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

*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 revoltling 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 Anil’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
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 Ondaatje 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 Ondaatje 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. Ondaatje 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 as 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 unison 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*. 
Works Cited


