

**NARRATIVE LINEAGE AND THE FRAGMENTED SELF IN MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S *RUNNING IN THE FAMILY*****Ms.K.Rajalakshmi****Assistant Professor (SS) –English**

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Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family* is an analysis of how story, myth, and memory shape individual and family identities. In fact, it offers a nuanced understanding of how cultural identities are mediated in a globalised setting and how self-discovery is pursued. Identity fragmentation is a significant problem in the drastically changing lifestyle of today. This paper examines how Ondaatje uses a creative but very emotional narrative framework to restore a broken identity by reinterpreting family history. The current understanding is limited so it investigates the reliability of memory and the uncertainty of origin using postmodern strategies including fragmentation, hybridity, nonlinear chronology and intertextuality. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how Ondaatje's story lineage goes beyond traditional family history. It also actively reshapes identity, transforming rupture into a dynamic, imaginative space for self-creation. Therefore, it tries to shed light on self-fragmentation and clarifies the idea of narrative identity.

**Keywords: fragmentation, identity, lineage, self****Introduction**

*Running in the Family* is remembering memories of Ondaatje's acquaintances and extended relatives. It is a rare example of a work that resists generic description as it simultaneously spans many genres. The narrative lineage is dynamic, unfinished, and sometimes wonderfully overstated unlike official histories, which often aim for factual accuracy and consecutive uniformity. This study clearly shows that family history is maintained through written records and robust oral traditions in many civilisations, especially in Sri Lanka's multicultural and hybrid culture. As a result, it is understood that these stories represent emotional realities as opposed to objective ones.

The focus on oral storytelling is a noteworthy aspect of *Running in the Family*. During his trips to Sri Lanka, Ondaatje speaks with family members, friends and acquaintances about many of the stories he recounts. Ondaatje's return to Sri Lanka represents a renewed engagement with the country as well as a reunion with relatives. The actual landscape has a great deal of metaphorical meaning. A lively storehouse of history, Sri Lanka's lush, tropical scenery is distinguished by its fragrant gardens, moderate monsoons, crumbling colonial homes and bustling city streets. The study contributes to a richer understanding that the evidence converges to suggest that the author's identity reconstruction is shaped by the intense emotions evoked by the environment's sensory complexity.

The main tool used in the study is fragmented identity, where the concept of split identities is quite relevant. After World War II, humanity was involved in a deep search for its identity. In particular, the postmodern era is well encapsulated in Michael Ondaatje's artwork. The narrative structure highlights that the idea of fragmentation is discussed and postmodernism's ideology is quite similar to modernism. On the other hand, a demarcation occurs when there is fragmentation. Accordingly, fragmentation is both lamented and regretted in modernism. In this case, the protagonists' quest for a sense of fulfilment is aided by the structures' disintegration. According to postmodernism, identity is a mixture made up of several situations and purposes rather than a set concept or a single person. *Running in the Family's* non-linear and broken narrative style is one of its most noteworthy features. Subsequently, it is important to note that instead of using a conventional chronological format, Ondaatje uses a surreal, associative approach to weave together vignettes, tales, and experiences.

According to Barbour in *Diasporic Identities* (2016) "The book's structure mirrors the fragmentary nature of memory and the fluidity of identity, resisting neat linearity in favour of a more organic, impressionistic approach." (116). The story of Michael Ondaatje mostly describes the lives of his father and grandmother, with elements of magic and reality in addition to fictionalised elements. Thereby, Ondaatje mostly explores his growth outside of Sri Lanka and his experiences upon returning to Ceylon, the other name for his home island, in the 1970s using his unique postmodern methodology. Although Ondaatje concentrates on himself in *Running in the Family*, he also describes his father, Mervyn, who enjoyed drinking but sometimes found himself in combative situations. In order to get a better knowledge of his identity, rooted in his background, Ondaatje explores a number of topics in the novel by fusing his fictional portrayals of himself and his family with family history.

The article delves deeply into the issues of identity and emptiness, the value and importance of memory and the crucial function of family. Michael Ondaatje explores the conflict between myth and history in detail. Moreover, his forebears enthusiastically tell stories that are diversely humorous, shocking, moving and utterly unorthodox. Their stories are full of bold adventures, colourful imagery, drunken shenanigans, lavish get-togethers and strange behaviours that give life to the family's past. A close reading of work reveals that the author negotiates a labyrinth of uncertainties since these tales are contradictory at the same time. Poignantly, this exchange suggests that identity is created by negotiation rather than certainty. In addition to narrative inconsistencies, the processes of hearing, remembering and retelling that modify them also contribute to the fractured ego. It is interesting to note that Ondaatje's attempts to create a genealogical pedigree are unsuccessful since it has irreversible gaps. The present study seeks to address narrative ancestry as is a metaphor for identity formation, which is defined as a continuous process of revision rather than a definitive start.

One of the most interesting aspects of the plot is its fractured, collage-like method. The author highlights narrative disparages sequential development and instead moves chaotically over time and place. Moreover, it also shifts from personal replications to magical accompaniments, from lyrical poetry to humorous tales, and from childhood memories to historical documents. The work reflects inherited identity is reflected in this purposefully fragmented shape. It is evident that the story unceasingly shifts between the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, which are obviously by colonial power and personal conflict. Therefore, these changes in time highlight how memory is innate and often turbulent. In fact, the writing captures the essence of human memory by avoiding the constraints of a linear, painstakingly structured form. The idea that the past cannot be accurately reproduced is emphasised by this approach. Therefore, it is revealed that every memory has subjectivity and every story is influenced by feelings, points of view, and time.

Uncertainty concerning Michael Ondaatje's uniqueness is caused by his lack of knowledge about his family history and the country he left behind. It suggests that a person finds it difficult to understand who they are without the context of their family's past. Also, it provides

actionable perceptions that Ondaatje had a nightmare about Mervyn being surrounded by malicious dogs when he was at a friend's house in Canada. When Ondaatje awakens, he confesses that he does not know who his father really is or what the dream means. Moreover, Ondaatje acknowledges his extreme ignorance of his family history as a result of this discovery. Indeed, his sense of uncertainty, which resulted from his lack of connection with his family, suggests that a person's identity is closely connected to the family background. As well, he claims that his family history, predominantly the absence of his father, has a significant but understated impact on his adult life. Thus, it is important that his history is decisive to empathetic oneself.

According to Michael Ondaatje's viewpoint, he is a member of a vast family legacy, raised by the efforts of his forebears, just as he elevates his children. A closer examination reveals that an individual's identification and recognition of their familial and cultural history affects their identity. Moreover, it also influenced by the past and positioned to influence the future of their lineage, as shown by the sense of belonging to a larger group. Predominantly, Ondaatje often emphasises how shaky such family narratives are, shaped as much by memory as by imagination. More generally, his father, Mervyn Ondaatje, told stories that are almost legendary in their use of magic. A combination of empathetic comedy and sad ambiguity is used to portray his drunken antics, train-interrupting adventures, and unbelievable occurrences. Notably, through these stories, Mervyn is transformed from a historical figure into a symbolic being a shattered, elusive presence that the author attempts to understand but is never able to completely grasp.

#### **Fragmented Self and the Search for Personal Identity**

Through a narrative lineage that is both deeply intimate and creatively inventive, Michael Ondaatje painstakingly and even obsessively reconstructs his family history. Besides, although being presented as a memoir, the work purposefully blurs the lines between creative reconstruction and factual reality. Moreover, it produces a deeply complex portrait of his ancestors that is both historically relevant and emotionally poignant. Ondaatje makes significant use of shattered memories, family stories, colonial documents and well-preserved oral traditions. Further, he reconstitutes an identity that has been scattered through time, migration and cultural dislocation. In addition, he fills in the emotional gaps left by years of being away from his homeland by using a range of lyrical descriptions, striking imagery, and sensory-rich recollections.

Inherently, the narrative lineage appears as a dynamic, constantly evolving story where truth, myth and memory are tightly intertwined rather than as a static genealogical record. Ondaatje stresses that family history cannot be meticulously reproduced as it deliberately admits the limitations of memory and the misrepresentations brought on by reminiscence. Through the stories that are passed down through the centuries, it is creatively crafted, thoughtfully understood and lovingly re-envisioned. Michael Ondaatje's journey to Sri Lanka enables him to re-establish a connection with his family's origins and the complex cultural and colonial history that shaped them. Furthermore, he is able to painstakingly recreate the historical and emotional context of his heritage through his interactions with relatives, local narrators, and artefacts of colonial society. Empirically, he discusses the conflicting, exaggerated and often endearingly disorganised stories that characterise Sri Lankan family life at these gatherings. Further, it illustrates how both individual and collective memories are regularly created, rearranged and even idealised over time. In actuality, the story's polyphonic structure which combines a variety of voices with literary reflections and archival material highlights the dynamic, surprising and complex nature of family history.

Michael Ondaatje embraces the past's imperfections, omissions, and aesthetic fragmentation rather than striving for a single authoritative narrative. As an act of emotional reclamation, the plot's reconstruction of family history allows Ondaatje to reconcile a fractured identity while acknowledging that the past is always open, often repeated, and very lively via narrative retellings. Similarly, he demonstrates that ancestry is not only inherited through this intricate blending of memory, imagination and historical importance; rather, it is continually recreated, continuously negotiated and profoundly impacted by the stories we decide to remember and tell.

Metaphorically, Mervyn's mythologization serves a number of purposes. First, he clarifies how families get meaning from chaos. Because of Mervyn's erratic, turbulent and sometimes sad life, his family often uses exaggerated, humorous, or metaphorical language while narrating his experiences. These stories serve as coping mechanisms, turning pain into entertainment. But they also hide the real person who created the mythology. Michael Ondaatje therefore moves between the domains of audible words, memories, and unspoken realities. There is still considerable uncertainty around his father's identity and, thus, his own ancestry. The author's fragmented self-perception is strengthened by this opacity. Ondaatje's mother, Doris, is shown through stories that emphasise her intelligence, strength and emotional depth in contrast to the affected, impetuous Mervyn.

In fact, Doris's steady presence provides a different narrative lineage that is calmer, more controlled and more articulate. Furthermore, her memories are yet tinged with personal interpretation. Paradoxically, the author's self-perception is highlighted by the contrast of these two-family lines. Conflicting sensibilities wild nature and self-control, chaos and order, legend and memory combine to form his personality. It is evident that Ondaatje struggles with his dual identities as a local and a foreigner. A closer examination reveals that he has a connection with Sri Lanka since he lived there, but he also feels alienated because of his colonial background and global experiences: "(we) own the country we grow up in, or we are aliens and invaders". (81) Ondaatje looks into it and discovers his father's identity as well as his own.

The narrative demonstrates that Michael Ondaatje is a prime example of a hybrid identity that combines Western and Sri Lankan components. The analysis foregrounds that his fragmented narrative style, which blends Western postmodern experimentation with Eastern oral storytelling, is a clear example of this hybridity. Therefore, rather than having a single origin, his identity arises from cultural crosses.

#### **The Emotional Dimension of Fragmentation**

*Running in the Family* has a strong emotional impact in addition to its intricate historical and structural details. The desire for understanding, connection, and resolution is what drives the trip back to Sri Lanka. The author admits that there is no way to find closure. One may understand Michael Ondaatje's reappearance to home as a metaphorical return to one's origins. The beginnings he seeks, however, are unreachable, strewn amid stories and memories that cannot be fully recreated. In detail, this knowledge is both liberating and painful. Therefore, his fractured self is an admission of identity's complexity rather than a lack of it. As a result, the piece essentially examines a profound sense of loss: the loss of one's upbringing, country, parents and confidence.

It is pertinent to highlight that the tale acknowledges that neither science nor narrative can fully bring back the past. Michael Ondaatje turns loss into creativity by embracing this incompleteness. Instead of being a basic emptiness, fragmentation becomes a space of creative reassembly. This study's central thesis is that fragmentation is beneficial rather than harmful. Such an interpretation underscores that Ondaatje constructs a new identity through his experimental narrative, one that embraces multiplicity and fluidity while acknowledging the impossibility of a singular truth. Ondaatje actively contributes to the creation of his identity by the gathering, interpreting, and incorporating of stories into a work of literature. Accordingly, he changes from being a passive recipient of family history to a creative storyteller who transforms those tales into works of art.

One notable feature of *Running in the Family* is its emphasis on oral storytelling. Ondaatje shares many of the anecdotes he tells with friends, family, and acquaintances when travelling to Sri Lanka. Ondaatje's return to Sri Lanka signifies both a reunion with family and

a renewed interest in the nation. There is a lot of symbolic meaning in the physical environment. A vibrant repository of history, Sri Lanka's lush, tropical landscape is characterised by its busy city streets, aromatic gardens, mild monsoons, and dilapidated colonial houses. The research adds to a deeper comprehension of how the data points to the author's identity reconstruction being influenced by the strong feelings sparked by the sensory complexity of the surroundings.

In his autobiographical work, Michael Ondaatje reveals the true picture by emphasising both the individual life and the larger family environment. Equally important, he makes an effort to reconstruct his past in order to give his life significance, entwining it with his family and incorporating them into his tale. Identity becomes an ongoing narrative attempt in this setting. Ondaatje recognises that identity is always changing rather than seeking definitive answers about his mother, father, or upbringing. Therefore, the shattered self is only responsive, able to evolve, reinterpret, and reinvent itself; it is not lacking.

Michael Ondaatje is well aware of his conflicted feelings about his Burgher ancestry, the family's colonial background, and his outsider status in Sri Lanka. The narrative voice, which continuously acknowledges his invented ethnicity and an intrinsically problematic sense of diasporic identity, typified by the concepts of the prodigal and the alien, strongly reflects his awareness of his complicated and hazardous predicament. To put it another way, the story challenges preconceived notions about prodigality and highlights a variety of perspectives. In addition, the narrator's story is complicated by the ongoing conflict between his prodigal status and his identification as a foreigner. Here, it undermines both his native or diasporic identity and conventional ideas about the returnee's ties to his birthplace.

### Conclusion

It is important to recognize that Michael Ondaatje offers a much nuanced viewpoint on how narrative history, memory and creativity impact identity. The plot illustrates that identity cannot be seen as a stable, coherent entity by accepting structural, emotional, and historical fragmentation. Instead, it results from the interplay of several voices, contradicting stories, different perspectives, and fragmented recollections. Specifically, Ondaatje lacks a clear identity and unique origins due to his storytelling ancestry. Rather, it offers him something more dynamic: a mosaic-like identity that is created through imaginative reconstruction. Admittedly, the shattered ego is not a weakness but a powerful artistic and emotional reality, as shown by Ondaatje's inventive blending of genres, lyrical language, and postmodern narrative techniques. It is worth emphasizing that the storyline rethinks family history as a dynamic, changing tale that shapes identity by promoting interpretation and providing assurance. As a result, Ondaatje transforms discontinuity into possibility, creating a self that is enlightened by the narrative process rather than defined by loss.

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