

Chapter II

The Zeitgeist of the Postmodern World

The twentieth century has witnessed the most remarkable achievements of the world such as globalisation, transformation of colonial power, rise of modern education and blooming of secular political ideologies. During this period, the exceptional growth of science and technology has influenced every aspect of life as it has laid intricate developments in various scientific realms including genetic and molecular biology, subatomic physics and space research. The world has encountered considerable growth of art forms as well, such as painting, music, literature and the emergence of a new artistic media such as cinema and recorded music.

Michael Ondaatje criticises the condition of postmodernity by enumerating various challenges and transformations which have engulfed the world from the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the twentieth century. He avers that the capitalistic attitude of the colonisers plays a vital role in shaping the zeitgeist of the postmodern world. The imperialistic policies of the colonisers have influenced both the socio-political scenario and the cultural condition of the colonised countries. Simon Malpas in the book, *The Postmodern* affirms that the postmodern theory ought to make an analytical study on the condition of postmodernity. He defines that,

. . . postmodernity is a social formation that takes root in the last years of the nineteenth century, puts forth its first shoots amid the social, economic and military conflicts that scarred the first half of the twentieth, and comes into its own about the middle of that century as it replaces the modern as the dominant form of cultural and social organisation. (34)

Ondaatje articulates the apparent shortcomings of the modernists' prospect of enlightening the people by the dissemination of faith on science and reason. He conforms to Jurgen Habermas' idea of the postmodern as adverted in the book, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*. To Habermas, postmodernity signifies "the end of the Enlightenment" or, more precisely, it constitutes a movement "beyond the horizon of the tradition of reason in which European modernity once understood itself . . ." (4). He deliberately shatters the high hopes raised by the Enlightenment policy of the colonisers by delegitimising the modernist social theory of political repression and cultural homogenisation. Instead, he cherishes cultural heterogeneity and exposes the violence behind the repressive strategies adopted by the colonisers and the rulers of the country.

In the novels *The English Patient* and *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje cogitates that the Western world had averted their interest towards exploration for hundreds of years after the fifth century BC. He remarks that the period between four hundred and twenty five BC to the nineteenth century was completely devoid of any explorations except for the few river seekers of the nineteenth century. He explicates that the twentieth century has seen a quantum leap in the spirit of exploration due to the process of colonisation. The imperialists assailed most parts of the world for material and economic pursuits. They claimed supremacy over land and people in the countries they dominated.

Ondaatje evinces that the capitalist ideologies of exploration and ascendancy over the unexplored parts of world like Africa has served as impetus to war between the nations. The disastrous wars like world wars and civil wars have shaken the entire world with its massive destructive power. It has crumbled the hope of evolving a consummate state of living in the characters like Kirpal Singh, Almásy, and Hana in *The English Patient*; Anil,

Sarath and Ananda in *Anil's Ghost*. The horrendous events of the war have made their life more dubious, disruptive and tenuous. They have confronted the mass tortures, ethnic cleansings, genocides, holocausts, and migrations. The world has experienced the senseless killings and horrors evoked by the threat of nuclear annihilation, death camps and death squads. Violence encountered by the common man highlights the horrors inflicted on the human race by the imperialists and the rulers of the country.

The detestable living conditions of the world epitomise the decline of entire civilisation. The life in the aftermath of war is horrendous as they are haunted by the impending sense of dangers around them. In the novel *Anil's Ghost*, the traumatic events like the assassination of political leaders namely President Katagula and the smaller disasters such as gunshots proliferate on a massive scale leading to war and revolutions. The random violence that occurred during the war has threatened the peaceful existence of people even after the end of the war. The exposure to these catastrophic events has created existential crisis for millions of people; the question of survival and the terror of living have perturbed the consciousness of the postmodern individuals. The memories of the trauma they endured and the threats posed by advanced scientific weapons affect the possibility of forming a future.

Ondaatje discusses the propensity with which scientific and technological expertise are channelised for the purpose of war and genocide in the novels, *The English Patient* and *Anil's Ghost*. The destructions brought in as a result of the use of deadly weapons like atomic bombs cause serious problems for mankind and in fact, make the future of human beings very uncertain and disruptive. The political and military institutions that dominated and controlled the natural environment and its human inhabitants have exercised their

scientific knowledge over people and thereby, lead to mass reification and ultimately extermination of human life. The effort taken by Ondaatje to reveal the evil effects of technological advances replicates his intention to eradicate the malevolent attitude of the power seekers.

The quest to become the super power is one of the prime factors that has led to the chaotic condition of the postmodern world. Ondaatje similarly highlights as to how the multicultural scenario of the world which accelerated during the period of colonisation becomes one of the prominent features of the postmodern world inciting inter-ethnic conflicts in countries like Sri Lanka. In the novels, *Running in the Family*, *In the Skin of a Lion* and *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje vindicates as to how the intermingling of people from various countries during the process of colonisation has led to the multicultural atmosphere in the colonised countries like Sri Lanka, Canada and New Orleans.

The colonisers believed that the hybridisation of the natives would facilitate them in according smooth governance in these colonies. They entertained differences and duality among the natives to the extent that even after the expulsion of the colonisers, the disruptions that surfaced during the colonial period between the natives like Emil Daniels in *Running in the Family* prevails with them and results in hybrid arena. Fredrick Jameson argues in the article “Postmodernism and Consumer Society” that postmodernism is “a periodising concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order” (113).

Ondaatje complies several factors involved in the formation of multicultural environment so as to explicate how the process of migration is considered as an

indispensable phenomenon in the postmodern world. The imperialistic policy of waging war against the third world countries has induced millions of people like Daniel Stoyanoff, Nicholas Temelcoff, and Ambrose Small to migrate from their homeland to distant lands such as Canada. Anil in *Anil's Ghost* and Ondaatje himself in *Running in the Family* have migrated to foreign lands seeking better living. The mass scale migration of people has blurred national boundaries and has exposed significant features of individual cultures to be accepted by the whole world. The notion of social and cultural plurality activated by multicultural environment has disrupted the modernist faith in social and cultural unity. Hans Bak in the article entitled "Site of Passage: The City as a Place of Exile in Contemporary North-American Multicultural Literature" states that in the postmodern world:

. . . the city becomes a multicultural collage or kaleidoscope – a contested and ever changing site of conflicting voices, cultures and beliefs – it permits itself to be read most effectively as a postmodernist arena of plurality, fluidity, discontinuity and difference, less a static mosaic than an ongoing process of ever-shifting interactions and dialogues between a multiplicity of voices and perspectives . . . the city becomes the territory where the postmodern drama of irony and indeterminacy – of self, of language – most forcefully plays itself out. (285-86)

The examination of the impact of colonisation on the cultural condition of the postmodern world helps in comprehending the hybrid scenario as it is the defining base with which the living condition of the migrants is determined. The process of colonisation has brought in several changes in the economic condition of the colonised countries. The

British colonisers employed the skilled immigrants from countries like India to work in the British army and made the unskilled workers from Canada to work in the construction works, tanneries, and factories. Ondaatje portrays the bourgeois tendency of the colonisers who inspite of utilising the manual labour of the migrants does not provide suitable living and working conditions. The author writes about the extent to which the immigrants like Bolden in *Coming Through Slaughter*; Nicholas and Ambrose in the novel, *In the Skin of a Lion* are marginalised in the new land. They lead a life of extreme poverty as they are segregated from the rest of the society and are not provided with adequate medical and boarding facilities in the new land. The discrimination they endure inturn prompts them to involve in hazardous and unlawful means of earning money.

The study spotlights the challenges faced by the migrants in the new land so as to bring considerable reforms in the condition of people throughout the world. Ondaatje's novels such as *Coming Through Slaughter*, *Running in the Family*, *In the Skin of a Lion*, *The English Patient* and *Anil's Ghost* chart the zeitgeist of the postmodern world by recording the multitudinous transformations that have swept across the world during and after the period of colonisation. His novels revolve around scenes of horrific violence witnessed or perpetrated as a matter of day-to-day existence in the world.

Ondaatje investigates both the constructive and destructive role of science and technology in the future of mankind. Moreover, he examines the hybrid nature of the world by foregrounding the process of migration as a significant development in the age of globalisation. The migration of people across borders has enabled the merging of people of various cultural background, in the mean time, this has resulted in the classification of people based on ethnic differences. He emphasises the pervasive social disintegration and

cultural fragmentation that has influenced the entire world in general and Italy, Sri Lanka, Canada and New Orleans in particular.

In the novel *The English Patient*, Ondaatje accentuates the repercussions of Second World War on the life of the people in the postmodern world. He exposes the sombre pictures of the post world war horror by exposing the ravages engendered by the colonial aggression. The dismayed natural world and the baffling experience of the characters like Almásy, Madox, and Kirpal Singh embodies the savagery of the British officials who posed threat to the serenity of the society by exercising their power and money to dominate the world.

Ondaatje enunciates the ordeals of the explorers like Almásy and Madox to adjudicate the destructive impact of colonisation on the real nature lovers. Almásy considers that with the outset of the world war, the British employed several people to map the greater part of the Gilf Kebir Plateau and the Libyan deserts of Africa. They promoted the enterprise of the explorers by providing them with the manuals of exploration that are prepared by privately funded agencies. Moreover, they developed correspondence with the Geographical Society in London and arranged several lectures to orient the explorers to the dangers during the expedition.

Almásy attends several lectures organised by the British officials and feels that “These lectures are given by sunburned, exhausted men who, like Conrad’s sailors” (141) travelled all over the world. The desert becomes a strategic arbiter of military wins and losses as the mightiness of the countries is determined by the extent of the area occupied. Robert Clark observes in the article “Knotting Desire in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*” that “Maps are laws inscribed on the earth. They mark jurisdictions and

possessions; they include and exclude along a line where the power of one ruler comes up to another” (65).

The colonisers’ prospect of civilising the colonised countries is in reality aimed at expanding their sphere of influence. They have the belief that by charting the geographical terrain of the unknown lands that has been in existence from time immemorial, they become the discoverers of the land. Almásy vocalises that, “The ends of the earth are never the points on a map that colonists push against . . . the first step by a white man across a great river, the first sight (by a white eye) of a mountain that has been there forever” (150-51) as he believes that colonists exploited the natural resources of the countries for their materialistic benefits. The financial and military despotism of the British have helped them in claiming power over different countries of the world. They have espoused the concepts like trade and power, money and war as the guidelines during the period of colonisation.

Ondaatje exposes the true adventurous spirit of explorers like Almásy whose sole aim is to render a unique contribution to the society by sharing his experiences of exploration with the people around him. He regards power and finance as temporary and futile elements of life as he believes that the passage of time will evanesce the claims of having been the first eyes to discover the land and superannuate the boasting that they are the strongest army and the cleverest merchants of the world. Ondaatje quotes Herodotus whose words were, “*For those cities that were great in earlier times must have now become small, and those that were great in my time were small in the time before. . . . Man’s good fortune never abides in the same place*” (151).

Almásy and his companions leave the safe domains of their home in search of adventure. They are ready to face the primitive challenges of the desert. They have the

ability to recognise any part of the town by glimpsing the skeleton of its map. Almásy considers the desert as a safe haven for people as it evades the markers of race and ethnicity. He and his colleagues compose their experiences in books exposing the tremendous glory of the deserts of Africa so as to offer a point of reference for the future explorers who undertake expeditions to the deserts. They are selfless and dedicated in their pursuit of knowledge but their expertise becomes one of the instruments of the Empire.

Almásy's accounts of the explorations in the Egyptian and Libyan deserts successively become "one of the theatres of war" (143) as they are used to determine the territorial limits of the Allies. In the article "Pastiche and Archetypal Symbolism in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*" A. Clare Brandabur posits that "the expertise of the Orientalists of the nineteenth century, the archaeologists and drawers of maps, the specialists who loved the desert but whose findings were used by their various governments to exert power over the Third World" (108). The knowledge that the colonisers gain from these explorers are in turn utilised to destroy these innocent explorers.

Ondaatje avouches lie and ownership as the two vices of war. He represents the pure scientific aspect of exploration through Madox who commits suicide when he finds it difficult to tolerate the cruel realities of war, "Someone's war was slashing apart his delicate tapestry of companions" (256). The explorers sacrifice their life for the sake of expedition but their contribution is considered trivial. Instead, the colonisers encourage the contributions of the members of the expedition who betray the sanctity of the desert.

The scientific aspect of explorations is replaced by the camouflage of agents like George Clifton whose motive is to exploit scientific knowledge for colonial expansion. Clifton, one of the members of the British Intelligence and who has joined the Almásy-

Madox expedition during 1931-37 as an amateur, has been spying on the group as the desert is being controlled by the armies during the war. “He was not just an innocent Englishman. . . . As far as the English were concerned, he was keeping an eye on your strange group in the Egyptian-Libyan desert” (267). By exposing the wicked intentions of Clifton, Ondaatje signifies the importance of imbibing moral values.

The conflict between the nations degrades the feelings of humanity and compassion towards the fellow beings. The war has made the people very wary and suspicious of everything around them. Almásy, who has been in deep love with Clifton’s wife, Katharine, rescues her burnt body from the plane crash. He seeks the help of the officials to assist him in nursing her back to life but they haul him up into the truck as they suspect him to be a “possible second-rate spy” (267). He could not save her life as his movement is constantly spied over by the Allied troops. He finds only her decayed body when he manages to enter the cave with the help of the German spies. He notices that her whole body is covered with bright pigments reflecting the work of cartography marked by nature, by herbs, stones and the ash of acacia.

The Second World War has littered the entire country with dead, half-eaten animals and with the rotten bodies of people hanging upside from the bridges. Ondaatje exposes the horrors of the war on the European countries by presenting the damaged condition of Italy within the larger context of Europe in ruins. In this scenario of chaos, the villa located outside Florence remains besieged for a month as it has been regarded as the main target during the onslaught of war. Entire town is torn apart by fire shells and most parts of the villa’s top storey are crumbled under explosions.

Ondaatje expresses that in the postmodern world of war, the city is also considered unsafe for people to live. The delayed action bombs are mined into the walls of public buildings and nearly every vehicle that crossed the road has been rigged. The retreating German army has left pencil mines within the musical instruments with an intention that the returning owners who open up the piano would face the danger of losing their hands. The Germans have retaliated by killing ten Italians for every German killed. The bombs are attached to taps, to the spines of books and into the fruit trees. The harbour scuttled ships are freshly mined and a German who witnesses the horrific state of the world, confesses that “there were thousands of bombs hidden in the harbour section of the city that were wired to the dormant electrical system” (294).

The sappers like Kirpal Singh become suspicious of any normal object placed in the room. They find it impossible to trust anything as concrete at the time of war since there is no permanence to the existence of things around them. The corpses too are considered to be very dangerous as they are sometimes mined and are blown up in the mid air. Ondaatje apprehends that with the end of war, life becomes plainly absurd. The sappers are not permitted to go home even after the end of war as they are entrusted with the task of diffusing the bombs mined by the Germans. Ondaatje presents the post world war society as

. . . a Heroic Age of bomb disposal, a period of individual prowess, when urgency and a lack of knowledge and equipment led to the taking of fantastic risks. . . . It was, however, a Heroic Age whose protagonists remained obscure, since their actions were kept from the public for reasons

of security. It was obviously undesirable to publish reports that might help the enemy to estimate the ability to deal with weapons. ' (196)

In the postmodern world, the entire society is falling apart as the fast pace of technological development together with great discoveries in science are frequently misused for destructive purposes. Keith Tester in the book entitled *The Life and Times of Post-modernity* opines that the “technology which had been developed in an effort to establish and defend the fabricated order of modernity is, from the point of view of the post-modern, quite beyond the bounds of reflexivity” (86).

Ondaatje views the process of setting mine fields as the most abominable strategy of treating an entire civilian population as the enemy. He condemns the manipulations of the constructive power of science for destructive purposes. Natania Rosenfeld comments in the article “Less Light: The End(s) of Aestheticism in Pater, Ondaatje and Sebald” that the novel highlights “the incongruity of natural and manmade disasters. The flash of a bomb blast may resemble lightning, but the former indicates man’s terrible manipulations of nature, not his harmony with, or even his mimesis, of natural world” (358-59).

The war office has taken over the responsibility for bomb disposal, and then it is gradually handed over to Royal Engineers. Twenty five bomb disposal units have been set up during this period. “Eighty percent of bombs dropped by airplanes over Britain were thin-walled, general-purpose bombs. They usually ranged from a hundred pounds to a thousand” (195). The most dangerous bombs are those dropped from low altitudes and which are not activated until they are landed. These unexploded bombs buried itself in the cities and fields and remained dormant until their trembler contacts are disturbed by a

farmer stick, a car wheel's nudge, the bounce of a tennis ball against the casing and then they would explode.

Ondaatje imputes the machinations of capitalist reification by presenting the appallingly high casualty rates in bomb disposal units in 1940 when Britain was caught in a state of siege after the falling of France. The life expectancy of the sappers during this period has been about ten weeks. In the month of August 1940, the blitz has begun and the sappers notice that there are almost "2,500 unexploded bombs" (196) mined in all parts of the country. The roads have been closed and the factories and streets are deserted owing to the dangers of the bomb. The ratio has increased gradually and by the month of "September the number of live bombs has reached 3,700" (196). The death toll has also increased continuously during this period.

Ondaatje considers that the Second World War has destroyed the utopian vision of the world by corroding the peaceful life of people all around the world. The modern inventions of man like Atomic bombs and other delayed action bombs have ruined the peace of people. There is no safety and security for the lives of the common man who remains ignorant of the devastating schemes of the rulers. He regards that the instrumentalisation of reason in technology has taken one of its most perverted forms. The linguistic adaption to death contains the schema of modern mathematics. *"If a man's life could be capitalized as X, the risk at Y, and the estimated damage from explosion at V, then a logician might contend that if V is less than X over Y, the bomb should be blown up; but if V over Y is greater than X, an attempt should be made to avoid explosion in Situ"* (224). The routine life of people is completely shattered with the explosion of the atomic bomb. Almásy finds it difficult to continue his mundane tasks like reading after the war,

since the war has ended with an event so terrible that even the act of lighting a match feels dangerous. He alludes to the world wars as the most terrible incidents in the history of world.

Ondaatje similarly demonstrates as to how war collapses not only the individuals but also a nation by examining the impact of civil war in the novels, *Running in the Family* and *Anil's Ghost*. He ascertains that the successive waves of domination have perturbed the amicable life of Sri Lankans. The country achieved independence in 1948 but the hopes of forming a democratic nation have collapsed when the ethnic conflict between the different factions of society began to disturb the edifice of the nation. He enumerates that the extent of differences between various cultural heritages, religion, and language along with the exasperating memories of colonial subjugation have complicated the efforts of Sri Lankans from forming a fair, representative government. The conflicts which arose as a result of the racial contestation have resulted in an abominable civil war. He spotlights the effort taken by Anil and Ananda to bring about peace in the society.

In the novel *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje discusses how the colonisation of the country by the Chinese and the Europeans has resulted in the rapid inflow of people from different parts of the world. He explicates the impingement of European values on the Sri Lankan culture. John Russell in the article "Travel Memoir as Nonfiction Novel: Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*" comments that the country offers "a merger between the romantic past and what may be hoped for despite the third-world trials besetting the country" (26).

The European countries such as Portugal, Spain and England have regarded the island as a colony for exploitation purpose and not for settlement. The pursuit of wealth

has been the main objective of Europeans and they did not consider the island as their home. They dislike the inquisitive natives but they become obsessed with the delicate smell of the cinnamon and tried to become wealthy with the spices obtained from the land. To them, the island is a paradise, so they plundered everything good that the island possessed. It is this, which Ondaatje highlights as the capitalistic attitude of the colonisers in the novel *Running in the Family*, “Every conceivable thing was collected and shipped back to Europe: cardamoms, pepper, silk, ginger, sandalwood, mustard oil . . . seven kinds of cinnamon, pearl and cochineal. *A perfumed sea*” (80-81).

The Europeans who settled in Sri Lanka intermingled with the native population and created a hybrid environment. They encouraged the immigration of people from different countries to work as labourers and soldiers in the island. They claimed authority over the inhabitants of the island by exercising their language and religion with power. They encouraged intermarriage in the society. Ondaatje explicates the hybrid nature of the people in the island by citing the origin of his family name. He relates that though his father has claimed himself to be a Ceylon Tamil, his ancestral heritage is extremely ambiguous, “my own ancestor arriv[ed] in 1600, a doctor who cured the residing governor’s daughter with a strange herb and was rewarded with land, a foreign wife, and a new name which was a Dutch spelling of his own. Ondaatje. *A parody of the ruling language*” (60).

Ondaatje admits that his name resonates an imperfect blending of two cultures where a foreign spelling is assigned to the native name. He reckons that the hybrid population of the country does not share an equal status with that of the rulers. Sangeetha Ray in the article “Memory, Identity, Patriarchy” also affirms that though Ondaatje’s

ancestors belong to the European ancestry, they “did not consider themselves superior to the indigenous inhabitants of the island . . . they broke off contact with the ruling hegemony . . .” (44).

The mixed ancestry of Sri Lankans serves as a constant reminder of the unfortunate effects of the British miscegenation during the period of colonisation. The native inhabitants of the land have acquired new blood and new names as a product of intermarriage. The interaction between the Tamils, Sinhalese, Burghers, Dutch and colonial English has forged a Sri Lankan identity almost impossible to categorise. Ondaatje exposes the absurd state of the people in the country by relating the inability of people to ascertain their nationality. They acknowledge the dubious nature of their nationality by saying, ““God alone knows, your excellency”” (32).

This has engendered everyone to be vaguely related and their cultural and ethnic differences are almost indefinable. The interrelationships between the different national and cultural identities that are formed have created a complex social network in contemporary Sri Lanka. In the novel, *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje alleges that during the twenties and thirties:

Everyone was vaguely related and had Sinhalese, Tamil, Dutch, British and Burgher blood in them going back many generations. There was a large social gap between this circle and the Europeans and English who were never part of the Ceylonese community. The English were seen as transients, snobs and racists, and were quite separate from those who had intermarried and who lived here permanently. (31-32)

The British imperialism has brought out several changes in the socio-political conditions of the country. The introduction of road and rail services has led to the remarkable changes in the country that is cross hatched with narrow routes. The disordered appearance of the country with the jungles encroaching upon the villages has been cleared and is made habitable. The road and rail map constructed during this period resemble a miniature garden full of red and black birds. Moreover, they have brought the colonised people in contact with its political culture of parliamentary democracy, directly or indirectly.

The rapid influence of industrialisation and westernised system of education that has been introduced by the colonial rulers prompted Sri Lankans to establish a democratic style of government when they attained independence. However, the issues that has aroused as a result of language differences have set the initial fuses for the conflict that extended over decades. Chelva Kanaganayakam in the article “Dancing in the Rarefied Air” acknowledges the fact that “Sri Lanka underwent significant changes in the name of decolonization, an example of which was the change from English to Sinhala as the official language in 1956” (52-53).

‘The Sinhala Only Act’, which became the law in 1956, recognised Sinhala as the official language of the country. The official business was decided to be conducted in the language spoken by the majority of the population. The citizens speaking other languages like Tamil felt that they were alienated by this gesture and became violent when they lost their jobs as they were unable to learn Sinhala language quickly. The war in Sri Lanka that initially erupted as a result of language issues has ostensibly pitted two ethnic groups against each other—the Tamils and Sinhalese. The terror that is generated in Sri Lanka

slowly eroded the deep tradition of multiculturalism, cultural hybridity, and peaceful coexistence of the people of different religions—Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims and Christians.

The tensions that erupted as a result of the ethno-linguistic and religious conflicts after independence have escalated during the 1970s. Ondaatje remarks that the year 1971 is known as the “year of the Insurgence” (103). Thousands of young men from every walk of life started rebelling against the government. The age of the insurgents mostly ranges from fifteen to twenty. They lead a very secluded life hiding themselves in the jungle reserves at Wilpatu and Yala where they survive by consuming the wildlife. The pride of the insurgents over their uniforms of blue trousers with a stripe down the side and of their tennis shoes suggests their commitment. They involve themselves in preparing home-made bombs with nails and scraps of metal so as to utilise them at the time of revolt.

The insurgents participate in various revolutionary activities. They attack the police station and the radio stations of the country. They ransack several houses, stripping them of everything—food, utensils, radios and clothing. They even loot several local government offices and seize several files that revealed the location of every registered weapon in the country. Ondaatje observes that the insurgents are a strange mixture of innocence, determination and anarchy. He illustrates this by commenting on the nature of the insurgents who began to play games when some of them are involved in the official business of collecting the notorious shotguns, “the rest of the insurgents had put down their huge collection of weapons, collected from all over Kegalle, and persuaded my younger sister Susan to provide a bat and a tennis ball. Asking her to join them, they proceeded to play a game of cricket on the front lawn. They played for most of the afternoon” (104).

In the novel *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje extrapolates the massive violence that followed with the emergence of the insurgent groups in Sri Lanka. The grassroots insurgency has been smashed by the Sri Lankan government in 1971, with the imprisonment of the youthful revolutionaries. There have been continual racial attacks and political killings during the emergency period from 1983. Ondaatje adverts the period between mid 1980s to the early 1990s as an era of sustained, unpredictable inter-ethnic violence in Sri Lanka. The conflict between the dominant Buddhist Sinhalese and the minority Hindu Tamils has become more complex. He traces the conflict between three forces: “The terrorism of the separatist guerrilla groups, who were fighting for a homeland in the north. The insurrection of the insurgents in the south, against the government. The counterterrorism of the special forces against both of them” (42-43).

The country has witnessed extreme cases of violence where several armed gangs and death squads carried out executions and disappearances. Ondaatje in *Anil's Ghost* states that there “was killing and hiding the evidence. *Every side*. This is an unofficial war, no one wants to alienate the foreign powers. So it's secret gangs and squads. Not like Central America. The government was not the only one doing the killing” (17). The idea of violence and massacres are inbred in the bones of individuals and communities fighting in the name of nation and freedom. Ondaatje views the Sri Lankan emergency as grounded on “a mad logic” (186), where the deeds and motives of all sectors of people defy any rational explanation. The terrible occurrence of the country creates an aura of unreality in the lives of the victims of war.

In the shadow of war and politics there came to be surreal turns of cause and effect. At a mass grave found in Naipattimunai in 1985, bloodstained

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, and the following day the president of the Citizen's Committee – who had brought the police to the location – was arrested. (42)

The war has destabilised the social conditions of the country. The society has undergone a significant transition from an innocent time towards the perpetual waves of violence seeping across the country. Ondaatje estimates that during the initial stages of war, more than three hundred casualties have been brought in as a result of the explosions but when the weapons improved, the casualty rate has also reached its pinnacle. The grenades are begun to be used during the war in the north-central province. The 'international violence' in March 1984 has devoured the lives of millions of young men. They have lost their limbs and life as a result of the mines, grenades, and mortar shells. He avers that the country has survived in a lackadaisical way due to the fierceness of the war.

In the novel *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje actualises that several attempts have been taken by the Centre for Human Rights in Geneva, an organisation to bring about a change in the condition of the people. He states that, "We are often criminals in the eyes of the earth, not only for having committed crimes, but because we know the crimes have been committed" (54). The complaints from Amnesty International and other civil rights groups have been sent to the centre in Geneva but President Katugala has claimed no knowledge of organised campaigns of murders in the island. The government eventually makes the gesture of pairing local officials with outside consultants when they are pressurised to placate the trading partners in the West. Anil who arrives Sri Lanka as a

representative of the United Nations, personifies the international juridico-political framework that recognises both the sovereignty of states and their mutual responsibilities toward the achievement of standards of justice and freedom.

Ondaatje beholds the unending sequence of violence that is generated by destructive passions in the novel. Anil believes that the idea of waging war has been ingrained in the blood of the revolutionaries. During the period of political turmoil, thousands of concomitant acts of race and politics, gang madness and financial gain have shaken the stability of the country. There have been family murders, attempted assassinations by one side or another, “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” (156).

The civil war period has been predominated by feelings of vengeance and slaughter. Ondaatje affirms that the madness of attaining glory through death lies within the structure of all civilisations. It is difficult to make any sense during the war as the quest for power is the driving force behind the acts of violence. The devastations that shook the harmony of the country express the loathsome nature of the rulers who encourage the acts of violence for the motives of power, “The way the terrorists in our time can be made to believe they are eternal if they die for the cause of their ruler” (261). He reiterates that during the time of war, the life of the individual is placed within the extremes of normal life where power takes hold of the body and charges the bare life of an individual.

Ondaatje brings out the grim record of the atrocities during the Sri Lankan emergency that began in 1983 by enumerating to full extent, the variety of sufferings that

are endured by victims of atrocities. He illustrates the cumulative emphasis on bodily putrefaction by furnishing the details of forensic pathology in USA as well as in Sri Lanka. He poses the fact of human decay as an existential truth by highlighting the investigation of forensic pathologists in Oklahoma:

They snuffed out death with music and craziness. The warnings of *carpe diem* were on gurneys in the hall. They heard the rhetoric of death over the intercom; ‘vaporization’ or ‘microfragmentation’ meant the customer in question had been blown to bits. They couldn’t miss death, it was in every texture and cell around them. (147)

The triviality with which the human corpses are treated resonate the extent to which the human lives are threatened at the time of chaos. The civil war has threatened the lives of people in the country. They regard life as an open challenge where they are prone to the endless dangers of war. Ondaatje associates the modern warfare with an apocalyptic vision. The extent of atrocities portrayed in *Anil’s Ghost* precipitates the sense of the world and humanity to the point of disintegration. Ondaatje is anxious about the present condition of his homeland due to the ravages of war which are more conspicuous in the barrenness that has overtaken the country. Lesley Higgins and Marie-Christine Leps in the article, “The Politics of Life after death: Ondaatje’s Ghost” state that the novel,

repeatedly correlates such specific brutalities to those occurring in Guatemala, China, Kurdistan, and the Congo, implying that each conflict performs a version of the others, and of larger confrontations taking place at the transnational level – together forming what many now call a ‘global civil war’ of the governed against state-sponsored wars ‘on terror’. (202)

Ondaatje demonstrates the horrors of the Sri Lankan civil war by confronting the Western and Eastern systems of examining the condition of the society. He contrasts the condition of the Cave 14—the beautiful site in a series of Buddhist cave temples before and after the war, “*When you entered, it looked as if huge blocks of salt had been carted away. The panorama of Bodhisattvas – their twenty-four rebirths – were cut out of the walls with axes and saws, the edges red, suggesting the wound’s incision*” (12). He reenumerates that the world is transient and the hope of witnessing the same beauty has become an old dream as the country has metamorphosed from its previous tranquil and peaceful state.

The gaze of Buddha’s eye encompasses all the confused events thickly covered with the conflicting passions of people. Ondaatje represents the imminent state of collapse and disintegration under the compassionate eyes of Buddha. The statues that are situated in the green terraces facing the distant north have witnessed the bloodsheds during the war as the innocent fields around the statue and the rock carvings are utilised as the places of tortures. The green grasses that surrounded the statues also represent the combustible world as the uninhabited land is mostly used to burn and hide victims. The smell of petrol and grenade pervades throughout the place and it epitomises the external sense of danger around them. “*These were fields where Buddhism and its values met the harsh political events of the twentieth century*” (300).

Ondaatje explicates the condition of the statues of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas overlooking the killing fields of the Sri Lankan emergency. The demolition of Buddha statue by the treasure hunters with metal rods is done with the hope of discovering some treasure, but they return empty handed as they do not find any treasure. This signifies the

disintegration of the lives of people who perpetrated unfair means as a way to find out a solution for hunger. The complexities of the religio-ethnic conflict and the sequence of killings followed by reprisals resist comprehension and assume an aura of unreality as each group such as Buddhist Sinhalese or the minority Hindu Tamils lay claim to its own version of truth.

Anil contemplates the atrocities committed during the civil war as the tragic confirmation of the human cost of rivalries based on nationalism and race. She notices the rapid transition in the scenario of the world after the war as the country has become a “*place of a complete crime*” (12). This widespread impact of violence on people’s lives has led to the erosion of values and traditions in the postmodern world. Her investigation has made her to realise that the accumulating horrors connote an insane sense of delirium that has enveloped the country. The death of the President in a suicide bomb represents the utter chaos and disruption brought about by the violence in the country. “The cutting action of the explosion shredded Katugala into pieces . . . the President could not be found. *Where was the President?* . . . The body, what remained of it, was not found for a long time” (294-95). The intensity of the violence has surpassed the surreal turns of cause and effect.

Ondaatje tries to contrast the life of people in the past and the present. He appends that the rulers in the past have acknowledged the opinion of people. He elucidates it by citing the life of a king in the sixth century who has ordered a few monks to be beheaded, as they did not carry out his orders. As a consequence, the King has been made to repent and suffer punishment by the public. However, in the postmodern age, people are denied any respect and concern by the rulers of the country. Crime inflicted on common man is

the same in past and present, but the only difference is that in the present scenario, people are not given any liberty and due respect.

Ondaatje contrasts Anil's rationalism and empiricism with Ananda's conventional knowledge of the world. Anil's western training has enabled her to gain confidence over the empirical evidence. She believes that by utilising her forensic techniques to determine the identity of the dead, she will be able to liberate society from political oppression and provide hope and relief to people in the country. She attributes individual guilt on the basis of empirical evidence and correlates the human tragedy of Sri Lanka's emergency to a universal condition characterised by fear. So, she prepares a report of the condition of the country to the International Human Rights organisation and thereby aims to bring about transformation in the society.

Ananda, on the other hand, regards fundamental irrationality as the cause for the civil crisis in Sri Lanka. He has based his observation in accordance with the Buddhist doctrine that claims that all existence is characterised by suffering. He imputes that suffering in the world is due to the blind craving for power. He believes that they could achieve the state of beatitude only when an individual is able to eradicate blind cravings directed to the world through a proper grasp of reality and through the recognition that humanity is the basis for peaceful life.

Ananda's act of conjoining various fragments of the statue symbolises its transition from divine detachment to a humanitarian involvement. The reconstruction of Buddha's statue reinforces Ondaatje's faith in restoring the normalcy of the country. In the process of reconstruction, Ananda's performance of the eye ceremony alludes to a form of knowledge different from that of Anil's. The Buddhist account of the awakening of the heavenly eye

provides a paradigm for compassion and offers the promise of emancipation by setting the individual self free from the disasters and horrors of the world. John Bolland in the article, “Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost: Civil Wars, Mystics, and Rationalists*” comments that

The Buddhist vision denies purpose and fatality to the phenomenal world, seeing it as condemned to an endless process of becoming and extinction, but it restores this world by making dissolution paradoxically the principle of a higher form of cohesion, and in the inclusive gaze of the Buddha’s eye it proffers a vantage point from which the fragments of the world, the disparate localized instances of grief and trauma, can be reconstituted and reconsecrated in a universal relationality. (119)

Ondaatje examines the plight of Canada like that of Sri Lanka as both these countries are known for the multicultural environment stimulated during the colonial period of British. In the novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, he posits that Canada like Sri Lanka has a long history of immigration. Canada has encountered a phenomenal increase in the influx of immigrants during the inter-war years due to the political unrest in the European countries like Macedonia, Italy, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, and Bulgaria.

The creation of nation-states in Central and Eastern Europe resulted in the persecution of minority groups. The political activists, national guerrillas and freedom fighters in Bulgaria, Turkey and Serbia were tortured and expelled from the country as large scale conflicts began to emerge in these countries. Millions of people who were left homeless and stateless sought Canada as a country of asylum. The immigrants in Ondaatje’s novel like Daniel Stoyanoff, Nicholas Temelcoff, and Ambrose Small have migrated to Canada so as to escape the religious, racial, and political persecution in their

homeland. Lack of economic opportunity and famine has prompted them to move out in search of livelihood.

Canada became the country of adoption for people of varied ethnic groups. Ondaatje evinces that the booming economic prospects of the country has attracted the political refugees from various European countries. The colonial government in Canada has encouraged immigration to their colonies as they consider it as an integral part of their trade and economic development. The immigrants have a belief that they could become wealthy by the wide scale opportunities available in the country. Ondaatje reiterates that the arena of the country is both rich and dangerous, “You went in as a sojourner and came back wealthy” (44). He exposes the dangers faced by the immigrants in Canada by relating the story of Daniel Stoyanoff who has bought a farm in his homeland with the compensation he has received for losing an arm during an accident in a meat factory. His body has become livid on the killing floors as he has lost his balance, “standing in two inches of cow blood, screaming like nothing as much as cattle, his arm gone, his balance gone” (44).

Stoyanoff feels contented with the money he receives from his employers and settles with his wife. His story has been told to every child of the region at a certain age and he becomes a hero to them “*Look*, he would say, stripping off his shirt in the Oschima high street, irritating the customers of Petroff’s outdoor bar once more, *look at what a good tailor Dedora was – no hint of stitches*. He drew an imaginary line around his good shoulder and the kids brought their eyes up close . . . and saw the alternative, the grotesque stump” (45). He is proud of his accomplishments and does not care about the losses he has

encountered during his life in Canada. He feels, “As if his arm had been a dry cow he had fooled the Canadians with” (44).

The grand future that is assured by the country in turn attracts the refugees like Nicholas who escape the political unrest of his country. He was twenty-five years old when war in Balkans began to disrupt the normal living conditions of people. He has led his life in the most impoverished condition as he has not been supplemented with sufficient amount of food and clothes. He decides to escape from his homeland as his village has been burnt in the midst of the war. He migrates without any passport since he could not afford the cost for a first or second class ticket. He perilously crosses the borders of different nations like Switzerland and France before reaching Canada. He seeks the help of the captains of ships and in fact bribes them to carry them over to the new world.

Nicholas and his friends travel in the most unhygienic condition. They sleep in the basement of the boats that are filled with most dangerous insects. They feel suffocated by the dismal atmosphere of the thick smoky compartments and long for a gasp of fresh air. Ondaatje pinpoints that “They slept in the basement of a deserted factory, doing nothing, just trying to keep warm. . . . They were six or seven days in the factory basement, unaware of time” (45). They face the most daunting problem of dealing with disease and destitution among those who arrives the country. The filthiness of the boats makes them susceptible to various diseases. They experience deliriousness during the course of their journey as they are afflicted by different forms of fever. They witness the death of their close companions but they sustain their life by keeping themselves warm until they reach Canada. They take whatever they need from the sacks of their fellow companions who died

so as to prolong their journey. They endure the unending trauma with the belief that they will be able to attain their dream of partaking in the blooming prospects of Canada.

Nicholas reaches Canada without any knowledge of the socio-political scenario of the country and gets bewildered by the zeitgeist of the new country. He is accommodated in the customs sheds along with the immigrants from other countries. The steerage passengers express a sense of relief as they enter Canada believing that they could escape the filthiness of the boats that has been covered with lice, “They began to remove the lice from each other and washed the dirt off with cold water and a cloth . . .” (46). They are also subjected to a series of medical examinations. The doctors allow them to continue over the border only when they satisfy the medical prerequisites and turn away those who suffer from communicable diseases. The immigrants who pass the inspection make their way to the farms, mines, forests or other places of employment in Canada’s heartland.

The Canadian government initially aimed at attracting agriculturalists to Western Canada but the growing demand for the labourers in the Canadian railway companies, manufacturers, and resource extraction industries prompted them to admit an increasing number of unskilled and skilled labours from foreign countries. Nicholas initially works in a Macedonian bakery. He is paid seven dollars a month with food and sleeping quarters. He seeks for better opportunities in the new land and is even ready to attain it at the cost of grave personal risks. He gradually takes up a job in construction works and his friends also start working as contract labourers in coal mines, steel mills, construction works and textile mills so as to make their lives meaningful. The immigrants who settle in the country play a significant role in shaping the Canadian identity and history by contributing in the fulfillment of the new world enterprise of the country. They have built the longest bridge

in the world, the great water-works at the east end of Toronto and other landmarks of the country. Thereby, they become integral to the social, economic and political fabric of the country.

Ondaatje summates the threats faced by the prospering immigrants in Canada as the immigrants who strive hard to establish a niche for themselves in the new world are constantly threatened by the capitalists. Further, the Canadian officials have not framed effective policy tools, such as long-term economic incentives and safe working environment to encourage permanent immigration. The immigrants like Nicholas are made to do some of the life-threatening jobs like checking “driven rivets, sheering valves, the drying of the concrete under bearing plates and padstones” (34) by swinging from the bridges upside down. The insecure working conditions have led to the amputation of the bodily organs and death of many of his colleagues, “His predecessor had been killed in a similar accident, cut, the upper half of his body found an hour later, still hanging in the halter” (41). This incident spotlights the need for regulating some effectual measures to safeguard the life of the immigrants.

Ondaatje similarly brings in the predicament of Ambrose Small who is doomed to an invisible state because of his immigrant status. Small, a manipulator of deals and property establishes himself as the jackal of Toronto’s business world. He has ascended from the impoverished existence into the world of theatre management. He has brought Toronto’s Grand Opera House when he was twenty-eight years old and “then proceeded to buy theatres all over the province – in St. Catharines, Kingston, Arkona, Petrolia, Peterborough, and Paris, Ontario, until he held the whole web of theatre traffic in his outstretched arms” (57). He has owned several theatres, hotels, and houses under different

names all over Ontario. He becomes a gambler at the track and gets obsessed with the aims of achieving a unique status for him in the country.

Small rises in the social status as a millionaire by his determination to surpass the capitalists who subdued him. He becomes a workaholic and remains secluded from the outside world. He has built high walls between him and the other businessmen. He has the habit of working out all the possible scenarios; he is hardworking, sincere and systematically plots the activities of the day. He is very keen in “choreographing his schemes, theorizing on bids and counter-bids and interest rates and the breaking point of his adversaries” (58).

Small, who succeeds in prospering economically remains obstinate to retain his status. He is conscious of the fact that if he does not win, he will lose all his property. He is caught in the battle with other capitalists of the country who disdains the flourishing immigrants and does not acknowledge their rapid progress. He revolts against the hostile environment by becoming just like the ones he wanted to overtake. “He was a hawk who hovered over the whole province, swooping down for the kill, buying up every field of wealth, and eating the profit in mid-air” (57).

The growing hostility of the rich towards Small prompts him to disengage him from the business world. He decides to save himself from the enmity of the rich by disappearing from the world of financial power after withdrawing a million dollars from his account. “He’s a rich man who escaped rich shoe. He protects himself” (99). He seeks abode in an isolated building in a village far away from his house. The public engross themselves in the case and hire searchers to investigate his disappearance. The investigation of the searchers by several organisations has turned “the millionaire’s body

into a rare coin, a piece of financial property” (59). Ondaatje enunciates that when all the rich people around him aspire to exalt their status, Small treads carefully in the hostile environment of competitors by sliding safely without getting hurt, “The others just had to get their oldest son into Upper Canada College. Crop rotation. The only one who could slide over the wall, skip along the broken glass, was Small” (84).

Ondaatje notices that during the Great Depression years, the arrival of immigrants has decreased to a significant extent due to the economic calamity. The Canadian officials have applied strict restrictions over the refugees who came to Canada as they realised that the increase in the strength of immigrants would simultaneously result in job scarcity. Valerie Knowles in his book *Strangers at our Gates* remarks that, “for Canadians everywhere took the view that immigrants threatened scarce jobs in an economy that saw almost a quarter of the labour force unemployed in 1933. Not only prospective immigrants but immigrants already established in Canada became targets of opposition” (142). The immigrants were thrown out of work during this period and Ondaatje discerns that “over 10,000 foreign-born workers had been deported out of the country” (209). The deportation policy has been adopted as a powerful weapon to relieve the surplus foreign workers from the country.

Ondaatje remarks that in the year 1938, people have assembled in large dark buildings across the country to protest against the government that failed to recognise the contribution of the immigrants. The immigrants strive hard to establish firm hold in the country but Canada has shut herself off from the world and has strenuously fought against the entry of immigrants. Valerie Knowles in his book *Strangers at our Gates* states that,

Hard on the Heels of the most exuberant years in Canadian immigration history came the most inglorious period, the three decades between 1915 and 1945. War, recession, uneven prosperity, grim depression, and then another world war, each in its turn helped to create antipathy to immigration and to throttle the movement of newcomers to Canada. (127)

Ondaatje feels that though the British colonisation has transformed Canada to a multicultural country, yet it is “still without language, gestures and work and bloodlines are the only currency” (43). He implies that the hybrid environment of Canada has become more culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse with the interminable entry of immigrants after the Second World War. He advocates that the Canadian government must recognise the endless travails of the newcomers and eliminate the problems to the greatest extent possible. They must ensure that the immigrants are able to utilise the skills for the development of the country and in turn the government should also help them to gain economically so as to enrich Canadian culture and society.

In the novel *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje foregrounds the deplorable state of people by delineating the social condition of New Orleans after the civil war. He evinces that the multicultural scenario of New Orleans effectuated during the period of colonisation has a great role in shaping the social, economic and cultural conditions of African Americans in the postmodern world. New Orleans, situated on a nexus of French, Spanish, and British territory has been considered as a hub of commerce with booming economic prosperity before the civil war but the condition has changed in the years following the war. In the meantime, the control of all the three powers has created a hybrid environment

with the conglomeration of people of various cultures including African culture that has been bestowed to New Orleans as a result of the slave trade.

The ethnic differences in the hybrid environment are highly transparent as in the case of the Storyville district of New Orleans where the entire city has been segregated into two divisions depending on the race. The Uptown side Back O' Town, west of Canal, was meant for African Americans, while the downtown side, east of Canal Street was associated with the Whites. This segregation depending upon the racial differences has expanded the communication gap between them.

The inhabitants of New Orleans live in economically backward condition. They involve themselves in multiple occupations and sometimes seek unfair means of earning money so as to sustain their lives. The impoverished social conditions of New Orleans prompt thousands of women to indulge in illegal activities. Danny Barker makes a reference to the living conditions of New Orleans in the book, *Buddy Bolden and the Last Days of Storyville* that "New Orleans throughout its history had, according to many noted authorities on the subject, just about the largest and most organized Red Light District in the Western hemisphere" (99).

The women who involve in the flesh trading are affected by deadly diseases. They become deformed as a result of ill health. Ondaatje notices that "their lives have become simplified by seeing all the rich and healthy as dangerous, and they automatically run when they see them" (124). They get depressed by the trauma they endure in the society as they feel that the continuous exposure to the sufferings around them makes their life more awful. They beg for alms to run their lives as they are barred from social interaction. They are deserted by the rest of the society and are prevented from entering Storyville. The

inflicted women who enter the locality are hunted and whipped down by the paraders.

Ondaatje opines that the women who are “riddled with the pox, remnants of the good life good time ever loving Storyville who, when they are finished there . . . learn to run fast when they see paraders with a stick” (124).

The abominable living conditions endanger the life of millions of people in the locality. They venture into brutal acts of violence causing tumults in the society. Murders are regarded as common day and night occurrences. The streetwalkers are haunted by the ““bestial habits and ferocious manners”” (2) of the men who come to visit them. They kill their lovers in order to escape from their clutches but in some cases the street walkers are stabbed to death by their girl friends. To quote one such example, Ondaatje writes of a streetwalker named Mary Rich who “was stabbed by her boy-friend and had her head beaten in with her own wooden leg” (3).

The agony endured by the people of New Orleans makes them susceptible to several mental disorders. Ondaatje catalogues some of the main causes of insanity as “ill health, loss of property, excessive use of tobacco, dissipation, domestic affliction, epilepsy, masturbation, homesickness, injury of the head” (155). The authorities open up several hospitals in the city including the Hospital in East Louisiana which is considered as the prominent medical centre. It has been opened in the year 1848 to treat the patients of all ages.

The hospitals do not possess favourable sanitary conditions for the patients. The unhygienic condition of the crowded wards makes them vulnerable to diseases like dysentery. Ondaatje highlights the lamentable condition of the hospital by referring to a minority report from a special committee that states that the patients in the hospital live in

“direst poverty and lacked sufficient food. Dinner consisted of a tin cupful of soup, meat about the size of a hen’s egg, and a small piece of bread. Breakfast was bread and coffee. Supper was bread and tea” (155). The women patients are neither properly clothed nor the cells in which they are accommodated have adequate ventilation. The rooms lack the warmth that is necessary to live. Moreover, the patients in the open wards are made to work throughout the day. The patients protest against the authorities when they find it difficult to tolerate the atrocities such as “guard rapes, bad plumbing, labour, lack of heat” (160) committed against them in the hospital.

The personal tragedies encountered by the patients reflect a broader, more disturbing social reality. Ted Gioia observes in the book, *The History of Jazz* that “The average lifespan for a black native of New Orleans in 1880 was only thirty six years. . . . Black infant mortality was a staggering 45 percent. During that decade, mortality rates for New Orleans as a whole were 56 percent higher than for an average American city” (29). The mortality rate reflected by Gioia expresses the abbreviated lifespan of the black society in the late nineteenth century New Orleans. Ondaatje states that the same condition has prevailed in the beginning of the twentieth century. The East Louisiana State hospital records that in the years between 1912 and 1914, “The death rate was 11% per year” (156).

Ondaatje relates the life span of the inhabitants of New Orleans with the jazz music that is originated by the Afro-Americans as both these are short-lived due to its socio-cultural associations. Jazz music is marginalised as it is mainly connected with the bordellos and prostitutes of New Orleans and to the alcoholics and the drug addicts of the nightclubs in New York and Los Angeles. The jazz musicians like Buddy Bolden do not

enjoy the straightforward commerciality of rock and popular music and do not gain any public support that is offered to classical music and opera.

Bolden, son of a domestic servant belong to the black populated area in Storyville district of New Orleans. He has been raised in a post civil war society that does not match the prosperity and general well-being of prewar New Orleans. Bolden lives a life of utmost poverty as the musicians like him are too measly paid for their performances. He engages himself in multifarious jobs such as an editor of the magazine, photographer, a cornet player and as a barber so as to sustain his living. He attempts to grapple with the meager resources but the financial crisis haunts him throughout his life.

The money that Bolden received is spared for all the preparation a musician has to undertake while organising the band for music. Moreover, they are prohibited from congregating in any public park. The musicians who perform violating the rules are either imprisoned or made to pay the fine. The rigorous conditions imposed on the musicians make them to shift their performances to an open-air area. In the book entitled *The History of Jazz*, Ted Gioia mentions about the various venues in which the jazz musicians played music:

Lincoln Park and Johnson Park were other favorite locations for crowds to gather to listen to New Orleans bands, and a wide range of other venues — including restaurants, assembly halls, and meeting places — commonly featured music, as did virtually every major event, not only the frequent parades and marches, sporting events, or the celebrations of Mardi Gras and Easter, but even the solemn occasions of funeral and burial. (31)

Ondaatje gives importance to the manner in which Bolden plays jazz music during his weekend performances. He plays music by marching around the parks like a big parade. The audiences who assemble in the park to listen to his music also join him in his parade. He “walks out of the crowd, struggles through onto the street and begins playing, too loud but real and strong you couldn’t deny him, and then he went back into the crowd. Then fifteen minutes later, 300 yards down the street, he jumps through the crowd onto the street again, plays, and then goes off” (36).

The marginalised status of jazz music has been overturned with the end of the First World War. In the decade after the war, a vast population of African Americans started migrating to northern cities such as Chicago, Illinois, and New York. This movement of people has naturally influenced the whole range of African American society including musicians. They have the belief that the northern cities would provide them with good prospects that the segregated southern cities have failed to offer. They move to a new land for better life, for greater opportunities to work and to lead a peaceful life with full freedom. Ondaatje mentions that the musicians like Louis Armstrong, Bunk Johnson, and Freddie Keppard who have migrated from New Orleans popularised jazz music far beyond the city limits.

The jazz music becomes a significant contribution of African Americans to the entire world. The music which has been confined to New Orleans jazz enjoyed a revival in the 1940s. Ondaatje evinces that in the postmodern era the jazz music is widely recorded. The contributions of the musicians are also immensely recognised. He states that in the year 1965, the pianists have been paid the salary of “\$1.00 to \$ 1.50 a night, plus tips. Money was worth a lot more then” (164). He notices that during this period, several

attempts have been taken by the historians to conduct studies on the life and social conditions in which the musicians lived. He pinpoints the interviews of some of the musicians like Frank Amacker, whose interviews are published in the popular magazines like Digest. He considers that the musicians gain a broader scope and greater popularity due to the significant changes in the field of recording and mass communication.

In novels such as *Coming Through Slaughter*, *Running in the Family*, *In the Skin of a Lion*, *The English Patient* and *Anil's Ghost*, Ondaatje foregrounds the condition of the contemporary world and offers scope for leading a serene life. He contemplates that life is transitory and so human beings should equip themselves to meet the challenges in life. He conceives the recognition of the financial achievements and dictatorship policies as futile attempts to claim authority over people. This realisation will eliminate the state of crisis in the society. He prompts the rulers of the country to adopt strategies of equality and kindness to the people of all races and cultures. He reiterates that the ability to think rationally and act wisely will diminish the savagery of people to a great extent.

The advancements in the field of science and technology are aimed at uplifting the condition of man. Ondaatje appraises how the innovations in the field of recording have led to the immortalisation of the jazz music in the novel *Coming Through Slaughter*. The versatility of jazz music and the musicians began to reach wider audience. This has led to a considerable change in the economic status of the musicians. He ascertains that only when science and technology are mobilised in a constructive way, life becomes meaningful.

Ondaatje insists that human beings should conciliate themselves with the changes of the world and employ it for the welfare of mankind. He represents the destructive impact of technology on human beings in the novels, *Anil's Ghost* and *The English*

Patient. He contemplates the tortured mind of the postmodern individuals who utilise science as a powerful weapon for dominating the life of innocent human beings. The advent of the grenades and the nuclear bombs has corroded the life of people. He depicts the destruction and suffering that is inflicted on the life of the innocent people by portraying the massive violence prevalent during the social and political turmoil.

The depiction of the dangerous working conditions of the sappers like Kirpal Singh and the death of the president, Katagula testifies the dismaying effects of violence in the society. Munir in the article “Paradigmaticity of Postmodernism” reiterates that Postmodernist fiction writing is marked by “the wind of permissiveness, which has swept every nook and corner of human life, especially social and cultural aspects of life in entire world in general and the Western world in . . . particular” (164). He calls for a rapid change in the attitude of the people by discerning the unending consequence of the unethical activities.

Ondaatje presents a vivid picture of the horrors of the war so as to avert the world wars in future. He believes that an insightful cognition of the depredations of the violence and bloodshed during the war will endow people to live an amicable life. He highlights the transformation in the attitude of Almásy in the novel *The English Patient* who decides to lead a secluded life in a destructed villa at the end of the war. His exposure to the atrocious events of war during his service as a desert explorer makes him skeptical towards the very nature and motif of war. He recognises that it is the quest for money and power which drives the imperialists and the rulers of the country to retaliate the life of countless number of innocent victims. His feelings of tenderness and sympathy towards the victims of war make him live a reposeful life.

Ondaatje conjures a peaceful society where human beings can live unaffected by the horrors and terrors of the outside world. In the novel *Anil's Ghost*, he appraises how the changes in the socio-political scenario of the world have made drastic changes in the life of Sri Lankans. The conflicting scenario that is generated as a result of death and catastrophes befuddles the tranquil state of the country. He alleges that the evanescence of moral obligation from the consciousness of the rulers has led to the continuance of the state of crisis. He appeals to the humanity in general to foster a sense of loyalty and kindness to the fellow beings.

Ondaatje stresses the government of Sri Lanka and the International Human Rights Organisations to ensure non-violent state in the society by initiating several rehabilitation measures and resettlement of displaced people. He incites that the adherence to the non-violent policies will eliminate the chaos and crime to a greater extent possible. Geetha Ganapathy-Dore in the article "Fathoming Private Woes in a Public Story – A Study of Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*" apprehends that the novel "is an aid to assist memory in remembering the ravages of human violence, be it in Vietnam, Korea, Kurdistan or Sri Lanka . . . he has proved himself to be a responsible writer by rising above the quarrels to see the human tragedy. . ." (50-51).

Ondaatje counteracts modernist belief in unity by adopting the policy of multiculturalism. He feels that the migration of people has made it impossible to ascertain the nationality of the individuals. He considers that the absence of racial markers will deflate the inter-ethnic conflicts in the country. In the novel *The English Patient*, Ondaatje permeates the condition of nomadism by highlighting the expeditions undertaken by the desert explorers like Almásy and Madox. They travel to different parts of the world and

thereby transcend the boundaries of nation and language. Vernon Provencal in the article “Sleeping with Herodotus in *The English Patient*” observes that “The desert explorers make up the detached branch of the Society. . . they have lost their bearings in the daily commerce of civilized life. They meet in near anonymity, coming from all nations to partake of a professional identity that transcends nationality” (144).

In the novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, Ondaatje discusses as to how heterogeneity is considered as one of the basic components of the contemporary societies. The social and economic exigency of the postmodern world has led to the mass mobility of people. He contrives a social scenario where people of different communities would live peacefully amidst the diversities in culture. He establishes that in the globalised world, the migrants have the chance of flourishing economically but they require favourable working and living conditions.

Ondaatje negotiates that the interference of the government of Canada on the condition of the immigrants like Stoyloff, Nicholas, and Small will mitigate and overcome the conditions of poverty and help them live an enhanced life. Jean S. Phiney et al. in the article “Ethnic Identity, Immigration and Wellbeing” notices a positive relation between the acculturation strategies adopted by the Canadian government in 1971 and the progress of the country. He affirms that the present government “supports a policy of cultural maintenance among immigrant groups, and immigrants to Canada tend to prefer integration as an acculturation strategy” (499).

Ondaatje explicates the same idea in the novel *Coming Through Slaughter*. He apprehends how the process of migration has become a prominent milestone in liberating the ethnic art forms like jazz music from the restricted segregated society to the outside

world. The migrants face several impediments in the new land but Ondaatje reassures that the ability to embrace the new atmosphere and the implementation of favourable multicultural policies of the world will facilitate the process of migration. He condemns the policy of ghettoisation and racial discrimination. Instead, he exhorts the policy of heterogeneity of cultures where people of different communities will be able to retain their culture in the alien land.

Ondaatje has aligned himself with the postmodern strategy of explicating the social, political and cultural conditions of the postmodern world. He has also offered ways of overcoming the catastrophes in the society. He calls for the maintenance of democratic governance throughout the world so as to liberate people from the clutches of the imperialists. He envisions a life free of turbulent world wars and ethnic conflicts. He confides that all the new inventions in technology and the extensive scale of migration accord chances of enriching the condition of living. He apprehends that the life becomes successful when all the changes in the world are approached with a view to cherish the future of mankind.