Chapter VI

Ethnic Identity and Politics: Unearthing the Truth in Anil's Ghost
"Onnay je kore aar onnay je shohe tobo ghrina jeno taare trino shomodohe."

"Those who commit injustice and those who forbear it, Let them blaze like hay in the fire of your indignation."

Rabindranath Tagore
Nyayadanda (Mace of Justice), 1901

Sri Lanka, a tropical island of natural resources, enchanting landscapes and ancient civilizations, is situated in the Indian Ocean and off the southern coast of India. It is endowed with diverse natural resources like mica, dolomite and marble, peat and pearl in consort with enchanting lakes, variegated religious sites, and rare bodies of water locked deep with rich coral, flora and fauna. Besides these resources, the island also is a habitat to piebald birds such as bulbul, the Indian blue chat and the blue magpie. It embraces ‘the pied ground thrush with its fading hoot, the tea, the shoveller, ‘false vampire’, pintail snipes, Indian courser, pale barriers in the clouds, having different reptiles and two basic monsoon systems like the Serbalian High and Mascarene High’ (Ondaatje 36). Despite these legenry esquisites, exhuming the skin of the island patently leads us to get indefinite skulls and bones of the countless innocent victims who were massacred in the Civil War (1983-2009) of the island.

In the crime fiction Anil’s Ghost, Michael Ondaatje, without any virility and prejudice, profoundly recreates the forgotten and subdued long past history of Sri Lankan Civil War. The mind-numbing violence took innumerable lives of common and lowly people. “The novel, a product of the consciousness of great historical convulsions of the author’s nation, is an ethnic narrative that historicizes the macabre ravages of civil war in Sri Lanka and the organized campaign of genocide engulfing the island” (Balachandran 49-50). In the novel Anil’s Ghost, Ondaatje re-creates true situations, events and organizations, while the characters are nothing but fictitious. The island runs through tumultuous ethnic riots and sectarian strives which take place in manifold times, resulting in the loss of many innocent lives over the last few decade. As a concerned postcolonial writer, Ondaatje does condemn such colossal mass killings and huge proportion of injustices. He wants every submissive Sri Lankan to be aware of the complete picture of inequalities as well as insists them to take part in the struggle in order to bring justice to the countless acquitted victims. In the novel, Ondaatje tries to uncover the politics of hate and terror through the
suffering of each and every character who struggles to unbury the lost identities of their family. Ondaatje, being unsure of how to write a story about the Civil War in Sri Lanka, “decided to write from the point of view of people who are not involved in the politics, not involved actively in the war” (Dave 2006). In Anil’s Ghost, Ondaatje “wanted to write about what had happened in Sri Lanka” (Doshi 2007). Ondaatje says that “If you are writing a novel, you can only give yourself one slice of the issue. And the fiction writer has to find his own form or pattern for the story. So that book is my pattern for an earlier time” (McCann 2008).

For its rich natural resources, the island was invaded, boasted and ruled by a succession of different European nations and ancient rulers of India. Sri Lanka, one of the well-known culturally diverse countries in the world, persistently travelled and experienced internal conflict since the pre-colonial period. So, homicide of common people is not a new thing to be discussed. In 10th century, on one occasion, some monks fled from the court of Udaya III, king of Anuradhapura, in order to escape the wrath of the king and took refuge in the Grove of Asetics but they were not spared rather followed by king’s forces and, their heads were cut off by the king himself. As a reaction to this, public became furious and rebellious, “like the ocean stirred by a storm. You see, the king had violated a sanctuary. There were huge protests all over the kingdom, all because of some kinds. All because of a couple of heads…” (Ondaatje 83). Another encounter came from earlier history, the Chola King Ellare, a South Indian Tamil, who invaded Anuradhapura, present day capital of North Central Province of Sri Lanka and became sole ruler of the Kingdom of Rajarata from 205 BC to 161 BC by defeating the king Asela, but his rule didn’t last long and collapsed in the hand of a young Sinhala prince Dutugamunu who ruled from 161 BC to 137 BC over there.

Later, European colonizers gave new directions and shapes to the conflict on the basis of ‘divide’ and ‘rule’ policy. Portuguese, Dutch and British colonizers persistently aggravated and prompted the Sinhalese, Moors and Tamil to stratify one from another on the basis of altered language, religion and custom in order to weaken the integrity and unity of the island. Under the British rule, the Tamils had preferential treatment, mostly in social, political and other spheres of life, while the majority Sinhalese were discriminated and dislodged from their right locus. So, Sinhalese became the victim of British favouritism. But, after the independence of Sri Lanka in 1948, the scenario was changed—the Sinhalese became stronger in political,
administrative and social spheres as they were before European invasion, while the Tamil community lost the colonial vigour and vitality. "The most prominent view of the national past in modern Sri Lanka is that held by the majority Sinhala population, who have exercised ever tighter control over national government since Independence" (Spencer 3). After recuperating the lost social positions in 1948, "The fear of ethnic domination and suppression [plays a role] of a motivating force [for the Sinhalese] for the acquisition of power as an end. And power is also sought for the confirmation of ethnic status" (Holowitz 187). For status, the Tamils, the victims of the Sinhalese nationalism, were locked in a deep poverty for generations by Sinhala-dominated government.

The main language of the Sinhala people is Sinhalese, an Indo-Aryan language, derivated from Pali language which has its existence in the Buddhist scriptures, whereas the Tamil language has Dravidian origin. In the 1956 general election, Solomon Bandaranaike (1899-1959) became the Prime Minister of the Sinhala-dominated government. "Within months of its election two things had happened: legislation was passed making Sinhala the sole official language; and communal rioting broke out between Sinhala and Tamil in the east of the country" (Spencer 2). He declared Sinhalese as an official language in 'Sinhala Only Act' (1956) which finally replaced English as the official language of Sri Lanka, while the Tamil failed to get recognition. He was impugned for stimulating such Sinhalese nationalism. The supporters of the minority Tamil viewed it as a kind of oppressive attempt to show dominance by a linguistic majority (Sinhalese) called linguistic nationalism. "Specifically, we show that two different measures of ethnic division—polarization and fractionalization—jointly influence [ethnic] conflict... (Joan Esteban et al. 858). The minority Tamils always experience an eclectic range of discernment and are always pushed in the low status of a society. They are thought to be inadequate to get a better social structure and status such as power and honour.

Many studies have focused on the so-called hegemony of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism, generally depicting the Sinhala majority as a monolithic aggressor and the Tamil minority as a monolithic victim. Others have examined post-independence language, employment, and land settlement policies and concluded that they gave rise to legitimate Tamil grievances, ethnic conflict, and the demand for a separate Tamil state. (Bandarage 3)
The Sinhala-dominated government’s biased policies and rules forced the Tamils to revolt against the government for the sake of equal rights on the island. It is sometimes a miscalculated and a one-sided explanation that the main reason behind the antagonistic feeling of the Tamil Tigers to Sinhala-dominated government is due to its distinctive caste, culture and language but that’s a partially true reason behind the violence. In essence, the Tamils were fighting not to convert the Sinhalese and other ethnic groups to their caste and class, rather fighting for post-independence demands of equality, liberty and fraternity in socio-political and economic spheres.

“Conflicts are seen to emerge in the context of changes in economic and political structures and the unequal distribution of wealth and power between groups at the local, regional and international levels” (Bandarage 8). Another reason behind the ethnic conflict in the island was the conflict of ideas and ideologies within their own ethnic group. To achieve their ultimate goal, the Tamil forces didn’t hesitate to assassinate their own community rebels and moderate Tamil forces who were thought to be against their mission and vision, and were working under clench of the Sinhalese government. On the other hand, the armed forces of Sinhala-dominated government not only slew the anti-government insurgents but also butchered their own community people who were thought to be against the policies of government and helpers of the LTTE and JVG insurgents. “Sri Lankan armed forces have been charged with indiscipline, disappearance, torture and indiscriminate killings of Tamil and Sinhala youth suspected to be members of the Tamil LTTE and the Sinhala JVP insurgent group in the early 1970s and late 1980s to early 1990s” (Bandarage 17).

“There is also evidence of widespread use of terror tactics and human rights violations including rape and torture on the part of the Indian Peace Keeping Force sent in by the government of India to maintain peace in the north and the east of the island between 1987 and 1991 (Bandarage 17). When law makers and policy makers break the law and take the path of violence, it is mandatory to revolt and should be criticized austerely. “Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other international bodies [had protested against them and] issued innumerable reports documenting the disappearances, torture and other human rights violations” (Bandarage 17). The protests of different organizations had never been heard by the government or police. During Civil War period as reports were made biased, one-sided and manipulated by the government and its forces, exact reasons behind the clash and killing of innocents remained unknown. The government never provided
with the exact reports behind the deaths because the government itself was playing the role of executions instead of equalization. "A vainglorious government. Every political opinion supported by its own army" (Ondaatje 23). The international rights commission saw how the domestic conflict takes the shape of international politics and economic conflict. Though it was very tough job for the international humanitarian law to differentiate who was keeping and who was breaking the peace, the Human Rights Commissions criticized Sinhala-dominated government for its counter terrorism and started taking sides of the Tamils to bring justice to them by centering their focuses on the mischief of the Sinhala-dominated government. For such legal voice, "A human rights lawyer was shot and the moved by the armed personal" (Ondaatje 38).

Post-independence discrimination was enforcing the anti-government insurgents to start an open war against the government and its barbaric forces. In mid-1980s three essential groups, the Sinhala-dominated government, the anti-government JVG (Janatha Vimukhti Paramuna) insurgents and the separatist guerrillas LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam), popularly known as Tamil Tigers, engaged in a bloody battlefield of autocracies against each other patented the Sri Lankan Civil War. Ondaatje termed it the "Hundred Years War" (1337-1453) with modern weaponry" (Ondaatje 49). From 1983s onward, a series of conflicts and continual emergency waged to different provinces of the island due to the communal and political attacks of one group on another group. It vented in open air and reached its zenith in the mid-1980s.

The killing in July 1983 of thirteen Sinhalese members of the Sri Lankan army by the Tigers (Tamil guerrillas) was another landmark event. At a mass funeral for the victims in Colombo, some 10,000 mourners began rioting, burning and looting Tamil neighbourhoods and they touched off similar violence throughout the country. At the end of the week, about 100 Tamil people were dead and about 100,000 or 200,000 were homeless. (Scanlan 304)

"The height of the terror was eighty-eight and eighty-nine, but of course it was going on long before that" (Ondaatje 13)" as said earlier. Like Government forces, LTTE forces and JVG insurgents, the nature too had become unruly and harsh in "the end of May, [...] the drought had gone on and on and still there was no monsoon" (Ondaatje
11). The devilish role played by nature like Thomas Hardy's 'Egdon Heath' is thought to be an upshot of multi-ethnic skirmish and clangs in the island. Though, it was mollified little bit in 2009 after successful military campaign by the government, such disbanding conflict is still running and emitted in the name of different communal rights.

The oppressed Tamils had tried to justify their demands by saying that as the north-eastern provinces of the island were dominated by them, they had a legal right to a separate state in order to escape the oppression of the Sinhala-dominated government and its forces. To be brief, they desired power, "not only for the lesser things it can gain, but for the greater things it reflects and prevents. Power in these two latter senses—confirming status and averting threat—usually entails an effort to dominate the environment, to suppress differences, as well as to prevent domination and suppression by others." (Holowitz 187)

In order to overcome torture and trappings of the Sinhalese-dominated government, Tamil tigers did not crouch before the government rather promised to fight till their last breath from the north-eastern province of the island. For their legal, social and political demands, they were coupled with the politics of terror in which innocent Tamil citizens were charged with serious allegations such as terrorism and waging war against the country. Is it a terrorist problem or an ethnic problem when one is demanding its right?

Here, in the island the law was abandoned by everyone, "terror everywhere, from all sides" (Ondaatje 150). The Tamil Tigers, the government forces and JVG insurgents—all were like 'makamkruka' means a churner, an agitator almost devils like Yaksa, demons in Indian mythology. It is said that "...a makamkruka, strangely, guards the sacred spot in a temple ground. No one knows why this kind of person is honoured with such a responsibility" (Ondaatje 161). When such devils like the Tamil Tigers, the government and JVG forces deceitfully tried to be the protectors of a land, everything had to be destroyed and poised sweetly in their hands.

The armed conflict blitzed mostly between the Sinhala-dominated government forces and the secessionist armed forces like the Tamil Tigers who had curved the island into a land of never ending bedlam. However, "The Conflict has reached a stage of "scissors crisis" in which the two main protagonists—the Sinhalese political class in the South, and the LTTE in the North—have crossed each other's paths and are now travelling in two separate directions" (Uyangoda 44). The Tamil Tigers
claimed "to be the 'sole representatives' of all Sri Lankan Tamils and blame[d] the Sinhala (anglicised as Sinhalese)-dominated Sri Lankan government for alleged discrimination and acts of state terrorism again the island's Tamil minority'' (Bandarage 3) after 1948. Tamil Tigers threatened the whole island by spreading suicide bombings and other deadly attacks in many public places and government sites which took countless innocent lives. JVG insurgents, rancorous insurgents of south-eastern province and followers of the Marxist-Leninist ideologies, too revolted against the bias policies of the Sinhala-dominated government for the betterment of the unemployed bachelors and oppressed minorities of the rural areas.

And we are caught in the middle. It was like being in a room with three suitors [government forces, LTTE guerrillas and JVG insurgents], all of whom had blood on their hands. In nearly every house, in nearly every family, there was knowledge of someone's murder or abduction by one side or another. (Ondaatje 150)

The trios disposed the alleged and innocent victims as "The disposal of bodies by fire. The disposal of bodies in rivers or the sea. The hiding and then reburial of corpses" (Ondaatje 39). The countless death bodies were being thrown by the combers into beaches at the Matara coast and at Wellawatta or by St Thomas's College in Mount Lavinia. "The identity of others in this grave in the Eastern Province — how they died. Who they were — was never discovered" (Ondaatje 38). The parents and relatives of the missing person could hardly recognize their fragmented sons, brothers and fathers in the politically motivated war. The death bodies were lifted into the air by helicopter from a house at Gower Street or a house off the Galle Road. They were "flown a couple of miles out to sea and dropped through the fathoms of air. But only few of these ever came back as evidence into the arms of the country" (Ondaatje 208). "Inland the bodies came down the four main rivers — the Mahaveli Ganga, the Kalu Ganga, the Kelani Ganga, the Bentota Ganga" (Ondaatje 209).

For such ruthless killings and bombings, the JVG was banned few times and LTTE was banned as a terrorist organization by India, United Kingdom and the United States of America, and also by the UN organization. The global terrorist organization, termed by these countries, had successfully assassinated two great politicians of the world; Rajiv Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India and Silver..."
President Katugala (a fictional name of R. Premadasa in the novel) who was torn up into pieces like a plate falling on the ground. “The central question after the bombing concerned whether the President had been spirited away, and if so whether by the police or by army forces or by terrorists. Because the President could not be found” (Ondaatje 291). It is said that such the assassination was done by an LTTE suicide bomber. During the period of such inter-ethnic conflicts, once a small village standing for all destroyed villages was being attacked and most of the villagers were killed. The rescue team brought back all the survivors to their hospital. The killing in the village took place in a morning beside the main road to Batticala. Such killings were intentional, not accidental, a close range job. They were left to die. During the clash, nine month old twins were shot at their each palm and each right leg. The doctors tried hard to save the innocent lives. Ondaatje’s fury came out here and he asked the readers about their fates. They were poor like grass and they did not have that much capacity to control them.

During the Civil War, if the working doctors of the hospitals were immediately informed of any massacre of a place or a village, they had to depart to see if any one of the wiped out village was still alive or not. They tried hard to save the injured patients from all political sides, though despite having a deficit of medicines and medical equipments. “To me, the book is dedicated to people like that and to doctors, who tend to be unsung heroes in these situations” (Kanner 2000). In a clinic near about four hundred family as well as three hundred patients were being treated. “No one from the Ministry of Health had ever come to the border villages” (Ondaatje 241). Such problem in the north-eastern province was not the problem of Tamil forces but it’s more than that and it’s a human problem. The problems came out from every angle and every sphere. The Tamil Tigers and government forces became worse day by day as wiped out the other small villages in their conflicts.

Every side was killing and hiding the evidence. Every side. This is an unofficial war, no one wants to alienate the foreign powers. So it’s a secret gangs and squads. Not like Central America. The government was not the only one doing the killing. You had, and still have, three camps of enemies – one in the north, two in the south – using weapons, propaganda, fear, sophisticated posters, [and] censorship. Importing state-of-the-art weapons from the West, or manufacturing homemade weapons. (Ondaatje 13)
Instead of helping, the government came out to thrive and send out legal and illegal squads to track down and aggravate the Tamil Tigers and JVG insurgents in the Southern and Northern provinces predominantly. So, in retaliation the government forces committed the same inhuman act like Tamil Tigers and JVG insurgents by assassinating uncountable people from both the groups. “A yellow Lancer had been seen at the army camp and was recognized during the roundup. This was at the height of the campaign to wipe out insurgent rebels and their sympathizers in the village” (Ondaatje 181). Most of the time, the government had successfully oppressed and eliminated both the groups through such counterterrorism. The Sinhala-dominated government of the island said that they had taken these legal and illegal steps against these fortified forces in order to maintain the integrity and sovereignty of the island. But in reality, the government forces amended new advanced weapons from the foreign nations in order to make the ‘intentional violence’ (the Civil War) more deadly and heinous. They were backed and corroborated by the gun-and-drug-runners of foreign nations. “It became evident that political enemies were secretly joined in financial arms deals. ‘The reason for war was war’” (Ondaatje 49). The government forces used these imported noxious mines, mortar shells and grenades to eliminate the Tamil Tigers and southern insurgents from the island. To overcome such vicious and cruel treatment of the Sinhalese-dominated government forces, The Tamil Tigers had to continue their terrorism against them till their last snort. Like them, “The [Tamil] guerrillas had international weaponry smuggled into the country by the arms dealers, and they also had homemade bombs” (Ondaatje 114). The Tamil Tigers used batteries which were essentials for making homemade bombs. The Tamil Tigers “…arguably [became] the most disciplined, dedicated, and ruthless guerrilla organization in the world” (DeVotta 170). In the novel, Ananda, husband of Sirissa, didn’t trust the modern inventions, and was against the development of these life taking weaponries because, according to her, the development of technologies brought more destructions than development.

Besides the killing and murders, abduction was a day to day phenomenon. The island became unsafe and rife with deaths and disappearances. In the month of March, 1984. “The country existed in a rocking, self-burying motion. The disappearance of schoolboys, the death of lawyers by torture, the abduction of bodies from the Hokandara mass grave. Murders in the Muthurajawela marsh” (Ondaatje 153). Ondaatje just draws few examples, but in reality their missing numbers were
uncountable, e.g. Kumara Wijetunga (age 17), Prabath Kumara (age 16), Kumara Arachchi (16), Manelka da Silva (age 17), Jatunga Gunesena (age 23), Prasanth Handuwela (age 17), Prasanna Jayawarna (age 17), Podi Wickramage (age 49), Narlin Gooneratne (age 17) who were kidnapped in 1989. The main targets of the armed forces and the LTTE were the growing up young boys. The common people on the basis of suspicion were abducted sometimes from their own houses, sometimes from friend’s home, playgrounds, footpath and army camps during such political turmoil and violence. The worse thing was that when a family member disappeared, there was no evidence about their existence or death. “In 1989, forty-six students attending school in Ratnapura district and some of the staff who worked there disappeared. The vehicles that picked them up had no number plates” (Ondaatje 181). “Sri Lanka has the second highest number of disappeared people in the world, says UN study. Only Iraq has had more cases of disappearances, with 16,384 missing, according to the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances” (Ramakrishnan 286).

Besides the abductions of common people, the Sinhalese JVG insurgents and the Tamil Tigers abducted people of medical profession not for any special lunch, dinner or payment but for the help to cure their injured insurgents. Generally, they never harmed the doctors because they were “like prostitutes” (Ondaatje 212) who were kidnapped and used optimally to cure the abrasions of the injured insurgents. There were crises of the doctors as “There were only four neurosurgeons in the country: two brain surgeons in Colombo, one in Kandy and one in private sector” (Ondaatje 122). During such a crisis, the JVG insurgents killed a doctor and two assistants in the Ward Place Hospital in Colombo, far away from the south of the island. The Sinhalese JVG insurgents kidnapped a Colombo based neurosurgeon Linus Corea who had to work along with another kidnapped forty years old nurse Rosalyn in the camp of the insurgents. Within a month, Linus Corea’s hectic schedule of checking the injured patients forced him to forget his family members. Another doctor Gamini, brother of Sarath, was kidnapped by LTTE guerrillas in the vicinity of the Trincomalee province. Due to language problem, Sinhalese Gamini had to speak paltry English with the Tamil insurgents. “English, here, is posited as the language of unimaginable conquest and dominion. It towers over the Sinhalese and Tamils, dominating those who are excluded from its mastery” (Pedri 54). Despite the altered ethnic background, Gamini tried hard to save the lives of the injured Tamil Tigers above race, class and creeds unlike the Sinhalese forces. Ondaatje through Gamini
reveals that he does not know what politics is, and is uninterested in knowing what a truth is. But he believes “If someone is dying in front of you, heal them, and if you can’t save them then get on to the next one. He’s more pragmatic about it. But there’s also a historical sense, a kind of moral sense, a political sense – all these versions of the truth” (Dave 2006). Under his care, hundreds of injured insurgents had been saved as well as died, while thousands couldn’t walk and use their bowels anymore. Though most of them would survive “but [they] would lose an arm or be impaired in some way. He had already seen the evidence of so many woundings in his brief ride through Trincomalee” (Ondaatje 215). “Some of the boys were delirious when they emerged from the influence of the pills” (Ondaatje 216) under his treatment. The injured insurgents were sixteen, seventeen and some even younger than them who were knotted with the rags, because they had neither painkillers nor bandages to save their wounds from infection. These insurgents were instigated by their instructors to drop deadly bombs “on crowded streets, in bus stations, paddy fields, schools...” (Ondaatje 216). “Who sent thirteen-year-old to fight, and for what furious cause? For an old leader? For some pale flag?” (Ondaatje 216)

In the Civil War period, the doctors in the hospitals spent their valuable times and used maximum of their skills in order to arrest “...the haemorrhages, removed the metal and stone from lungs, sutured lacerated chests” (Ondaatje 114). The child victims were taken care of by their mothers so that they could feel confident and safe at night there. The war hospitals became haunted lands that echoed off outcries of pain. In spite of such chaos, the doctors continued their everyday duty alongside the war and had to spend restless as well as sleepless times. “The hospital would run out of painkillers during the first week of any offensive. You were without self in those times, lost among the screaming” (Ondaatje 115). To maintain the order in the hospital, Savlon antiseptic was used to wash floors and walls; the children injection room with its nursery murals “Half-dead soldiers who wished for sun and fresh air rested there and ate morpheme tablets beside a BETEL CHEWING IS PROHIBITED sign” (Ondaatje 114).

The doctors saved the lives first, then the limbs. There were mostly grenade injuries. An antipersonnel mine the size of an inkwell would destroy most of a person’s feet. Wherever there was a base hospital in the country, new villages sprang up nearby. There was a need for rehabilitation programmes, and the
making of what came to be known as the ‘Jaipur Limb’. In Europe a new artificial foot cost 2500 pounds. Here the Jaipur Limb was made for 30 pounds—cheaper because Asian victims could walk without a shoe. (Ondaatje 114)

In order to serve the war victims of the explosions more than three hundred causalities were opened to give proper treatment throughout the waves of violence in first two years of Civil War. In the base hospitals in Anuradhapura, the capital of the North Central Province, four main books, namely Analysis of 2187 Consecutive Penetrating Wounds of the Brain in Vietnam by Hammon, Wounds by Swan and Swan by Gunshot, Arterial Repair During the Korean War by Hughes and Annals of Surgery were being always kept for better medical treatment of the war victims. The books instantly helped the doctors to prescribe the medicines for the deadly injuries. "There were about fifteen souls sitting or lying on the long benches. Now and then a doctor strolled in, signaled for the next patient and went off with him" (Ondaatje 34). Due to over crowdedness, it was impossible for the doctors to call them by their names. Hence they had to put on the tags on their right wrist and if they had no arm then on the right foot.

Red for Neuro, green for Orthopaedic, yellow for Surgery. No profession or race. He liked it in this way. Names were recorded later if the survivors could speak, in case they died. Ten cc’s of sample blood were taken from each of the patients and attached to their mattresses, along with disposable that would be reused if they were needed. (Ondaatje 122)

The doctors used triage in order to separate the dying from those who were in need of immediate surgery. They didn’t spend much time on the dying patients. In such period, it was very tough to separate the patients on the basis of severity of their injuries because

Street bombs, usually containing nails or ball bearings, could cut open an abdomen fifty yards from the explosion. Shock waves travelled past someone and suction could rupture the stomach. ‘Something happened to my stomach’, a woman would say, fearing she had been cut open by bomb metal, while in fact her stomach had flipped over from the force of passing air. (Ondaatje 122)
The common citizens of the island became fearful, and were emotionally shattered by the public bombings. After the cure, the survivors returned back to the doctors and informed that they might still die because the war still haunted them. The bomb's sound and its shrapnel and fragments didn't touch the vital organs of the bodies but there was emotional shock and deafness or semi-deafness and it was hardly possible to reconstruct the eardrum. The roads were covered up by the mines and “all versions of trauma, all versions of burns, surrounded” (Ondaatje 122) the island.

In the war period, doctor Gamini, brother of Sarath, played an important role was, who was serving the injured soldiers and common injured people before his kidnapping. Gamini could easily sense the upcoming unstoppable war which would take countless lives. Whenever he got the information about the war victims, he would immediately reach the war victims’ room to serve them unconditionally. In a hospital, doctor Gamini, “became excessively fond of; in diagnosing a vascular injury, a high index of suspicion is necessary” (Ondaatje 114). According to him, “there seemed little difference between pre-operative and post-operative patients. The only reasonable constant was that there would be more bodies tomorrow – post-stabbings, post-land mines, Orthopaedic trauma, punctured lungs, spinal cord injuries” (Ondaatje 116). After his wife Chrishanti’s death, Gamini spent his valuable time in Emergency Services at a hospital to save the lives of the war victims. He just used to stand in front of the entrance of a hospital, “the funnel of the triage, and categorized the incoming victims, quickly assessing the state of each person – sending them to ‘Intensive Care’ or to the operation theatre” (Ondaatje 121). He continuously worked for these war victims as to wake himself around them on time, he took medicine pills with a protein drink. He was addicted to his job in such period and could find his social value in the job. “It was where he met his fate, this offstage battle with the war. He ignored war news. He was told he had begun to smell, and for some reason this distressed him. He hoarded Lifebuoy soap and showered three times a day” (Ondaatje 205).

Gamini, in the middle of civil war, worked under another medical officer Lakdasa. The doctors were sent to the peripherals provinces and small villages of the island in order to save lives of the injured people. Gamini worked for long three years in the northeast provinces highly densed by the Tamil ethnic groups. The doctors like Skanda, Gamini and Lakdasa worked not for any political purpose or agenda, rather to save the innocent lives despite the lack of proper medical equipments and foods.
Gaminì spent his last years of medical life in a base hospital in the north east at Polonnaruwa. He encountered all the serious diseases of the war period like "Family murders. He saw typhoid, grenades injuries, attempted assassinations by one side or another" (Ondaatje 235). The wards in the hospitals of Polonnaruwa were "always in turmoil outpatients in General Surgery floor patients in the corridors, technicians arriving from a radio store to fix the electrocardiograph unit" (Ondaatje 235).

Most important theme of the novel is the crisis shown in everybody's life like Ananda, Sarath, Palipana, Gaminì and Anil. Ondaatje believes that the unconditional love of Sarath and his brother Gaminì for the island would not be understood by the Western white people, "in spite of everything" (Ondaatje 282). Their lives and carriers all crashed in the darkness as Sarath was shot dead finally. "There had never been a tunnel of light between them. Instead they had searched out and found their own dominions" (Ondaatje 286). Despite the barriers, Gaminì and Sarath both had devoted their whole life to the well-being of Sri Lankan War victims.

Once there was an order in the life of Sarath and his father, a lawyer. But gambling played by his father broke the family balance and their family fortunes started going down and down. On the other hand, Ananda lost his wife Sirissa, a school servant, amidst the atrocities of the Sri Lankan Civil War. "She was one of the thousands who had disappeared" (Ondaatje 296). In the novel Anil's Ghost, Sirissa, wife of Ananda came in contact to a horrible incident before her kidnapping when she was moving for the school work at 6:30 am. In her way to school, when she was ten yards away from a bridge she saw

...the heads of two students on stakes, on either side of the bridge, facing each other. Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen years old...she doesn't know or care. She sees two more heads on the far side of the bridge and can tell even from here that she recognizes one of them. She would shrink down into herself, go back, but she cannot. She feels something is behind her, whatever is the cause of this. She desires to become nothing at all. Mind capable of nothing. She does not even think of releasing them from this public gesture. Cannot touch anything because everything feels alive, wounded and raw but alive. 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 more. (Ondaatje 171)
The human life on the island was full of uncertainty and alienation. In the war time, the suicide was a common day to day phenomenon in order to forget the nearest ones as well as to elude the Civil War trauma. Death and loss both were never ending processes that took place in broad day light as well as at night. Hence it was better not to dare to walk through any protest and defense. If someone, who lost his or her nearest or dearest one, dared to complain or book a police report or protest against such inhuman activity, “it was feared another family member would be killed” (Ondaatje 52). “The warden of an orphanage who reported cases of annihilation was jailed” (Ondaatje 38). “This was the scarring psychosis in the country” (Ondaatje 51). Here, nobody could open his/her mouth, if he/she could open—would be sent to grave easily. If they didn’t file any complaint at any police station, there was a chance that the disappeared person might be alive. So no one could dare to complain and get any trouble to himself/herself and his/her family. Here “everyone’s scared” (Ondaatje 49). And, if they fought, they would do nothing, rather would consume their own lives and blood. It was harshly criticized by Ondaatje to be a passive observer and to be scary.

Ondaatje terms such silent tolerance as “a national disease” (Ondaatje 49) in the island. “Mass disappearances at Suriyakanda, reports of mass graves at Ankumbura, mass graves at Akmeemana. Half the world, it felt, was being buried, the truth hidden by fear, while the past revealed itself in the light of a burning rhododendron bush” (Ondaatje 152). The common civilians have to fight against such social exploitation and destructions in order to eliminate the fear from their minds and society.

During such callous atrocities in the Civil War, Anil Tissera, the main protagonist of the novel, was sent by the Centre for Human Rights of Geneva on a forty days mission in order to demystify the mysterious death of innocent civilians. Ondaatje and Anil were returning to a country ‘they’d once been a part of, now finding themselves a stranger in that place. That’s Anil’s path. She grows up in Sri Lanka, goes and gets educated abroad, and through fate or chance gets brought back by the Human Rights Commission to investigate war crimes. Anil left her homeland Sri Lanka to study in the United States of America at the age of eighteen and came back after fifteen years (at the age of thirty three) as an anthropologist in order to excavate and examine the truth behind the abduction and death of the civilians. It was not expected by the government as well as other organizations that finally a human right specialist would be chosen and sent to the island in order to detect the true reasons behind the abduction and killing of innocent people, because she born in and
was from the island. Despite that, the government, under the pressure of human rights commission, had to make final gesture to accept her, with her British passport, as the Geneva organization’s forensic specialist.

Nostalgic Anil was missing the Lankan sarong, celling fans, Gabriel’s Saloon and toddy of the island when she was abroad. She was good in English language but could speak her mother tongue Sinhalese diminutively. Anil was running with duality (ambiguous identity) having the identity of both the world: the Western and Eastern like Michael Ondaatje. She had relatives throughout the world like Australia, Malaysia and England rejecting the fixed national identity. When she was abroad, she was suffering from homesickness and emotional detachment from the island like Ondaatje who had experienced the same thing in Canada. Anil, a half-prodigal like Ondaatje, had a family in the island but the family members were dead, “Just [his] father’s friends are still here” (Ondaatje 19). She loved to be alone, so she did not inform and contact anyone about her homecoming.

Like Marc in the novel Heaven’s Edge by Romesh Gunesekera, though Anil’s main mission in Sri Lanka was not to unearth her family identity, she had to discover the submerged identities of the countless Civil War victims. Like Gunesekera’s Heaven’s Edge, Ondaatje narrates the dismaying ailment and violence of the Sri Lankan Civil War in his novel Anil’s Ghost. In the USA, Anil was sent those reports which were collected by different human rights groups. She came to know that the investigations by the human rights activists didn’t lead any arrest earlier in the Civil War rights. Anil had keenly observed and read Civil War documents, newspapers and reports on the political and historical killings with a long distance gaze while studying abroad. She reached the island “...during the worst political times, alongside a thousand dirty little acts of race and politics, gang madness and financial gain. War having come this far like a poison into the bloodstream could not get out” (Ondaatje 152). She saw the island as barren box of ethics and peace—no social and political changes are seen there. “The streets were still streets, the citizens remained citizens” (Ondaatje 7) and “...the darkest Greek tragedies were innocent compared with what was happening here. Heads on stakes. Skeletons dug out of a cocoa pit in Matale” (Ondaatje 7). Only unrecognized bodies or remaining bones of dead bodies were left behind; a relative could hardly find out the actual identity of his nearest and dearest one. Parents would always run through ‘double-edged’ to find out their son,
...it was their son in the pit, or that it was not their son – which mean there
would be further searching. If it became clear that the body was a stranger,
then, after weeks of waiting, the family would rise and leave. They would
travel to other excavations in the western highlands. The possibility of their
lost son was everywhere. (Ondaatje Anil’s Ghost)

Anil inundated herself into the depth of political mayhem and searched hard for a
rinse by unearthing the hidden truth behind the executions of the innocent lives in
order to make a peaceful and a harmonious island till the penultimate stanza of the
novel. She thought that the information had to be clarified and acted upon always. The
island was moving among uncountable and uncertain laws and fear that were
prevailing everywhere. “Truth bounced between gossip and vengeance. Rumour
slipped into every car and barbershop” (Ondaatje 51). In the war, truth was buried;
people started believing in the well-told lies of government as true ones. “Information
was made public with diversions and subtexts – as if truth would not be of interest
when give directly, without waltzing backwards” (Ondaatje 51). According to Anil,

Forensic work during a political crisis was notorious, she knew, for its three-
dimensional chess moves and back-room deals and muted statements for the
‘good of the nation.’ In the Congo, one Human Rights group had gone too far
and their collection of data had disappeared overnight, their paperwork
burned. As it’s a city from the past had been reburied. The investigation team,
which included Anil in a slowly role as a programme assistant, had nothing
left to do but get on a plane and go home. So much for the international
authority of Geneva. The grand logos on letterheads and European office
doors meant nothing where there was crisis. If and when you were asked by a
government to leave, you left. You took nothing with you. Not a slide tray, not
a piece of film. At the airport, while they searched her clothing, she’d sat
almost naked on a stool. (Ondaatje 24-25)

Though she started collecting the authentic information successfully, her mission
remained unsuccessful in the end of her journey. In Colombo, she was to be teamed
up with an archaeologist Sarath Diyasena, a broad-chested man in his late forties with
other local officials and consultants to placate the contemporary problems. Anil's journey was to get into the truth but she didn't know

...what would the truth bring them into? It was a flame against a sleeping lake of petrol. Sarath had seen the truth broken into suitable pieces and used by the foreign press alongside irrelevant photographs. A flippant gesture towards Asia that might lead, as a result of this information, to new vengeance and slaughter. There were dangers in handing truth to an unsafe city around you. As an archaeologist Sarath believed in truth as a principle. That is, he would have given his life for the truth if the truth were of any use. (Ondaatje 153)

Anil appeared to be a stranger to Sarath while the Colombo city appeared to be a place of languid and loss to her. Initially, it was very hard for both the strangers to trust each other during the political turmoil of civil war which led them to suspect one another throughout the novel. Sarath wanted Anil to understand the archaeological surroundings of a fact as a different archaeologist who would not just discover the missing people, its reason and would leave the journey of investigation but also would be argumentative and would try her best to dig up the actual reason behind the disappearance and death of the common civilians which would send the defectors behind the bar. Otherwise she would "be like one of those journalists who file reports about flies and scabs while staying at Galle Face Hotel (Ondaatje 40). Sarath had no faith in such false empathy and report. According to Sarath, no one from the island was innocent rather all people including himself had blood on their clothes.

In the beginning of her investigation, Anil was warned by Sarath not to go against the ruling government and was also requested to be preservative because "sometimes law is on the side of power not truth" (Ondaatje 40). First day, Anil did realize the same thing as her heels were cooling ever since she moved in the island. But she knew the manoeuvres of controlling thing while everything ran in her reverse. She had to smear herself to expose the doors of the mysterious death of the civilians. Earlier, Anil had professed the same wretched conditions of the villagers when she was in a mission in Central America. She was informed by a villager of the Central America that, "When soldiers burned our village they said this is the law, so I thought the law meant the right of the army to kill us" (Ondaatje 41). Anil recollected the quote in the same condition of the island when truth became false and false became
true. That is why nobody at Centre of the Human Rights was too much hopeful for the mission.

According to Anil, due to the savage violence, the island had become “a path that snaked between large boulders, then opened unexpectedly into clearing” (Ondaatje 81). From the beginning of the novel Anil, throughout her investigation, came in contact of many innocent killings. Firstly, she came in contact with a Buddhist corpse. The bones of the arms, fingers and rib cages of the corpse had been broken and fractured deadly. She started investigating the time and location of the dead body.

“It was the freshness of the body. It was still someone. Usually the victims of a political killing were found much later. She dipped each of the fingers in a beaker of blue solution so she could check for cuts and abrasions” (Ondaatje 9) of the dead body. Their heads were completely separated from their bodies, other parts of the bodies broken off and left unrecognized. “A couple of years ago people just started disappearing. Or bodies kept being found burned beyond recognition. There is no hope of affixing blame. And no one can tell who the victims are” (Ondaatje 13).

The magnitudes of the Sri Lankan Civil War forced Anil to reminisce on the Guatemala conflict where she worked with her boyfriend Cullis helping to discover and identify the victims of the Guatemala Civil War (1960-1996) that ran for more than thirty years. Guatemala, a country in Latin America, was also intruded by the Western developed countries like the USA in its political and homely matters that instigated the civil rights. In the war, the Guatemala government forces killed innumerable guiltless civilians of Mayan ethnic group. In Guatemala, Anil was working in conflict zones for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and spent a miserable life in Aizenman, a village in the Central America. “Dysentery, hepatitis, dengue fever, they were all going around. She and her team were eating in the villages where they were exhuming bodies” (Ondaatje 29). She was working to elicit the truth in a mixed bag of bodies in different sites. It was very tough for Anil to specify the exact class and community of the dead bodies.

Just like the Guatemalan government and its forces, the Sinhala-dominated government forces of Sri Lankan also had a hand in killing common civilians, the Tamil guerrillas and JVG insurgents, violating the human rights law. The island was covered with the dead bodies like abandoned stone and wood structures. The hostility continued as the murderers left the dead bodies to the families of the victims with the
intention of traumatizing them further. The island is postulated as a land of complete
crime from the perspective of colonial violence. During the civil right movement, a
lot of blood covered up the swimming river. The death sceneries and sights turned up
each and every day. Her investigations led her to become a keen inspector and
observer of the adverse situations of the island. According to Sarath, “What we’ve got
here is unknown extrajudicial executions mostly. Perhaps by the insurgents, or by the
government or the guerrilla separatists. Murders committed by all sides” (Ondaatje
14).

Once Anil and her team moved to a nearby river to cool off during their lunch
break. While returning from there, they saw a woman sitting within a grave. “She was
on her haunches, her legs under her as if in formal prayer, elbows in her lap, looking
down at the remains of the two bodies” (Ondaatje n. p.). They were none other than
the woman’s lost husband and brother who were abducted one year back and finally
killed. “It seemed as if the men were asleep beside each other on a mat in the
afternoon” (Ondaatje n. p.). Anil became perplexed after his eagle-eyed observations
and failed to think of a single word to describe the pathetic condition of the woman.
Such suffering, loss and mourning of a woman stand for the suffering and loss of
other thousands innocent mothers and wives who have lost their nearest and dearest
ones. During the investigation, she again saw “more and more injured were coming in
off the street and her wound began to seem insignificant in comparison” (Ondaatje
34) with them. Their dead bodies even denying their own original identities refers to
their depthless loss and suffering.

In the shadows of war and politics there came to be surreal turns of cause and
effect. At a mass grave found in Naipattimunai in 1985, blood-stained clothing
was identified by a parent as that worn by his son at the time of his arrest and
disappearance. When an ID card was found in a shirt pocket, the police called
an immediate halt to the unburial.... (Ondaatje 38)

Anil had to remember these incidents and accidents which would simplify his
upcoming investigations into the unnamed or unidentified bodies. Here, Ondaatje
feels sorry for these innocent citizens of the island who had become victims of
ethnocentrism and racism.
Once, a truck driver, Gunesena, was tried to be killed by someone who "had hammered a bridge nail into his left palm and another onto his right, crucifying him to the tarmac" (Ondaatje 107). When Anil and Sarath both moved to rescue him, "...a terrified look appeared on his face. As if they were coming back to kill him or torture him further" (Ondaatje 107). He was terrified and his wide eyes were looking for an unknown destiny where he could rest without any fear of the torturers. He was neither killed nor spared rather left in a state of half-death. Gunesena just slightly rolled his head with a tactful mixture of 'ye' and 'no'. His ambiguous reply left us in a state of doubt about the island and its people. The innocent people like Gunesena neither could spend his life smoothly nor could reject the muddled island. They were left to die slowly which was very painful and inhuman. In spite of menace and fright, Sarath, Anil and people of the Galapitigama village didn’t give in to the fear of being killed rather came forward to rescue injured Gunesena. They finally saved him irrespective of his caste and creeds unlike the other people of the island. The people of the island lost all the moral and ethical values; they just spent their times in doing the illegal works. The island became a hell in itself, no soothing fragments and air passing through there. Hence, the people of the island could not breathe properly in such intoxicated air.

During her investigations in Sri Lankan Civil War, once Anil was working in an emergency in dark Colombo barricaded with curfew: "the fraught quietness of the roadblocks" (Ondaatje 71). Anil asked Sarath to "imagine how many bodies must be buried all over the island?" (Ondaatje 47). It was unanswerable to Sarath. Ondaatje quoted a line from the poet Robert Duncan's poem, "The drama of our time ... is the coming of all men into one fate" (Ondaatje 199). Here, 'one fate' stands for 'death'.

Anil and Sarath both the anthropologists visited a sacred graveyard of sixth century monks near Bandarawela where they found several skeletons of anonymous dead bodies. They even didn’t know if the dead bodies were two hundred years old or two weeks old. Anil started doubting that something was wrong in the graveyards. Anil determined to know and to let the whole world know about the truth. Sarath knew that it would be a dangerous job to interfere with a government protected area, but for Anil, truth was her principle, that is, she could give her life for the sake of truth. Unable to respect and understand his situated truths, Anil mistrusted him: "I don’t know where you stand...I know you feel the purpose of truth is more complicated, that it’s sometimes more dangerous here to tell the truth" (Ondaatje 49).
Like Sarath, Dr. Perera though acknowledged her way of investigation into the Sailor’s skeleton, he knew that doing any kind of investigation against the government would be unsafe and dangerous. Regardless of the upcoming danger, Anil along with Sarath again entered a cave more than seventy years old in Bandarawela where prehistoric remains had to be discovered—“hundreds of caves and rock shelters began to be explored. Remains of cranial and dental fragments were found, as old as any in India” (Ondaatje 46). During their investigations in Bandarawela cave, they found several skeletons in the ancient debris of “arboreal gastropods, bones fragments of birds and mammals, even fish bones from the distant eras of the sea. The region felt timeless.” (Ondaatje 46)

After few days, when Anil and Sarath again moved to excavate a cave of government-protected area in Bandarawela, they discovered a fourth skeleton along with three complete skeletons: “... bones [of the fourth skeleton] were still held together by dried ligaments, partially burned. Something not prehistoric’ (Ondaatje 46). At that juncture, she was shocked and perplexed because “It was found within a sacred historical site [where only a government official could get into]. A site constantly under government or police supervision.... It was buried no more than four to six years ago” (Ondaatje 48). Sarath was not that much snooping to know and to go along with this particular body because it was an ordinary murder and common day phenomenon for him among the countless and nameless dead bodies in late 20th century Sri Lanka. Yet, Anil picked up a fragment of bone and rubbed it in order to fix the time and date of the dead body from the detritus pile. He initially came to know that is was a ‘Sailor’. From her investigation, Anil came to know that the Sailor’s one forearm was broken, partially burned and his vertebrae was damaged at his neck; when “He puts his arms up over his face to protect himself from the blow. He is shot with a rifle, the bullet going through his arm, then into the neck. While he’s on the ground, they come up and kill him” (Ondaatje 61). After giving ‘coup de grace’, by using the smallest and cheapest bullet, the killers tried to set him on fire.

Anil wished to turn out the lights of truth to clarify the cloud along with Sarath and wanted to prove the skeleton as a recent political or other kind of murder. Anil “...need[ed] to break things apart to know where [the skeleton] came from. That’s also an acceptance of complexity. Secrets turn powerless in the open air” (Ondaatje 255). The most important thing was that the body was buried for the second time in a government restricted area which was only accessible to the high-level government or
police officials or an army like Sarath, but not to others. Sarath knew how a truth was made fictitious and buried so deep that nobody could measure the depth to spin out the truth. He thought “Political secrets are not powerless, in any form” (Ondaatje 255). The main reason behind the ethnic conflict was “The dividing line between what is right and wrong is blurred...the conflicts that we have today are all mixed in with the idea of xenophobia...” (Gunesekera 56). Anil wanted, in spite of political danger, that it was the duty of each citizen especially like Sarath to find out the truth. Anil could think that though there were “…tension and danger around them, one [could] make them evaporate …. Truth [came] finally into the light. [It was] in the bones and sediment” (Ondaatje 255). Anil wished to turn over the secrets behind the death and disappearances of the citizens. Beside the help of Sarath, Chitra, an entomologist and aloof-woman of Western cultures and virtues who usually loved to work on insects, helped a lot during her investigation to draw Sailor’s true identity. Anil was too much curious to demystify the Sailor’s tangible identity who was buried twice as they found apposite name to Sailor, namely Ruwan Kuamara.

Anil had worked with all those teachers and mentors like Lawrence Angel who taught her the ways to discover truth, victim’s profession and durability of the skeletons. They discovered through the physical stresses in those skeletons. The central axiom in her work was that in order to know the suspect or murderer, one first needs to know the victim of that murderer. Anil was running through right channel—searching permanent truth and actual reasons behind the death of the Sailor. Anil was trying to draw the true identity and the last activity of the Sailor with the help of insufficient anthropological weapons. Her main purpose behind the experiment was to determine whether the murder was committed by the government or by any other group. In her day-night investigations of the skeleton, “the dim lights didn’t give her enough voltage to read by so she found an oil lamp and lit it” (Ondaatje 54). She brought the skeleton into ‘being’ after her lengthy investigation under the sulphur light leading to the objective truth. Her experiment left her with the uncertainty about the exact bone age of the Sailor but led to an objective fact that the dead body was first buried into a wet earth which could be a paddy field, after which it was moved to an ancient gravesite in Bandarawela, a government-protected area, in order to hide the true identity of the Sailor. But “…murders [were] sometimes committed during a war for personal reasons, but [she did not] think a murderer would have the luxury of burying a victim twice” (Ondaatje 85). Her lengthy investigation also made her sure
that it was an indictable crime committed by the government forces. The skeleton of the Sailor was an evidence in order to prove certain kind of crime committed by the government agency which is an important issue here. The matter came to light after tracing the elements of soil and suspecting that the pollen came from a totally different region. Sarath worked hard to locate the pollen and finally located it “to two possible places, one up near Kegalle and another in the Ratnapura area” (Ondaatje 85). The Ratnapura area was controlled by insurgents and from such a sensitive area many villagers disappeared during the Civil War.

Here, Ondaatje poses certain questions which may also arise in the minds of the readers. As “…in any case, if they did identify him, if they did discover the details of his murder, what then? [The Sailor] was a victim among thousands. What would this change?” (Ondaatje 172). Anil answered to these questions, “What [she] wish[ed] to report [was] that some government forces [had] possibly murdered innocent people. This [was] what [Sarath was] hearing from [Anil]. [Sarath] as an archaeologist should believe in the truth of history” (Ondaatje 272). Anil and Sarath knew that in such civil turbulent in the island nobody dared to complain against government and the police didn’t dare to book even a single charge-sheet against the government and its forces. But this particular investigation of the Sailor “could be a clear case against the government” (Ondaatje 172). They had only one victim (skeletons of a Sailor) in their hands to prove the wrongs done by the government forces and the government itself. She truly impugned the government forces for their ruthless killing of innocent people including the LTTE forces and JVG insurgents. This particular skeleton of a Sailor would give justifications to the countless unidentified war victims of the island. She started believing that examination of the Sailor would lead to continuing her enquiry through which she could trace the identity of unimaginable missing people. In such context, she could remember a quote of her teacher Clyde Snow, a real anthropologist from America, who said, “One village can speak of many villages. One victim can speak for many victims” (Ondaatje 172). The skeleton, thought by Anil, was a “representative of all [she] lost voices. To give him a name would be name the rest” (Ondaatje 51) which was the main motive of Anil in the novel. She had no hunger or thirst or desire for any friend or a lover’s company, rather she was thirsty to reach the truth. So next, she decided to give a name to the skeleton.
...in the midst of such events, she realized, there could never be any logic to
the human violence without the distance of time. For 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 person a door to escape grief and fear. But
she saw that those who were slammed and stained by violence lost the power
of language and logic. (Ondaatje 51)

On one occasion, Anil and Sarath were going to visit a village in order to find
out the true identity of the Sailor. On their way, they encountered a spell of storm
symbolizing the chaos and conflict created by the LTTE guerrillas, JVG insurgents
and government forces in the island. We can compare the storm to the ferocious and
detrimental LTTE ethnic group and its insurgents. The storm which was coming from
the north can be compared with LTTE guerrillas who could easily grasp the natural
objects (stands for common innocent people) and could change the directions and
shapes of the weather conditions (stands for the life of innocent people). The blue sky
became black under the storm’s spell and magic; the fresh wind changed its direction
and branches of the tress started shaking due to its effect. Not only LTTE guerrillas
destroyed the innocent life, but government forces were also responsible for taking
their lives. The villagers protested against the unlawful activities of the felonious
forces of the Sinhala-dominated government in the forms of beating drums which was
revealing their innermost untold agonies. The unstoppable noises of drums were
coming from the distanced village, which stands for the voices of the thousand
innocent people of island. But the village drummers could not dare to make vocal
sound that metaphorically refers to how they had been silenced by government forces.
The drummers stand as silent figures but did not stop playing the drums until or
unless ‘a name’ was provided to the head (the skull of sailor). They wanted the ‘skull’
to speak against the vicious government by demanding justice.

After the final investigation, in order to prove the murder of the Sailor, it was
necessary for Anil to produce the skeleton of the Sailor along with the reports and
lectures before the government officials in the Armoury Auditorium in Colombo but
she failed to produce the Sailor’s skeleton, evidences and reports before them. She
moved with a fake skeleton in the Armoury Auditorium “filled with various officials,
among them military and police personnel trained in counter-insurgency methods…”
(Ondaatje 268). The skeleton of the Sailor and its report were being stolen by Sarath
to discredit her whole investigation, thought by Anil. Sarath came back and arrived in the Auditorium after a mysterious absence to deride her exertions. Earlier,

...her mind circling around Sarath once more. She had been working with him for several days and she still had no handle on him. He was high up in the state-sponsored Archaeological Department, so how much a part of the government was he? Was he its ear and eyes while assigned to aid her in the Human Rights investigation and report? In that case whom was she working for? (Ondaatje 24)

Anil suspected Sarath and questioned him whether he was neutral in the war or he was going to take the side of government or “Was he just an archaeologist who loved his work?” (Ondaatje 25). In such a deceitful period, it was not an easy task to believe the other when environment had been corrupted in the hand of the government forces, Tamils forces and the Southern insurgents. A doubt occurred in her mind which ran till the end of the novel.

As a matter of fact, Sarath confiscated the skeleton in order to save Anil. Whatever Sarath did, he did in order to save her from the government forces and officials. Sarath tried to conceal the truth from the government officials because they could manipulate the true reports. If they came to know about Anil’s true approach towards them, they would also kidnap and kill her like LTTE and JVG forces. It would not lead any proper conclusion, rather would result in chaos and further conflict. So, Anil was advised by Sarath to delete the days from her mind which she spent in the Civil War. Like Sarath, Dr. Perera also cautioned her about such upcoming danger before the investigation but she neglected it. Though she neglected their words, it was necessary to be much cognisant like Sarath and Dr. Perera about the evil sides of these government officials. What Sarath could see, Anil couldn’t. Earlier, Sarath forbade her to submerge herself into such danger because “the purpose of truth is more complicated, that it’s sometimes more dangerous here if you tell the truth” (Ondaatje 49). Anil was not that much familiar of the contemporary situation because she was there after fifteen years, sent by Amnesty international in order to unearth the truth. However, Sarath revealed the truth to Anil as he “believe[d] in a society that has peace.... What [Anil was] proposing could result in a chaos” (Ondaatje 272).
In the Armoury Auditorium, there was a ‘fake debate’ between Anil and Sarath in order to show the government that they had contradictory views on the skeleton. Sarath pretended to be in favour of the government forces and against Anil’s investigation. It was a kind of trick devised by Sarath to save Anil from the execution of the government forces. In order to save Anil, Sarath had to prove that skeleton was two hundred years old. In order to gratify the officials, he also had to ask a question “Why do you not investigate the killing of government officers?” (Ondaatje 272). Officials in the Auditorium was too much happy for the question, “There was a scattering of applause” (Ondaatje 272). “He was aware of the people on the periphery, her gasp, her face as if it contained fever” (Ondaatje 279). Whatever was done by Sarath, was done to save Anil from government officials’ eagle eye and to make the officials fool. But she could not understand the truth, rather became ferocious for putting such question before her. Anil lost her courage and didn’t wish to stay in Sri Lanka because she could only see “blood everywhere. A casual sense of massacre.” (Ondaatje 280)

Sarath’s clever steps later proved to be worthy for Anil. Secretly, Sarath passed his voice in a tape recorder and advised her about his true motives behind the counter questions in the auditorium. He returned the Sailor’s skeleton to Anil “It’s your twentieth-century evidence, five years old in death. Erase this tape. Erase my words here. Complete the report and be ready to leave at five tomorrow morning” (Ondaatje 281). He knew that Government would not allow Anil to carry the evidences at the end of the day of her investigation. So, she would have to sign back all the research works, evidences and tape recorder and would never get them back. The government wanted reports in two days but he advised her to prepare a false and to get it done overnight. After preparing a false report, she was advised to leave the island by a plane. Sarath advised Anil to re-create new reports and strong evidences, after her returning back to the USA, against the government. Anil should buy new equipment and re-create new reports with the help of the Sailor’s skeleton, so that she “[could] replace everything. [It was] just [Anil] who had to be safe” (Ondaatje 279).

In order to discover the true identity of the Sailor, Sarath and Anil had to move to Anuradhapura for the help of Palipana staying in a forest ‘the Groves of Ascetics’. Palipana, an epigraphist, teacher and instructor of Sarath, and foremost archaeologist of Sri Lanka, had attended several international conferences throughout the world and had vast knowledge and scholarly attitude about ancient culture. Sarath knew the
capability and mastery of Palipana who had “reconstructed eras simply by looking at runes” (Ondaatje 92). Palipana was a specialist and better known person on the field of archaeology and anthropology. But he had now become blind and could only guide and send Anil and Sarath to a person who could help them to know the true identity of the Sailor. He guided Anil and Sarath in their investigation and instructed to find a sculptor in order to recreate the face of the unknown Sailor. Palipana loved to call someone by not mentioning his/her name rather he loved to refer to someone by pronouncing the pronoun ‘you’. Palipana didn’t like to “use anyone’s name, as if that were immaterial to the discussion or search” (Ondaatje 90) because during the Civil War one was killed brutally and left in an unrecognized state. Then and there, it was hardly possible to recognize the person’s true identity: his/her physical appearance, name and family background. So, according to Palipana, it was useless and baseless to call anyone by his/her name. Instead of investigating the name, it was better to know the timing of the murder and age of the murderer.

Palipana had given a postcolonial explanation about the island “While the West saw Asian history as a faint horizon where Europe joined the East, Palipana saw his country in fathoms and colour, and Europe simply as a landmass on the end of the peninsula of Asia” (Ondaatje 75). Palipana, the most respected Sri Lankan also realized that the culture of Europe was old but the culture of Asia was older as compared to European culture.

As an archaeologist “He had discovered and translated a linguistic subtext that explained the political tides and royal eddies of the island in the sixth century” (Ondaatje 77). He published a series of observations and interpretations of rock graffiti which stunned the other archaeologists and historians. He worked for a number of years at the centre of a nationalist group, “Wrestled archaeological authority in Sri Lanka away from Europeans. He had made his name translating Pali scripts and recording and translating the rock graffiti of Sigiriya” (Ondaatje 75). Palipana loved natural noises and sounds of oceanic weaves as well as sounds by the birds from the forest, while “Farther away were the wars of terror, the gunman in love with the sound of their shells, where the main purpose of war had become war” (Ondaatje 94). Sarath spent his valuable academic three years under Palipana. “History was ever-present around him. The stone remnants of royal bathing pools and water gardens, the buried cities, the nationalist fervour he rode and used gave him and those who worked with him, including Sarath, limitless subjects to record and
interpret. It appeared he could divine a thesis at any sacred forest” (Ondaatje 76). He chose the archaeology as his profession and became prominent figures because “he knew the language and techniques of research better than those above him.” (Ondaatje 76).

Palipana left the materialist world and started living with his young niece Lakma like a hermit near Anuradhapura, an ancient capital of Sri Lanka. In spite of his success and fame, the contemporary situation forced Palipana, the best archaeological theorist in the country, to spend a minimal lifestyle in a forest. Like his brother Narada, he also became a monk and started reducing his link less and less with the material world. He left the chaotic world which took the lives of his relatives and family members. His brother Narada, a Sinhalese-Buddhist monk and brother of Palipana, was shot dead, when he was sleeping in his room. He was killed before he could flourish and fulfill his mission. The barbarous and uncivilized rebels forced the monks to leave their monasteries. “It had been a long era of humanlessness, religiouslessness. The knowledge of such a monastery had vanished from people’s minds” (Ondaatje 186). The island became an abandoned forest covered up and consumed by rough vegetation, unnamed pants and colonies of insects. Such picture was not visible to the outer world, so it was better for them to know its sudden loose depth. His death shook Sarath and his wife who missed the monk more than their other lost friends.

Narada taught Sarath how a mind could teach the mantras to be old. Sarath first denied to reveal the name of actual killer because the rumour of his death, instead of true reason, would be accepted by most of the people. The people of the island believed that the murder of Narada was executed by his own novice that was a false rendition and was a political homicide.

Once, it was heard in the forest that “An insect chirped like the sound of a watch being wound, one of the inhabitants in this forest of ascetics. ‘There had always been slaughter in passion’” (Ondaatje 98). The passion for toncning spares none from the slaughterer’s wrath. If you are innocent like Palipana’s brother, slaughter will meet you some day and eliminate you from the earth. If society became evil and people spent their time in the devilish dance of killings, none can survive even if he is a monk.
You renounce society, but to do so you must first be a part of it, learn your decision from it. This the paradox of retreat. My brother entered temple life. He escaped the world and the world came after him. He was seventy when he was killed by someone, perhaps someone from the time when he was breaking free – for that is the difficult stage, when you leave the world. I am the last of my siblings. For my sister too is dead. The girl is her daughter. (Ondaatje 99)

Palipana’s granddaughter Lakma’s parents were killed few years back when she was just twelve year old. After their murder, she was taken to a government ward run by nuns. In fact, the ward took care off and worked for those who had lost their parents or whose parents had been killed in the civil war. “The shock of the murder of the girl’s parents, however, had touched everything within her, driving both her verbal and her motor ability into infancy. This was combined with an adult sullenness of spirit. She wanted nothing more to invade her” (Ondaatje 99). It seemed to her that “After so many years of fighting, violence became ingrained into our way of life. Killers everywhere” (Gunasekera 34). In the government ward, she didn’t talk to anyone and kept herself aloof over a month. She was forcefully taken away from her room to practice her exercise in the sunlight.

The nightmares continued for Lakma, who was unable to deal with the possible danger around her. A child who knew the falseness of the supposed religious security around her, with its clean dormitories and well-made beds. When Palipana, her only remaining relative, came to visit her she saw was immune to any help in this place. Any sudden sound was danger to her. She would finger through every meal looking for insects or glass, would not sleep in the safety of her bed but hidden underneath it. It was the time of Palipana’s own crisis in his career, and his eyes were in the last stages of glaucoma. He bundled her up and travelled by train up to Anuradhapura. The girl terrified during the whole journey, then brought her in a cart to the forest monastery, the leaf hall and ambalama, in the Groves of Ascetics. They slipped this way out of the world, not notice by anyone – an old man, a twelve year old girl who was scared of the evidence of anything human, even of this person who had brought her into the dry zone. (Ondaatje 99-100).
Lakma was tried to be convinced by Palipana who exerted all his effort to save her from the inflicted isolation. After entering the Groves of the Ascetics, she left all her previous life activities and skills which she learned from her parents in her childhood. She had a desire to eliminate the horrible past which she didn’t want to dredge up in the soothing and harmless beauty of forest. She abandoned all the past memories of the human world. She got her education in the hands of Palipana. He “gave her the mnemonic skills of alphabet and phrasing and conversed with her at the further edge of his knowledge and beliefs” (Ondaatje 100).

He supposed he had always trusted her, in spite of her fury and rejection of the world. He weaved into her presence his conversation about wars and medieval slokas and Pali texts and language, he spoke of how history faded too, as much as battle did, and how it could exist only with remembrance – for even the slokas on papyrus and bound ola leaves would be eaten by moths and silverfish, dissolved by rainstorms – how only stone and rock could hold one person’s loss and another’s beauty forever. (Ondaatje 100)

Palipana, an incorruptible name, was also falsely defamed by one of his protégés who voiced and spread an opinion that he had written a paper on baseless evidence, fictitious. It was not a trick nor false rather “...it was more than trick, less of a falsehood in his own mind; perhaps for him it was not a false step but the step to another reality, the last stage of a long, truthful dance” (Ondaatje 77). His dejected paper, which had held the histories of his finding, was fading and aging fast in the hand of time. “It was insect-bitten, sun-faded, [and] wind-scattered. And there was his old, thin body. Palipana too now was governed only by the elements” (Ondaatje 80). He was discredited instead of admiration even by Sarath. Sarath was also accused and challenged several times by his mentor for his laxness and inaccuracy during his academic years. “The gesture, Palipana’s gesture, was seen as a betrayal of the principles on which he had built his reputation. A forgery by a master always meant much more than mischief, it meant scorn. Only when seen at its most innocent could it be regarded as an autobiographical or perhaps chemical breakdown” (Ondaatje 78). Now Palipana became seventy but didn’t let go the habit of racing the truth.

Another prey of the political turmoil was Ananda Udugama, husband of Sirissa who was hired by Anil and Sarath to recreate the face of the Sailor. Despite his
disagreement to Anil, he finally decided to recreate the true identity of the anonymous Sailor. He hoisted the Sailor’s skull to left and right like a potter’s wheel and finally recreated a peaceful head of the Sailor. Such peace he wished for his late wife, and for the rest of the country. The juxtaposing with the heads peaceful, yet decapitated is symbolic of the immense death in Sri Lanka, covered up by the government making it appear as nothing was wrong. The head was peaceful, just like Sri Lanka, but was truly chaotic in morbid underneath. Several times, he broke the recreated head to erase the reflection of his late wife’s face as well as faces of the other incalculable innocent war victims. Like Ananda, innumerable Sri Lankans had lost their nearest ones in the hard-nosed clash. Finally, Ananda tried to slash his throat in a suicidal attempt in order to get rid of his innermost untold pain and agitation which ensued for his late wife and the other war victims. The blood was running on the knife and fingers. “His eyes like a deer in her light” (Ondaatje 191). Anil played the role of a saviour who interrupted his death and tried her best to save his life. Here, the distinction between two strangers was abridged in spite of the cultural gap between them. They became friends as a human bond was created between them.

Anil was with Sarath and Ananda, citizened by their friendship – the two of them in the car, the two of them in the hospital while a stranger attempted to save Ananda. Her hands were at her sides, she was barely able to reach for a sheet to cover herself. It was almost morning and light was in the room with her. Only then did she drift off, believing that the good stranger would save Ananda. (Ondaatje 196)

The depiction of the culminating chapter “Distance” without a single conversation among the characters figuratively demanded peace in near distance. In the line “the rain miles away rolling like bone dust towards them” (Ondaatje 303), ‘rain’ imagery signifies anticipation for a better society in inept island. In the culminating chapter, despite the chaos and turmoil in Sri Lanka, Ondaatje has coated an episode of the reconstruction of a Buddha statue which was destroyed by thieves in order to find some treasure in it. “This was for once not a political act nor an act perpetrated by one belief against another. The men were trying to find a solution for hunger or a way to get out of their disintegrating lives” (Ondaatje 296). Village man Ananda Udagama, a sculptor and painter, from south along with other seven artisans
were brought to refurbish a destroyed statue to Buduruvagala, an ancient Buddhist temple. It was necessary to replace the destroyed God as replacing the destroyed faith in order to convalesce syndrome free life of pre-Civil War. So, the reconstructed new statue vaulted for a new era and a new well-constructed society.

In “neutral and innocent fields around statue” (Ondaatje 296) at Buduruvagala temple, the innocent people were tortured, burnt, and killed during the political turmoil on the island. During their working times in such unsafe places, they were finding unrecognized numerous dead bodies daily, not even buried, in the adjoining fields of Buduruvagala temple. Ananda assigned two of his men to deal with the dead bodies and ordered them to catalogue the bodies and contact civil rights authorities.

In the end, pessimist Ananda became optimistic. During painting, Ananda wearing the shirt of murdered Sarath will always finger out the truth of the island. Ananda tried hard to paint and repair the Buddha statue by uniting its perfection. It almost seemed as if he was being enlightened by working on the statue of Buddha, searching for unanimity. Ananda’s repairing of the Buddha statue and its eyes with the help of villagers symbolize the regaining of lost-hope and repairing of the wound pinned up by the civil war. Ananda took part in “Netra Mangala”, a traditional ceremony of the new Buddha statue. Netra means ‘eye’. It was a ritual of eyes. The ‘eye’ stands for truth and true vision. “Without the eyes there is not just blindness, there is nothing. There is no existence” (Ondaatje 95). Vision is extremely important theme because it is related to enlightenment. This theme permeates the novel through the use of eyes and sight imagery especially with the painting ritual. The eyes were not painted until the end of the novel”. “Anil’s Ghost invokes the pieta, the Buddha, and the sacred eye-painting ceremony Netra Mangala to focus attention on the process of contemplating suffering deeply, even spiritually, in a variety of contexts divorced from Christianity and Buddhist theology.” (Davis and Lee 98)

The artificer who “[brought] to life sight and truth and presence”, was being prepared during the night before he could paint the eyes on the Buddha image in the morning at five o’clock. “The hour the Buddha attained enlightenment” (Ondaatje 95). “A special artist [was] needed to paint eyes on a holy figure. It [was] always the last thing done. It [was] what [gave] the image life. Like a fuse. The eyes [were] a fuse. It [had] to happen before a statue or a painting in a vihara [could] become holy thing. Knox mention[ed] it, and later on Coomarasawamy (Ondaatje 93). Buddha never taught to harm others irrespective of race, class and caste, unlike government armed
forces, Tamil Tigers and JVG insurgents. Like Buddha, Ananda always tried to reach the truth for the sake of the war victims and his late wife. The end of the novel remains unresolved as Anil’s result of investigations remains unknown.

Ondaatje wanted to convey a message that one can find truth and solace only in religious activities. Truth is just like a ghost, formless, invisible, but one can know and realize that truth does exist. Ondaatje thinks there will be no progress until and unless Westerners and Sri Lankans open their eyes and acknowledge what wrong is happening everywhere. He also believes that to run a society and a family efficiently, one must believe in the theory of unity in diversity which is lacking everywhere in the earth. Nothing is permanent here, rather everything is faded off in the hand of times.
Works Cited


Chapter VII

Conclusion
No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.

Nelson Mandela

_The Long Walk to Freedom_

The case study of Michael Ondaatje’s select novels has led us to draw some conclusive issues. The present work claims to be one of the first serious concerns shown towards this exceptionally poetic prose writer. His writings make an unforgettable oeuvre of recording the history of the South-Asian and Canadian immigrants, touching upon several universal themes like racism, ethnocentrism, minority subjugation, ethnic cleansing of the minority, communalism, and nationalism altogether. Ondaatje’s most important contribution is reshaping the half-recorded and half-forgotten histories of marginal groups around the world— the Sinhalese, the blacks in US and Canada: all those living half-lives for being unrecognized as humans for inhuman causes. Recollection is his power, which hits at the power hungry imperialist nations’ Samson secret. He brings forth all those Canadian voices accented by native, black, French, Caribbean, Indian, Japanese and Anglo-Saxon origins; made to live apart from the mainstream. He restores the status of ‘being human’ upon them, and that way he has already made a new history. This Ph.D. thesis is an effort to accentuate these fast changing sand dunes of facts which are always under threat of being vanquished and erased from the face of the earth!

Ondaatje throughout his writings, has discarded the theory of art for art sake and explored the art for life sake philosophy. Ondaatje’s novels are true reflections of life, dealing with various aspects of world society and its various problems. He makes us wake to the fact that heterogeneity is the most natural form of life on the planet earth and how we should have respect for all, or it is a replica of hell in minutes. As a post-modern writer his writings may play a very positive role in the reconstruction of a damaged human society. He has gone straight to the heart of the sensible issues of our time—the problem and the tragedy of our present complex situations like class bigotry and civil
war. For such theme, Ondaatje gets overwhelming responses around the world as far as his fictional works are concerned.

After the long discussion throughout the various chapters, it becomes clear that Ondaatje's advices, messages and suggestions lead us to realize the profound importance of men, engendering genuine respect, love and faith. Ondaatje demands no power for a better society but peace; he demands a revolution without any bloodshed. Ondaatje also has not tried to justify the unjust rather tries to justify the just for a better chaos free society where social equilibrium and equality should be maintained. It is Ondaatje's love for the entire mankind, transcending all limitations of race, class, and creed, and all geographical boundaries of nations, all of which are man-made—which is at the root of Ondaatje's thought provoking and prolific writings. In Coming Through Slaughter, In the Skin of a Lion, The English Patient and Anil's Ghost, Ondaatje has endeavored to glorify the essential dignity of man and inspire compassion in the readers' hearts for the beleaguered, neglected and the downtrodden as discussed during the analysis of the selected novels. All the novels exhibit that it does not matter how different the forms in which mankind looks on earth: it is still far and wide one and the same human species. So, the discussion leads us to conclude how Ondaatje honestly seeks to create a multicultural chaos-free society where minority will live in peace with majority.

Ondaatje's works make us familiar about our present day colonialism which lingers in attractively disguised forms in a more controlling way. The previous long history of the white Europeans' colonization has already left unforgettable wounds and scars: the seeds of racism and casteism are among the most heinous ones. The indigenous people's unity and integrity of these colonized nations was weakened deeply, for the foreign power reigned more than two centuries. Unfortunately another version of the global power-politics has begun in the twenty first century as technocracy, stronger nations are instigating weaker countries or former colonized countries to engage in bloody battle of inter-nation conflicts. They are no more sitting as administrators inside the colonized countries but the ethno-racial problem is still prevailing in our today's society as running in different names and forms. Moreover, most of the powerful nations like America (U.S.A.) exclusively, are trying to expand their 'economic imperialism' throughout the world in order to capture the foreign economy. The Western ideologies,
mainly American ideologies directly or indirectly have apprehended the world power, especially ‘Third world’ countries through capitalism and economic imperialism. So, despite complete freedom, the former colonized countries “are still fighting to attain sovereignty ... [and] living under the constant menace of imperialist aggression” (Fanon 10).

Ondaatje emerges as a marginalized hybrid writer revolting for the subjugated people like the African-Americans in the United States of America; oppression and elimination of minority ethnic groups in Canada, and oppression of the Tamils by Sinhala-dominated government in Sri Lanka. With new enquiry and a great amount of legitimacy, the diaspora or immigrant writers like Ondaatje, V. S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie present the life of these neglected people as they themselves have experienced it through various incidents and situations.

It was a challenging task for Ondaatje to bring forward the unheard voices of so many suffering groups and people to the readers, so that they have a chance to be heard by the world. His writings confidently achieved a large number of readers and audiences as seen after the film adaptation of his novel The English Patient. His first novel Coming Through Slaughter talks about a neglected black musician Buddy Bolden and his coterie. He records, how for a long time the women of this society had no choice but to be black prostitutes, his fellow black musicians, and black oppressed ancestors who had been discarded by white dominated society as ‘Others’. Musician like Buddy Bolden and his contemporary musicians struggled a lot to establish their socio-cultural identity in white dominated and biased society. Here, one neglected community can speak for many other neglected communities of the world and one victim like Buddy Bolden can speak for many victims. Bolden is a representative of all those lost voices, who despite being endowed with godly gifts and avant-gardes have remained unknown to the world. To give him a name would name the rest victims and marginalized people of the world. Here Bolden’s “Blackness is vital not because it represents the ‘primitive’ but because it invites engagement in a revolutionary ethos that dares to challenge and disrupt the status quo” (hooks 37). The concerned novels – Coming Through Slaughter, In the Skin of a Lion, The English Patient and Antl’s Ghost depict how Ondaatje has tried to abolish class hierarchy like ‘we’ and ‘they’, ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’, and ‘white and black’ etc. Bolden
revolted not physically rather through his talent as his music became the strongest weapon which made his contemporary white musicians jealous. Oppression of African-American community is a long past history which is covered up by 20th-century writers like Ondaatje revolting to establish their socio-cultural and political identity in white dominated society. Post-World Wars African-American writers like Richard Wright in Native Son (1940) and Ralph Ellison in The Invisible Man (1952) protested against the white rules and dominancy, later the black movement is extended by our contemporary writers like Maya Angelou, Tony Morrison, Alice Walker, Nikki Giovanni, and Terry McMillan who fought and still are fighting for women’s rights in white dominated society. Their writings prove how racial discrimination, nationalism and ethno-national conflict still are prevailing throughout our today’s world and are still matters of concern in America.

Ondaatje’s each novel like Coming Through Slaughter, In the Skin of a Lion, and The English Patient voiced for those people who were most of the time thought to be ineligible for ‘history’ written by hegemonic ‘white hand’. In In the Skin of a Lion, he mainly focuses on the marginalized people with sympathetic eyes and highlights the dictatorship of capitalism over immigrant minorities on the other hand. Such dictatorship and discrimination are still prevailing in today’s world. Bourgeoisie class uses the minority labourers till their last breath as well as discard them from socio-political and economic rights for their maximum benefits by paying very low wages. Labourers try hard to change an uncivilized place from its primitive and primordial world of ‘darkness’ to modernism, but their story, name and fame are submerged, though these marginalized proletariat erect the basic infrastructure of a country like roads, rail lines, bridges, buildings and water purifiers. After discussion of the chapter four “Untold Story of the Minority Immigrants in Anil’s Ghost”, we can say that Ondaatje has tried to create a ‘space’ for all those marginalized workers who are working painstakingly for the betterment of their families. He is creating a room for these marginalized people, so that they have a chance to be heard by readers.

In the discussed chapters, it is shown how Michael Ondaatje, without any virility and prejudice, has tried to recreate the forgotten history of Wars’ periods profoundly. During the discussion and assessment of his fictions, the different wars like the American
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Civil War (1860/61-63), the First World War (1914-1918) and Second World War (1939-1945), the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-1990), have been highlighted by Oondaatje which we can relate to our today's muted war and incidents, which caused mind-numbing violence, loss of innumerable lives of common people. After this incisive research, it can be said that the main reason behind any conflict and war is excessive nationalism which may take countless innocent lives. In our contemporary politics, ethnic, national, and religious identities which are pervasive in nature, are strongly implicated in mass violence. Such mass violence and atrocities have not stopped yet, rather running in different names in our contemporary times, e.g. the Israel-Palestinian war, the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India, Buddhist-Muslim conflict in Myanmar and Sinhalese-Tamil conflict in Sri Lanka, and black-white conflict in America etc. We know that violence has not brought any fruitful result to anyone. If we look at history, we can say that violence cannot bring any satisfaction to anyone. The whole concerned discussion has focused on how Oondaatje has tried to eliminate all nation-state conflicts in search of new identity and new nation and new culture which will go beyond the barriers of caste, creed and nationalism. Oondaatje does not forbid anyone to nurture a sense of possessiveness for his/her own motherland, culture and traditions, but forbids to cut oneself off from the people of other nations by means of borders in their mind and around their lands. Such sense of possessiveness as an antidemocratic element may take the lives of minority people in the name of its nation's safety as executed, still executing, by Myanmar Buddhists against Rohingya Muslims and Israelis against Palestinians. In such context, most important conflict comes to be known as border conflict, which mainly occurs due to excessive nationalism demanding expansion of its geographical boundaries, e.g. border conflict between India and Pakistan, India and China, dispute between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, the South Korea and North Korea conflict etc.

Extreme nationalism, no doubt, always takes human beings away from humanity to inhumanity, from the civil to savage as done in so many histories of so many nations. Partition of India in 1947 is the closest example. But unfortunately, we don't learn from history. We are unable to understand and stop it as a continuing menace by the Americans in the Middle East Asia by engaging the arm forces there to capture the lands, its power and economy. So, while a powerful nation playing the role of a colonizer is
busy to expand its geographical boundary, the minority people like Rohingya Muslims, minority people or ‘boat people’ or ‘stateless entities’ are fighting to get a bit of land for their inhabitation and safety. So, the border issue or territorial dispute is still a matter of concern for today’s world which has a link to the post-modern writers like Ondaatje. He wants a world without border and to see the world as a single entity without any racial and ethnic biases. As a concerned postcolonial writer, he debunks “the nationalist /fundamentalist assertion of a homogeneous national self that seeks to erase divisions [and] contradictions” (Silva 82).

Ondaatje’s novels not only highlight the problem of excessive nationalism but also suggest resolution which can be achieved, through changes in governmental policies, proper maintenance of external and internal forces, media, propaganda, and perceptions regarding power and economy.

All the chapters also highlight how he wants every submissive people of the world to become aware of the complete picture of inequalities as well as assert them to participate in the fight for justice to succor the countless acquitted wars’ victims. In his novels, Ondaatje has tried to uncover the politics of hate and terror through the suffering of each and every character who struggled a lot to unbury the lost identities of their own as well guiltless victims of the Wars. So, he “decided to write from the point of view of people who are not involved in the politics, not involved actively in the war” (Dave 2006).

After analyzing Ondaatje’s discussion it can be said that Ondaatje wants to disrupt the deterministic understanding of history and debunk the modern and post-modern notions of nation-state. “We are criminals in the eyes of the earth, not only for having committed crimes, but because we know that crimes have been committed” (Ondaatje 50). If we don’t voice against such crime, remain silent and tolerate silently, it would become an issue of ‘national disease’. Ondaatje cannot remain silent, rather shows deep concern for these ‘Others’, surviving all pains at the margins: which is one of the distinguishing characteristics of his fictions. It cannot be stopped as long as we don’t open our eyes and acknowledge what is happening, there will be no progress. Nationalism, racism and ethnocentrism blaze like fire and can easily reduce human civilization into the ashes if they are allowed to reign and run without any control. He
dreams to formulate a new concept of a nation as he jolts us out to keep in mind that as human beings we have to craft uniqueness in any nonaligned land without any segregation. The need of the time is rather amalgamation of multifaceted people above varied castes, creeds and cultures. Ondaatje tries hard to integrate the mottled human beings connecting them above the frivolous and flimsy barriers of racism, ethnocentrism and gender prejudices in his novel *The English Patient*. In the novel, Ondaatje puts forward and tries to mingle four different nationalities like Canadian nurse Hana, Hungarian explorer Almasy, Indian Sikh Kip and an Italian thief turned spy Caravaggio in a desolated villa in order to generate a new community by destroying their pre-conceived national culture and identities. So, Ondaatje like some postcolonial novelists Salman Rushdie, Meera Syal, Hanif Kureishi, Monica Ali, and Amitav Ghosh strides out to hook up the multicultural bodies, multi-ethnic or multiracial groups in a single rope where universal love and brotherhood should turn out to be imperative elements of union transcending place, time and nation. We need to evade ethnic, nationalist, and religious sentiments soon under the light of modernity and rationality. For the world is one — we have no right to divide it and create chasms between one and another. Let there be light, *once again*. 
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INTERVIEWS


