists who spoke Sinhala, the Tamils who were Hindus, the Burghers like Ondaatje and the Portuguese. The Sinhalese feared that the Tamils would outwit them in voting. The Tamils were disenfranchised. In 1956 The Sinhala Only Act was passed which ousted the Tamils completely from government services. This was the reason for the formation of the separatists and the insurgent groups. “This was actually the beginning of the civil war” states Lydia Kokkola in her article ‘Truthful Histories in *Anil’s Ghost*’ (qtd in Ratti 125). Many rounds of peace talks proved unsuccessful between the Sri Lankan government and the separatists. Sarath Diasena, the government appointed archeologist sums up the backdrop of civil war to Anil:

The bodies turn up weekly now. The height of terror was 88 and 89, of course it was going on long before that. Every side was killing and hiding evidence. *Every side*. This is an unofficial war. No one wants to alienate the foreign powers. So its secret squads and gangs... The government was not the only involved in killing. You had and still have three camps of enemies.—one in the north and one in the south—using weapons, sophisticated posters, propagandas, fear and censorship. Importing state-of-art from the west or manufacturing home made weapons. A couple of years ago people started disappearing. Or bodies kept found burned beyond recognition. There is no hope of affixing blame. And no one can tell who the victims are. (AG 17)

(Italics as per original)

Historiographic metafiction is a common technique in postmodern fiction. Linda Hutcheon coined the term. Historiographic metafiction is a term which denotes fictionalizing

actual historical facts or events or figures. Metafiction is essentially about clarifying the artificiality of art or the fictionality of fiction. It is often employed to undermine the authority of the author, for unexpected narrative shifts, to advance the story in an effective way. The statue of Buddha is stolen by the thieves, ravaged and buried. It is again unearthed and reconstructed. Ananda's painting of the eyes of Buddha which gives life to the statue is an act of creation and has historical overtones. Adopting historical names such as Ananda who is the loved disciple of Buddha is an act of historiography. The novel is a mixture of fact and fiction. Palipana's reading and re-reading of ancient writing, "the dialogue between old and hidden lines, the back and forth between what was official and unofficial during solitary trips, when he spoke to no one for weeks ... his only conversations" (AG 105). His sense of the sacred and intimate history is revealed in these dialogues.

The structure of the novel is based on binary opposites such as past / present, modern/ postmodern and east / west. Anil had the western assumption that the individual had every right to clarify and act upon. But this is highly impossible in a nation which is highly terrorized by unofficial war. The war remains unreported in the western nations because "no one wants to alienate the foreign powers" (AG 17). Anil is comfortable with the west for it provides comfort and safety. On the contrary there is no safety in Sri Lanka with unofficial war between the government, separatist guerrillas and the insurgents. "Murder committed by all sides" (AG 18). The atmosphere in Sri Lanka when compared to the west is totally different. Sounds of birds, lorries, fighting dogs and there is noise everywhere in Sri Lanka.

Anil represents west more than the east. But when she is in America she exhibits the characteristics of a Sri Lankan. She says: "We are full of anarchy. We take our clothes off because we should not take our clothes off. And we behave worse in other countries. In Sri Lanka one is surrounded by family order... rain and smoke" (AG 138).



Gamini's experience of civil war is pathetic. He had to treat the casualties non-stop. He witnesses different kinds of horror every minute. People are labeled with different colours. Red for neuro, green for orthopedic, yellow for surgery. Patients who are sure to die and can't be saved are given morphine. Gamini has a gesture of doing things in a speedy way to cope up with frustration. "The hospital would run out of pain killers during the first week of any offensive. You were without self those days, lost among the screaming" (AG 118-119). Gamini finishes surgery in the middle of the night. He becomes frustrated that he runs to the children ward for relaxation. He could find the children's mothers sleeping on the cot holding their little one's arms. On the other side he could see women crying for their husbands or sons as they were dying. They were screaming "Wait for me! I know you are here" (AG 116). He turned away from every soul that talked of power or money. He only believed in mother's love and found solace in the pediatric ward, as it was the only place where love and compassion exists.

The author's presentation of political events is based on the research he has undertaken and he has acknowledged at the end of the text. A formal context based approach is given in the novel. The target audiences from both east and west are made aware of the authentic political and social scenario of Sri Lanka. Alienation and isolation is one of the major themes of the novel. Anil feels lonely and alienated in her own country for she is western in her outlook, thus she is a prodigal. Ananda feels isolated and lonely after his loved wife Sirissa's mysterious disappearance and death. Ananda attempts suicide and is saved. He feels comfortable with the little boy who holds the mirror during the Netra Mangala ceremony; the ceremony of painting the eyes of the Buddha. While painting Buddha's eyes the painter is not supposed to see the eyes of Buddha as it is created, so he sees the eyes of Buddha through the mirror and paints it.

Sarath feels lonely for he has lost his wife. Gamini has divorced his wife. The brothers feel comfortable to talk to each other in the presence of Anil. Chrisanthi, Gamini's wife left him and she lives in Colombo. The brother's relationship is elaborated in a great deal by the author. They lived a happy life, their father was a lawyer. Gamini was quiet and had big ears. He was called the mouse. Sarath was active and intelligent. The family was upset when the sons took professions of their choice instead of pursuing family business. Both of them entered into government service. Sarath as an archeologist and Gamini as a government doctor. Both the brothers are friendly with their colleagues. The trauma of war created havoc in their personal life. When Gamini's marriage broke he leads a vagabondish life of sharing a bed in the hospital and eating from the street shops opposite to the hospital. Ravina Sarath's wife commits suicide. Gamini dedicates himself to serve the people and Sarath plunges into his archaeological research.

Gamini warns both Anil and Sarath not to involve themselves in political matters. They should just stick on to their jobs and not to probe into government's affairs. He was aware of the terror that surrounds them. At last when Sarath dies Gamini finds his brother's body in a tortured condition. His body is covered with a long sleeve shirt and Gamini identifies him with the photograph brought by civil rights workers. He immediately runs into the room where the bodies were kept. He opens the third body which was his brother. He walks restlessly similar to his nature and dresses his brother's wounds hoping he would bring back his life. He remembers how they were brought up and many memories of love and affection shared by them came to his mind. They had not damaged Sarath's face. He understood something by seeing the loose fitting shirt. Hastily he opens the shirt and finds the bones are broken below the elbows.

Dr. Linus Corea never agrees with the west. He hails from a family of doctors of three generations. He was abducted by the insurgents to treat the wounded boys, he

performed operations with lanterns hanging on the bodies of victims. He never returned to Colombo. From then onwards Gamini addressed him as just Linus Corea and no longer as Doctor. Gamini was in a similar position when he was abducted by the Tamil rebels from a beach hotel. He was drunk that night and found himself in the hut of wounded boys in the morning. He thought that he would never return back to Colombo. But fortunately he returned to Colombo after one week. Thirteen year old boys were sent to fight and Gamini wondered what morality they possessed.

The novel ends with a note of optimism and rejuvenation as Ananda reconstructs the broken images of Buddha statue and draws Buddha's eyes during the Netra Mangala ceremony. The author intends that as Buddha's eyes are restored peace would be restored in the country.

Memory is one of the themes in the novel. Anil's memory traces back to the past Sri Lanka, her days of medical school in United Kingdom and her internship in America. "In her years abroad during her European and north American education, Anil had courted foreigners, was at ease whether on the Bakerloo line or the highways around Santa Fe. She felt completed abroad" (AG 54). Anil's memory shifts from the past to the present and she thinks of her colleagues in the USA. The novel moves from the past to the present filled with ethnic violence. Thus the novel rambles between the past and present.

The conflict takes place between the rebels and the government. The novel is preoccupied with postcolonial issues of displacement and alienation. The story is grounded in postcolonial discourses concerning issues that confront people who have been affected by the dominant culture than their own. The author has grounded his stories in legend, myth, psychology, culture, history and individual experience. The novel is juxtaposed with fragments of a remembered past with the present experience from the perspective of Anil who returns after fifteen years of education in America. The author explores possibility of

recovery from trauma, through reestablishment of a sense of order and community building. A glimpse of the current landscape and cultural details are explored. Anil left the place as a child and returns during the time of political chaos. History and identity is constructed through language. Sri Lanka is a place of memory where Anil gets a sense of belonging.

Anil feels that by discovering the secrets of the mysterious murder of sailor she could find out all other crimes. She will be able to identify and reconstruct the lost history. The central truism in her work was “that you could not find a suspect until you found a victim” (AG 176). She has a strong faith in her profession. Anil’s simplicity, language and connection with other people show her sense of belonging to the country of her birth. The fragmented narrative heightens the readers with intensive activity in a situation of social and political upheaval. There is uncertainty, anxiety, fear and random violence everywhere. The horror makes the country disintegrated. Violence has crumbled the culture and tradition of the nation. Anil believes that forensic science would reveal the truth and will be instrumental to unearth the truth.

The novel has many intertextual references from many sources. Anil gets her name from her brother. Her brother gives his name to Anil and she acquires male identity. There is a reference in the Bible where Isaac’s sons Esau and Jacob wanted their father’s blessings. Their mother Rebecca cheats the father by cooking meat from the house. Jacob steals the blessings that are due to the elder brother. The elder brother sells his birthright to his younger brother Jacob for a bowl of porridge. So Anil’s brother gives his name and prerogative of patriarchal identity to his sister.

The story of the two lovers Ananda and Sirrissa is taken from Ondaatje’s collection of poems *Handwriting*. The poet’s sense of grief is shown in the poem. The poem also shows the poet’s sense of grief for abandoning the servant. The novel opens with a miner’s song. Ananda Udugama is a miner. The novel records historical incidents like the

tragedy of Archilocus and also records Sinhalese history of Culavamsa. Songs play an intertextual role in the novel. Familiar songs of those days “The Good Ship Venus” (AG 69) “Sleep come free to me” (AG 133) and “The air that I breathe” (AG 251) act as mnemonics, just like the names chosen to label the bodies Tinker, Tailor and soldier.

The detective story provides the structural basis for the novel. Anil visits Palipana in the grove of ascetics. The blind artist feels her arm to get a sense of her personality. A particular kind of logic is at work here. Anil is impressed by the man’s wisdom. This is also similar to the Biblical story of how Rebecca makes Jacob play duplicity to get father’s blessings. The novel has many micro narratives with several characters. The miner’s song has Buddhism as its theme. The song refers to the wheel of fortune. “Blessed be the scaffolding deep down in the shaft/ Blessed be the chain attached to the life wheel on the mine’s pit head/ Blessed be the chain attached to the life of wheel” (AG 1).

Anil comforts herself with old friends, sentences from books, voices she could trust. “This is the dead room, said Enjolas. Who was Enjolas? Someone in *Les Miserables* ... vengeance” (AG 54). *In Search of Gandhi* and *A Life of Frank Sinatra* are the two books she reads to overcome her loneliness. *The Daily News* and *The Sunday Observer* were the two newspapers read by her.

The story of Ananda and Sirissa, Palipana and Lakma are depiction of real incidents. The novel is quite straightforward in its structure. Anil’s enthusiasm to expose the crimes of the government costs Sarath’s life. Sarath though rational has to sacrifice his life to uphold truth. The novel is a mingling of fact and fiction. Palipana is accused of forgery and so flees from the place. Palipana is the centre of a nationalist group that eventually wrestled archaeological authority in Sri Lanka away from Europeans. He has made a name by translating pali scripts and recording and translating the rock Graffiti that stunned archaeologists and historians.

People become inquisitive when Sarath, Anil and Ananda go to a village to identify Sailor. Sailor is identified as Ruwan Kumara, a toddy tapper and a worker in the Plumbago mines. Anil has come to Sri Lanka for just seven weeks. The few days she experiences an eerie atmosphere of murder and the mysterious way in which horror has been plotted. Sarath's memory haunts her like a ghost. Ananda is also haunted by Sarath's ghost. This is obvious when Ananda paints the eyes of Buddha wearing Sarath's shirt. Anil owns the skeletons that haunt her like a ghost and she talks to them, "Honey, I am home" (AG 19). This is one of the reasons for the novel's title as *Anil's Ghost*. Anil is forced to leave Sri Lanka once she comes to know the government's involvement in the murder. The guilt hangs on their heads like a knife. The readers witness the crimes and they know crimes have been committed. "Ghost is the symbol of the collective guilt like that of the ghost of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" (Ganapathy 55).

The narrative is non-linear and fragmentary. "The novelist is a Tumbler if not a Tinker" (AG 264). Ondaatje tries to connect the characters through places, persons and memories. Human Resource Management in Geneva connects Guatemala and Sri Lanka with the war crimes. The inaction taken against the political authorities are shocking to Anil. "The novel is a historiographic metafiction. The novel translates time and death. Through frequent flash backs, intertextual references and typological variations in the text Ondaatje tries to maintain order in a chaotic world" (Ganapathy 53).

A person's name ascertains a person's history, place, his family and social history. Sailor is the collective voice for all the missing persons. Chitra Abeyesekera greets her as a 'Woman from Geneva' (AG 71). Sarath takes great pains to reconstruct the identity of sailor. Anil, a strong character has a weaker side. She does not trust Sarath Diyasena who has real good intentions but trusts Dr. Perera who supports the Sri Lankan Government. "There is

gossip and outcome justice like shuttle cork balls or is hidden by fear or slips across like a wriggling eel” (AG 157).

In the armory auditorium Anil is proved to be a fraud. As the skeleton of Sailor was missing she had to report with other skeletons. Anil does not understand the genuineness of Sarath’s intentions. Only when he brings the lost skeleton from the van she really understands his good intentions. She recognizes her Sri Lankan identity when she argues with the authorities claiming “You killed hundreds of us” (AG 272). The leitmotif of the novel is the conflict between truth and deception. The reader is not clear of the mysterious deaths. The reader cannot comprehend whether the man in black coat is a patient or a doctor, or whether Sarath’s teacher is Palipana who supports him or a Buddhist monk who betrays or how Naradha Palipana’s brother was killed. No one knows the truth. It becomes very clear how people adopt to a survival concept in Sri Lanka.

Cartography is one of the postcolonial aspects in all the novels of Onndatje. The national atlas of Sri Lanka which seems to be a part of colonial legacy has different versions of Sri Lanka. It does not mention river names:

*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. The geological maps reveals peat in the muthurajawela swamp south of Negombo, coral along the coast from Ambalagonda to dondra Head, pearl banks off shore in the gulf of mannar. (AG 39-40)( Italics as per original.)*

Brutal human violence claimed historical lives. This gives a visual portrait of various features of the environment. The novel not only depicts the reduction of human life but the country plundered by the colonists. The novel shifts from the historical to the modern context:

There are the most precisely recorded moments of history which lay adjacent to the extreme actions of nature or civilizations. She knew that. Pompeii. Laetoli. Hiroshima, Vesuvius. (Whose fumes had asphyxiated poor Pliny while he recorded its tumultuous behavior). (AG 55) (paranthesis as per original)

“Palipana is an epigraphist and teacher of Sarath. He translates the rock of Graffiti in Sigiriya and discovers linguistic subtext” (AG 81). He is unable to prove his findings as there is no evidence for his concept. The novel ends with a positive note of revival and retribution. One of the important Buddhist ceremonies is Netramangala ceremony where the artist gives life to the Buddha statue. The assistant holds the mirror and the painter looks at the reflection of Buddha in the mirror and paints the eye of the statue. So a boy holds the mirror. No one should see the eyes of Buddha directly. This incident is symbolic of rejuvenation. The process of creation is one of the postmodern techniques called Poiumena. It is a term coined by Alastair Fowler to refer to a particular kind of metafiction in which the story is about a process of creation. Ananda creates a tall life like statue with powerful eyes could be considered as the process of creation.

Ananda tries to stab his hands after creating Sailor’s head. He is saved by Anil and Sarath. Knife acts as a weapon of destruction in one’s hands and a symbol of healing in the doctor’s hands. The mallet and chisel in Ananda’s hands are used to construct the hundred and twenty foot tall statue of Buddha. Ondaatje brings out the urgency to reconstruct the destructive world. The government is troubled by the antigovernment insurgent groups and separatists guerrillas in the north. “To quell the protest it has to take some measure like secret



plotting and murders. It adopts both legitimate and illegitimate methods to kill the violators. The information is kept a secret for the people who commit murders are politically powerful” (Spinks 228).

Ondaatje insists that reconstruction, reconciliation and reestablishment is essential in a war torn country. The novel is semi-documentary and metafictional in nature, bears witness to reality, history and creativity. Anil’s journey is a quest for truth and justice. “Anil is neither patriotic nor prodigal and is not guilty of being an alien in her own nature. There is metaphorical surrounding – human bodies, statues, natural habitats. She witnesses the sufferings of the Sri Lankan multitude” (Glover 72).

The aim of Ondaatje is not to write about barbarity of human beings to one another but to stress the importance of redemption in the novel. He wants “sweet touch from the world” (AG 307) and not barbarity of human beings. The eyes of Buddha promises peace and brotherhood. “The novel has a monological narrative voice but polyphonic mourners and whimpering” (Ratti 117). The narrative centers on the investigation, of the circumstances under which sailor was murdered. There are multiple quests in the novel. There is violation of human rights everywhere. “UN’s declaration of human rights states that the recognition of human dignity of all the members of human family is foundational to freedom, justice and peace in the world in the promotion of social progress” (qtd in Ratti 138). The metaphor of burning Rhododendron bush and sleeping lake of petrol suggests that violence may erupt any time. But the use of burning Rhododendron bush in the cave to view the painting of a mother holding the child is like Madonna image a symbol of peace and harmony. The problem of Sri Lanka involve not just the question of human rights but also the state sovereignty.

*Anil’s Ghost* is a postmodern political novel. Within a short span after its publications it won many awards. The Governor General’s Award, the Prix Medices for foreign literature, the Kiriya Pacific Rim book prize and the prestigious Giller prize. The novel has won

great acclaim in the west but was received differently in the east. “Anil’s ghost is both praised and condemned in the west” (Kanaganayagam 8). The novel presents all the true and authentic incidents with evidence. This novel is a testimony of Ondaatje as a great writer of international acclaim.