Conclusion

The introduction to this thesis had endeavoured to indicate that the aim of this study was to understand through a close examination of the works of the exilic writers Shobasakthi, Michael Ondaatje, Khaled Hosseini and Atiq Rahimi the nature of the portraiture of the conflicts in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan. The wide framework of comparison has facilitated a contrapuntal analysis of their perceptions and representations of the armed conflict, which display overt differences yet inherent similarities, making possible therefore to draw specific conclusions within and across these conflict domains. The present study has found that the portrayal of armed conflicts intersects complexly with the exilic situation of the writer. It further finds that the exilic position in turn influences the writer’s specific stance and outlook on the war. The study also observes that the personal-political ideology of the writers and their relationship, with their source nations, their causes for exile from there-in and their socio-cultural, position in their host land informs their perceptions of the armed conflicts. While these are wide-ranging observations, the thesis also notes intrinsic differences and similarities.

The microscopic view of the tortured body of the insurgent subject, the unrelenting darkness of prisons, detention camps of the state and the militant groups on the one hand and the remorseless coldness of xenophobiaic host land on the other, in Gorilla and Traitor is made possible because and by the composite casting out of Shobasakthi. Being the refugee-ex-child soldier-island Tamil of Sri Lanka he exposes the parochial state and its inequitable practices from unscrupulous Acts like the Prevention of Terrorism Act to state sponsored massacres of Tamil prisoners in government prisons. Within the same canvas Shobasakthi scalds and deflates Tamil ideologues, the megalomania of militant groups and challenges univocal Tamil identity posited in Tamil discourses as the innocent victim of a persecuting Sinhala majority. In his implacable portraiture of the ruthlessness of war, zones of mercy and innocence do not exist, for how does one differentiate between a pedophile-rapist-yet-victimised Tamil insurgent and the marauding rapist Sri Lankan army. Shobasakthi’s marginal location in his host country, France also influences this position. Commenting on why he chose France he states “I did not choose France as my country. I came here only because I was able to get a false French passport. I am still a political refugee in France.”(in the DNA, interview, 14th May 2010). Unlike the other writers a return to Sri Lanka is an impossibility because (as he says) of “the totalitarian government run by the Mahinda
Rajapakse clan”. If exile therefore allows the undermining of ideologies, it is also important to note that it is former ideological beliefs that cause exile.

Michael Ondaatje has “returned” to Sri Lanka after many years of self-exile, moving from *Running in the Family* a memoir about his family to *Anil’s Ghost*, a memorial for the many unnamed dead of the Sri Lankan wars. A. Burgher, a Canadian citizen, anthologised today with seminal Canadian writers and seen in many Literary Companions as a Canadian writer, like yet unlike Shobasakthi, he too is “cast out” of Sri Lanka( albeit differently) and is the outsider trying to get a foothold into a nation he long expatriated himself from. Like Jean Arasanayagam and other Burgher writers Ondaatje is a minority in Sri Lanka and the Burghers were negligible in the Tamil- Sinhala fray, much like the Parsis during the Partition of India. This “long distant gaze” presents a macroscopic vision of the conflict, wherein Ondaatje enters the fields of the conflict through art, archaeology and forensic anthropological sciences. Telescoping the conflict as a transnational subject leads to disappearance of names, identities, bodies and archaeological surround. However this unseen becomes a chilling fearful presence in *Anil’s Ghost* for “all sides killed” the State, insurgents and terrorists. Unlike most mainstream Sinhala writings that have categorically seen the Sinhalese as guiltless, Ondaatje’s distanced outsider’s gaze allows a perception of the stentorian states violation of human rights and is critical of its homogenising policies. Writing from a pluralistic Canadian mosaic cultural space, Ondaatje argues for a similar heterogeneous national policy, however the teetering fretfulness of the Diaspora to ambivalently dislocate and yet seek roots, privileges a Buddhist religious space in the artistic closure to the novel.

Like Shobasakthi, Hosseini and Rahimi exiled themselves from Afghanistan because of the conflict. However the harried rough passage of Shobasakthi’s flight from Sri Lanka is replaced by a smoother migration in the case of the Afghan writers. Hosseini and Rahimi’s assimilation into their host culture significantly informs their perception of the conflict. It is important to remember Hosseini’s privileged space in America when one reads his account of the armed conflict in *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*. This was before his global tours, his book-signing events and the paraphernalia which came with the kind of heady success *The Kite Runner* and later *A Thousand Splendid Suns* brought him in the United States. Many Afghan scholars, on the other hand, as noted in chapter three have been critical of Hosseini’s portraiture of Afghanistan. Hosseini, like Ondaatje is an outsider to the war- yet
claims the position of the Afghan-insider to an American readership and hence is unable to maintain his “long distance gaze” of the armed conflicts especially his silencing of the role of America’s Cold War ideology in Afghanistan, which armed the armed conflict in Afghanistan. Like many other writers, Hosseini confesses to the survivor’s guilt, (which the thesis had called “Diasporic guilt” in chapter three), which led him to write the novels. This re-presentation of Afghanistan in the two novels is, no doubt as much a sincere effort as his help for Afghan refugees and his other NGO projects. However in attempting to dismantle the terrorist narrative within which the West, more specifically America has located Afghanistan, and uncover Afghanistan to the stereotyping Western gaze, which is what Hosseini sets out to do, Hosseini enables not so much Afghanistan but America. If Ondaatje’s exilic space leads to a certain kind of problematic closure- where Buddhism is the site of the conflict and the reconciliation, Hosseini’s assimilation into a host culture leads to certain stereotypical closures and suggestions. As a result we have the pillaging Soviets, the Afghan terrorist-patriarch, the hapless ethnic minority, and Uncle Sam the saviour in the two novels. However with due credit to him, in his *And the Mountains Echoed* Hosseini moves away from these black and white modules, and traverses across borders, boundaries and binaries Privileging the many victims of power struggles like war, Atiq Rahimi like Ondaatje blurs to some extent the many factions of the war and thus sees all warring groups as guilty of war, dust and ashes. Rahimi also a privileged resident in France, a well known film maker as well is however able to problematise the different cultural and social structures that legitimise war. Neither Rahimi nor Hosseini nor for that matter Shobasakthi claim like Ondaatje that “the reason for war is war”. Ondaatje’s rather universalising statement might help one imagine the Sri Lankan war amidst other wars alluded to in *Anil’s Ghost*, but one finds that Ondaatje’s outsider status is unable to perceive the particularity, the intersecting pluralities that have led to the armed conflict in Sri Lanka. Conversely Hosseini, Rahimi and more so Shobasakthi are able to situate the different indigenous locations of conflicts in their works. Nevertheless Rahimi’s neutral position like Ondaatje allows the foregrounding of the human against the cataclysmic rampage of war. Though this is also the focus of Hosseini’s novels, Rahimi’s war victims are not abject sufferers but debate the ethics of tribal honour and codes that facilitate war and champion the warring. They are also resistant subjects who refuse to remain trophies of war allowing the war to either erase their identity to become “Sailors” or fracture their selves to become Nesakumarans or “Gorillas”.
Edward Said says that exile has its “pleasures” as it allows a certain perception. The thesis notes and adds that if exile has its “pleasures” it also comes with a privilege- the licence to tell. In the texts researched, from the languages used to narrate, to the stories narrated, this is a dispensation that can happen only after dislocation. The contemporary natures of these conflicts require this spatial shift since the temporal and ideological are too immediate. Shobasakthi says, “To live in Sri Lanka and write is, until this day, a life-threatening activity. …My living in Paris allows me to write freely.” He is also quick to add the loss and lack in his Parisian life,

In fact, those I wish to write about – their sorrows, the injustices that they have endured, their desires – I am forced to live ten thousand kilometres away from them in Paris, a factor that effectively blunts my writing. Rather than being in Paris, I wish I could live in Sri Lanka. (Interview with Warscape Jan, 2012)

Shobasakthi well known in Indian Tamil literary circles and a significant figure amongst the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora is unheard of in Sri Lanka. Several mainstream and alternate Sri Lankan anthologies and critical writings from Sri Lanka which the researcher perused have no knowledge of his writings. Gayatri Chakraborthy Spivak in her speech has emphasised the necessity to consider the opponent even if it is a suicide bomber as a human being and attempt to understand the significance of his/her act. Shobasakthi’s works achieve this and further show the dehumanising effects of the violation of human rights. Published when the Civil War was an ongoing reality with the LTTE at the heights of its rampage, Shobasakthi’s writings, could have been possible only in exile.

Like Salman Rushdie’s Satanic Verses, Rahimi’s The Patience Stone addresses spaces and narrates a resistance that cannot be restrained in exile. This was earlier noted in chapter four and Rahimi’s choice of language supplements this observation. In a similar vein the film version of Hosseini’s The Kite Runner met with many challenges and attacks in Afghanistan- especially the scene portraying the rape of the Hazara boy by the Pashtun Assef. Speaking about inter-ethnic strife and the intersection of gender in armed conflict, silencing totalitarian states and theocratic regimes occurs outside such structures. Voicing the curbs and limitations becomes a medium of resistance and protest something these resisters would see as implausible within such structures.

This liberty to speak in exile leads to a recovery of untold tales of the traumatised subalterns. The research finds of paramount significance in times of confrontations, whether
the Sri Lankan strife or the Afghan discords, are particular identities be it a gendered, linguistic or ethnic identities or a conflation of all three. In this milieu minority identities – whether Tamils, Hazaras or women are threatened and the body of the marginal becomes an important site on which the hegemony wages its war to establish hierarchical binaries. As highlighted in earlier chapters these varied subaltern voices through genres like Historiographic Metafiction, Testimonio and Autofiction, challenge the centrality and univocality of dominant discourses. As postmodern narratives, some of these texts evaluate the validity of Grand narratives, challenging every authoritarian and canonised forms of knowledge, by recovering ordeals in times of conflict from different memory sites – personal, collective and cultural.

The complex comparative framework this research has attempted in choosing heterogeneous writers from the two locations of conflict is a unique endeavour. Further this comparison of the portraiture of armed conflicts from two varied spaces and drawing out their inherent differences and similarities is a radically new venture. Using the wide canvas of wars the research has located amidst these disparate areas the common trajectory of trauma and exile as sites of narration and fall-outs of conflicts. The comparative framework in addition universalises pain, anguish and suffering while simultaneously narrowing down particular socio-cultural milieus in postcolonial states. This venture into a comparative conflict study, done through the close-study of literary texts, has concurrently brought together global concerns like war, torture, human rights violation and indigenous, local locales of such carnages and has situated them at the intersection of trauma, exile and postcolonial studies.

Since 2000, many scholars like Kay Schaffer, Sidonie Smith, Sophia McClennen, Joseph Slaughter, Pramod Nayar and others have worked on different testimonial writings like Afro-American slave narratives, Dalit writings, Native American and Latin American writings to see how they work as critiques of policy, the state and the law. This research situates itself within such a tradition and argues for a similar approach to writings on armed conflict, in order to address violations there-in, whoever the victim is. Pramod Nayar comments in his Introduction to his book Writing Wrongs, “Court rulings, state policies and commissions of inquiry might produce definitions and norms about who counts as human and therefore has human rights.” He goes on to add how the “cultural apparatus” of newspaper coverage, documentation of violations, and narratives of and in civil society” can create a more “popular” and the research adds immediate image of the “human” (9). Sophia
McClennen and Joseph Slaughter argue that human rights are as much a cultural discourse as a set of legal standards (3). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak suggests the necessity of our times— the need of “imagining the other” ("Terror", 90). This thesis’ significance lies in its recovering and engaging with the violation of human rights be it actants-guerrilla insurgents or victims during armed conflict, within the field of humanities research.

This research suggests that in order to access armed conflicts and the human stories therein of different abuses, loss of rights, human dignity and torture, it is necessary to examine such literary historiographies that represent the event. These narratives build up into a chorus of voices that testify to such violence, make us bear witness to not just an unjust world but demand us to respond to injustice, inequality and human suffering. Hence this research would like to suggest the possibility of developing a critical discourse wherein, literary historiographies that reveal the intersection of politics, the human and the humanities, could be read as potent vehicles for advancing human rights claims. These accounts of loss, anguish and bloodshed are warnings to civil societies to act on its complacency to arbitrary carnage, persecution, the state’s use of the medium of torture and the absence of human rights. These representations take these violations of human rights out of the legal, official and the judicial into the public cultural realm. The significance of this research lies in its attempt to build lines of contact between humanities research and human rights violation in contemporary armed conflict. This research suggests that such writings are a form of socially relevant critical engagement which requires members of civil society and the public sphere to speak, debate, negotiate and to act on these atrocities and violations. It suggests that Humanities with its focus on the human gives subjectivity and subject to the abstract legal-judicial discourse of human rights. Even as awareness of human rights violation is made possible through such literary, cultural texts, different theoretical approaches enable recovery of such violations together with problematising the dominator’s discourse.

Through this intersection of humanities and human rights, this thesis argues that research in these texts like other cultural texts, whether literary or media texts can make public private grief and enfold and engulf us in the memory drawing us into a public mourning and a reliving. These texts warn us through their representations, against such loss of human rights. If a literary space provides an unregimented terrain to testify to suffering hence resist and reclaim, it draws the researcher to imagine the denial of basic human rights in a so called cosmopolitan world. Such inventories of fundamental denials awaken a global consciousness. Literary texts may not be seen as proof in a court of justice but society’s
moral imagination can no longer be apolitical. These narratives call out to institutions, communities and individuals to react to the annals, to be aware of the humanity of the teller, to take accountability for that awareness and to find means of rectification. Research on these fictional texts become indispensable to affect a remedy, marshal action and fashion communities of awareness which will bring forth social change. As individual stories that signify a collective, the collective story gains cultural salience and reverberation. Thus the politics of art awakens the poetics of society – to engage, empathise and to act.

Though Elizabeth Goldberg speaks about a “universal discourse of human rights”, “eliding crucial differences” in such studies, this research argues otherwise (4). While there can be no doubt about the universal need for human rights, in spaces of violations like these contemporary armed conflicts one cannot homogenise oppression. As earlier stated these conflicts themselves emerge from socio-historical contexts. Hence addressing basic denial of rights requires addressing the pluralistic space of the oppression. In global politics today with its pertinent issues like global terror, national security and the mainstreaming of the margins, this research’s significance lies in locating this investigation at the meeting point between the aesthetics of art and the ethics of human rights. Through such intersections, the research observes that the portrayal of armed conflict creates a deeper, worldwide consciousness about persecution, ethnic cleansing and other such desecrations that at once corroborates victims and survivors’ experience and generates a shared craving to make sure that such atrocities do not persist.

Conflicts have become an ongoing reality of our everyday, whichever part of the world we live in. An interesting and significant follow up to this research would be to turn the focus from a global terrain to multiple armed conflicts within India and attempt a comparative research between these writers from within India who write about armed conflicts and locate contemporary Indian exile writers who narrate the same. One is forced to admit that achieving objectivity while perceiving the different angles and perceptions of ethnic and civil strife without India was not a very exacting or testing assignment. However perceiving the state, the armed forces, the victims and the insurgents’ view points within India with a similar objectivity would be a challenging and demanding implementation.

Studying the exilic perspective has refined the researcher’s subjective perception to now view “dialectically” and “contrapuntally” these conflict zones within the researcher’s homeland and nation. Such research would also need to address the multimodal methods of
narrating these different conflicts. A comparative study of writings from the North East, or Kashmir to name a few would enhance this field of research. Poems of Manipuri writers like Robin Ngangom, Binlakshmi Nepram which are critical of AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act), the memoir of Rahul Pandita a Kashmiri Pandit who narrates genocidal practices of the Islamic insurgents of Kashmir would be an imperative and significant angle to the study. Exilic writings like Jhumpa Lahiri’s recent work *The Lowland* and M.J.Vassanji’s *The Assassin’s Song* which are fictionalisations of the Naxalbari and the Gujarat riots, would form exciting and enterprising point counterpoints of comparison. Humanising the Kashmiri insurgent subject, seeing the “terrorism” of AFSPA or state sponsored violence within the supposedly secular democratic state of India would require another kind of “witnessing” for the researcher.

The Oriya poet Jagannath Prasad Das, using Adorno as a springboard, asks in his poem “After Gujarat” whether there can be poetry after Gujarat, Babri Masjid. He goes on to answer that poetry in particular and literature in general cannot be contained by fatwas, bans and censorships. It will survive the blue pencil, the book burnings and theocratic states, re-emerging triumphant. To this we can add that literature survives even endless armed conflicts because it narrates the human and reasserts the need to be humane. Literature in its myriad forms, like the works of Shobasakthi, Ondaatje, Hosseini, and Rahimi brings the human into the dehumanising site of terror and armed violence and makes us hear amidst the clamour of arms and ammunitions the whimper, the cry and even the silence. The function of all great literature, wrote Yeats, is “Forgiveness of Sin” (qtd in “Two Case Histories” Gould, 76). Though it is of “arms and the man”, literature “sings” (Virgil’s *Aeneid*); the literary text yet goes beyond the context of war, arming the unarmed moving from war, harm and horror to counter-imagine, healing, reconciliation and the restoration of human dignity.