

Chapter IV

The Discourse of the Marginals: An Inquiry

Michael Ondaatje resists the official discourse of the conventional historians who claim to represent historical events truthfully and objectively. He believes that the early historians emphasise facts which they perceive to be the significant events of history and extol the deeds of the most affluent class of people. They throw light on the conflicts between the historic figures and narrate the events that lead into such confrontations in their version of history. They thereby introduce fundamental contradictions in their histories which may not have had any impact on the events that comprise the life of the common man. This inevitably leads to the fact that marginalised groups are denied an official voice by hegemonic ideologies. In the book entitled *PostModernist Fiction*, Brian McHale affirms that in the traditional historical novel “historical realemes – persons, events, specific objects and so on – can only be introduced on condition that the properties and actions attributed to them in the text do not actually contradict the ‘official’ historical record” (87).

Ondaatje reckons that the traditional history is used by the colonial powers, the rulers of the country and the elites in a discursive way as an instrument to entrust their supremacy over the marginalised class of people. The colonial discourse, as a form of dissemination of knowledge during the colonial period, composed history that is extremely colonialist in fostering the dominant Western discourse and its ideologies. Carmel L. Haynes in the article entitled “Subaltern Challenges to the Author/ity of the Colonising Subjects” comments that “These texts represented the social existence of colonial relations, and were shaped by the dominant ideologies, primarily colonialism, imperialism, and

racism, and had the primary goal of consolidating the unity of the Imperial Centre” (1). This formed dominating, coercive systems of knowledge in which the plight of the colonised people are virtually effaced and their discourse is effectively silenced.

Ondaatje regards that the grand narratives of the conventional historians are extremely vehement in their imposition of a totalising pattern and fake generalisations on the actions and events of history. As Linda Hutcheon notes in *The Canadian Postmodern*, history cannot be accepted to have been a true account of the things as it actually happened but “as a construction, as having been made by the historian through a process of selecting, ordering and narrating” (14-15). Ondaatje ascertains that these narratives are judgmental in tone and are mainly designed to give a moral point. Traditional historians exclude the experiences of the subalterns by selecting the events that fit their agenda. The subalterns remain invisible or subsumed under the hegemony of more powerful social groups and they acquire a place in the written sources only when they revolt against the dominant forces and claim voice of their own. Tim Woods in the article “Postmodernism: Philosophy and cultural Theory” suggests that,

. . . all one can do is utilise local narratives to explain things, hence, knowledge can only be partial, fragmented and incomplete. This is regarded as a radically new form of epistemological freedom, resisting the dominance of overarching patterns which appear to ignore the details and experiences of differences in their effort to construct patterns which make sense of the world on a grand scale. (21)

Ondaatje tries to undo the histories of conventional historical authors by countering the subjugating attitude of their discourse. Voices of the subaltern people which share a

subordinate social, political, economic and ideological status occupies a prominent place in his novels. His novels depict the quandary of various groups such as the ethnic minorities, colonial subjects, peasants, the urban poor, victims of the war and the immigrant proletariats who are excluded from political power and are considered to be marginal to the dominant ideological and cultural discourses. His chief objective in voicing their histories is to present a realistic self-narrated version of their history to counter the distorted one projected by others.

Ondaatje attempts to reconstruct the experience of the ethnically subordinate social groups like African Americans and brown races of the world in novels like *Coming Through Slaughter* and *The English Patient* by focusing in particular on the moments of political upheaval and social crisis. His novels also trace the process of self-realisation of the characters like Bolden and Kirpal Singh who attempt to emerge themselves from their contingent status and revolt against the dominant powers. They remain subservient even after accomplishing themselves in different fields like music and mining as they are not acknowledged by the whites. Suppression on the basis of racial differences makes the real genius of the marginalised people unknown to the world. The subjugated people liberate out of their bondage by resorting to their own means of escaping from the clutches of the white people when they feel that they could no longer endure the supremacy of the whites.

The discourse of the subalterns explicates as to how they have been tormented by the colonisers who employed the potent weapon called colonisation in dealing with the different class and race of people with a biased attitude. In the novel, *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje elucidates as to how the dominant discourse of the colonial rulers like Dutch, Portuguese, and British has transformed the name and shape of Sri Lanka according

to their fantasy. He also cites several travelogues that have effaced the lifestyle, culture and beauty of the country from the pages of history by giving a prejudiced report of the country's resources to the outside world. The colonisers' have projected Sri Lanka as a wild land with horrible environment in their version of history, but in reality they exploit the natural wealth of the country. Ondaatje as a postmodern writer gives a truthful account of the country's richness to the entire world with a precise account of the country's splendid language, literature and culture.

The rulers of the country encourage injudicious rendering of historical events as it helps in concealing the atrocities that are meted out on the common man. In the novels, *Anil's Ghost* and *In the Skin of a Lion*, Ondaatje enlightens the unequal treatment of the victims of the Sri Lankan emergency and the immigrant Canadians by the rulers. They are subjected to innumerable tortures at their residential and working place but the real condition of these people remains unknown. The rulers aim at maintaining the obtuse state of the people as it helps them in executing the unruffled state of governance. They fear a possible outbreak against them when the people become aware of the injustices done to them.

The subaltern figures like the sailor and Patrick in the novels, *Anil's Ghost* and *In the Skin of a Lion* respectively compete with the dominant discourse to acquire a place for them in history. They represent the large mass of people who remain voiceless and unidentified by the people in power. Alessandro Fontana, Pasquale Pasquino quotes the words of Michael Foucault in the article entitled "Truth and Power," who expresses that the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth becomes complex when,

The problem is not changing people's consciousness . . . but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth.

It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power . . . but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time. (133)

Ondaatje aims at exposing truth by liberating it from different forms of ideological discourses. In the novels, *Coming Through Slaughter*, *Running in the Family*, *In the Skin of a Lion*, *The English Patient* and *Anil's Ghost*, the subaltern characters try to overcome the nullified condition of their existence by acquiring a unique position of their own in the discourse of the novels. The silence of the subalterns leads to the exploitation of life, culture and erasure of their voices from the official records. They realise that they will be able to obtain an equal status in society only when they share their agonies and anticipations with others. So, they revolt against the whites and other dominant powers of society and achieve a voice of their own.

In the novel *Coming Through Slaughter*, Ondaatje explicitly signals his involvement in a movement to assimilate the history of African Americans by subverting the discourse of the main stream individuals from the heart of the narrative. He fictionalises the tormented life and tragic death of the African American cornetist, Charles Buddy Bolden who is believed to have been one of the first and most powerful musicians to play what has been subsequently called as hard jazz and blues.

Bolden has inaugurated the rich musical transformations of African American music across the country. He is known as a jazz originator with a good band but there is no extant recording of Bolden's music, so his reputation is staked only on oral tributes. The

novel coerces that his illiteracy and his place within the marginalised African American community in New Orleans lead to the exclusion of his name from emerging histories of jazz. Jon Saklofske in the article “The Motif of the Collector and History in Ondaatje’s Work” makes a remark that the novel is based on “an actual person who has nearly slipped through the cracks of official history into obscurity” (75).

Bolden was born during the civil war period in New Orleans on 6th September 1877. His parents, Westmore and Alice Bolden were the African slaves who were brought to America as a part of the slave trade. They were allowed to choose only the path of slavery before the war. However, once when the rules were abolished they were allowed to choose their own ways of living. Bolden belongs to the first generation of blacks to be born after the abolition of slavery. He has been segregated on the basis of racial difference throughout his life time. He sees life as an open challenge instead of being within a confined domain as the racial identity of an individual plays a vital role in determining the course of one’s life.

Literacy has an indispensable function in eradicating the segregation of people based on ethnic differences but the African slaves in America were forbidden by law from reading and writing. So, Ondaatje addresses the issue of literacy as one of the major haunting issues of a black slave’s life in the novel *Coming Through Slaughter*. He projects the way in which the enslaved African Americans consider literacy as a major form of political demonstration of resistance to oppression and of self-determination. Bolden does not have any formal education in music. He has an informal training of music from Mutt Carey, Bud Scott, Happy Galloway but he does not consider them as his real teachers because they have taught him craft and “the real teachers never teach . . . craft” (99). He

dislikes Mutt Carey's playing of the trumpet as he does not like the instrument's usual role of providing the structure to the song. He feels that the role of a musician to evolve a structure in his music would be a burden, something one gets chained to and cannot move away from it. Bolden tries to excel in music even if he does not have any favourable condition to chisel his musical talent.

Bolden has learnt the basics of music from his predecessors unlike the other white musicians like Robichaux. He has learnt the fundamentals of how to play music from the musician, Hall and has depended upon Carey to learn the strategies of how he should not play. Galloway on the other hand has taught him how to improvise and how to be a jazz musician. Ondaatje makes a remark of Bolden's belief that "Galloway taught me not craft but to play a mood of sound I would recognize and remember. Every note new and raw and chance. Never repeated" (99).

Bolden admires Galloway whose music is unique and played in a way that no one could have anticipated by improvising every note. It is a fact that Galloway's "guitar much closer to the voice than the other instruments. It swallowed moods and kept three or four going at the same time which was what I wanted" (99). Bolden wished to play like Galloway reflecting multiple moods at the same time.

The crucial difference between Bolden's untutored music and that of his contemporary Robichaux's music is based on the formal musical education. The inherent values of Bolden's jazz, its apparent change and unpredictability are entirely opposed to Robichaux's clear forms who have dominated the New Orleans music scene during Bolden's days. Bolden criticises Robichaux's music by saying that "I loathed everything he stood for. He dominated his audiences. He put his emotions into patterns which a

listening crowd had to follow” (97). His knowledge of the written musical culture gives him the vantage to acquire an undisputable place in the official history of jazz. As an artist he is keen in imposing a dominating structure and pattern and rigidly wants to control what his listeners must hear. Bolden’s music sharply contrasts with the perfect arches and mechanistic pleasure of that of Robichaux. Bolden’s musical style on the other hand is considered to be in analogues to his multi-faceted identity. In the article entitled “Hanging on a Question Mark,” Coomi S. Vevaina remarks that “Bolden’s spontaneous, anarchic and transient music was an expression of his life” (57). He tries to give variety and liveliness to his music by blending his music with scandals and incidents that he collects from various resources.

Bolden tries to overcome the standard structure of music by focusing more on emotion and its inherent flux rather than on the form of music. He custom tailors his music according to his audience and the environment. Ondaatje finds how Bolden has no influence over anything that went on around him. The writer feels that despite his lack of formal training in music, there is a discipline in his music that his contemporaries have failed to comprehend. Bolden’s racial marker as a black prevents him from attaining fame and recognition even after possessing the unique ability to attract the attention of the audience with his musical talents.

The persistent neglect of the musical talent of the African Americans makes Bolden to tease the official history that privileges the dominant power and suppresses the history of minorities by divulging the life of a low life district amidst prostitutes, hustlers, gamblers, alcoholics and drug addicts in his magazine ‘The Cricket’. The magazine deals with “stray facts, manic theories, and well-told lies” (19). He composes his own account of

the sub-history based on the information he receives from his customers and police. His position as barber enables him to be exposed to a wealth of information and sub-histories of marginalised African Americans. He ridicules the routine of the so-called decision makers who impose their views on the subjugated class of people, and in Ondaatje's words, "a servant's memoirs told everyone that a certain politician spent twenty minutes each morning deciding which shirt to wear" (19).

'The Cricket' reverberates Bolden's obsession with the fear of mortality as he doubts that the musical ability he possesses will cease with his death, "when a celebrated murder occurred Bolden was there at the scene drawing amateur maps" (19). He realises that his music like that of his mother-in-law, Isadora Duncan's dance performances are not recorded. He senses the fear of mortality for the first time after the mysterious death of Isadora.

Bolden repeatedly circumvents his fear of mortality and attempts to escape all confinements. He consoles himself by acknowledging the fact that fame would exercise an unseen threat to his musical talent as his skill gets circumscribed and loses the possibilities of growth. He ascertains that reputation and fame will stifle his improvisational skills and by repeating the same performance in the same way every time, he will gradually suffocate with the echoes of the same music.

Ondaatje vindicates this by saying that the contribution of the musicians who strive to enhance music are forgotten by the future generations, so he determines to avoid becoming one like them, "Climbing over them still with me in the sense I have tried all my life to avoid becoming them" (100). Though, he considers himself to be in the bottom rung on the ladder of jazz history, he expects the future musicians to step over him, just as he

did with his ancestors, climbing over them. Meanwhile, he requests the future musicians to acknowledge the musical talent of their predecessors by citing the predicament of his father who has been a famous musician during his times. His father has excelled himself in playing music, but he is pushed back into the memory after his death:

My fathers were those who put their bodies over barbed wire. For me. To slide over into the region of hell. Through their sacrifices they seduced me into the game. They showed me their autographed pictures and they told me of the even bigger names all over the country. My father's failing. Dead before they hit the wire. (99)

Bolden's anxieties over the fate of his music makes him seek refuge in Brewitt's place and during his two years stay at the Brewitts, Bolden does not play his Cornet even once and, in fact, forsakes all his musical affiliations. His detective friend, Webb finds Bolden at the home of Jaelin and Robin Brewitt and convinces him to return to Storyville and continue playing music. Bolden is given an opportunity to perform a live event at the Liberty-Iberville. It is at this point that he takes a step past the boundary over the social edge and into himself. Bolden began to play to the audience in general and to an unnamed woman in particular, once he stepped into the parade. He gradually loses sense of the entire world as he plays music.

Bolden becomes engrossed with each dance movement of the unnamed woman in the audience. He feels that he has completely attained the pinnacle of joy as she hits "each note with her body before it is even out so I know what I do through her. God this is what I wanted to play for, if no one else I always guessed there would be this, this mirror somewhere" (138). She mirrors the sound of his cornet with her body, while he mirrors the

movement of her body with the sound of his cornet. The shifting and spontaneous performance makes him feel that he has achieved the peak of his musical career and the woman clearly represents his ideal audience.

The parade scene demonstrates the ideal musical live performance as it offers Bolden the creative impulse and unique participation from the audience. He gradually dissolves from the boundary of crowd and delivers an astounding performance. Ondaatje's description of the parade signifies the importance of live recording of a historical event as it helps in presenting a faithful account of the events that takes place in the parade.

Ondaatje explains that during the robust performance in the parade, Bolden loses his link with the audience as his throat gets severed and experiences a serious hemorrhage that leads to the bursting of blood vessels in his neck. He becomes increasingly erratic and violent as he is taken to the House of Detention where he undergoes a surgery in his neck and is later incarcerated in an asylum for the insane. Though, he collapses in the midst of the performance, he believes that he has attained redemption by transcending his music to a level above satisfaction and has attained salvation. His march from sanity to insanity thereby epitomises his procession from mortality to immortality. His music is immortalised in the minds of the audience, though it is not engraved in the official records of history.

The official reports and chronicles of Bolden contrasts sharply with the real truth within which these are embedded. Ondaatje quotes in the novel the "*Interview with Lionel Gremillion at East Louisiana State Hospital*" (148), and "Selections from *A Brief History of East Louisiana State Hospital* by Lionel Gremillion" (155) so as to interrogate the tendency of official accounts to force a label on Bolden as a paranoid type and as a hyperactive individual. Ondaatje resists the authoritative tone of the source texts by

securing a place for Bolden in jazz history. Willie Cornish, the contemporary of Bolden relates the extent to which the life and family of the musicians are neglected by the conventional historians:

Then everyone was becoming famous. Jazz was now history. The library people were doing recording and interviews. They didn't care who it was that they talked they just got them talking. Like Amacker, Woodman, Porteous. . . . They didn't ask what happened to his wife, his children, and no one knew about the Brewitts. All I had of Buddy was the picture here.
(157)

Ondaatje distinguishes between conventional history and unrecorded accounts of events in the novel so as to explore the extent to which racial difference affects the life of a less known musician. Sally Bachner in the article "He had Pushed his Imagination into Buddy's Brain" believes that the "Jazz that Bolden is enlisted to personify can hardly be separated from the lives of Storyville's prostitutes. . . . Storyville and Bolden's music share a rawness and marginality that confer authenticity to both by virtue of their resistance to the respectable monumentalization that the historicization of jazz has entailed" (205). Ondaatje by exploring Bolden's lifelong struggle to secure a place of his own in the evolution of Jazz music avows that Bolden has shown the new possibilities for jazz musicians by influencing the generation of musicians through his legacy.

In the novel, *The English Patient* Ondaatje subverts the class consciousness of the dominant British rulers by presenting four marginalised characters under the pillages of colonial power struggles and imperial expansions. He projects the background of the post-world war period near Florence in Italy and suggests the peculiar relationship among four

persons of multiethnic nature by the residents of the villa. All the characters in the novel are displaced from their motherland and live in a foreign land. They do not have a well defined cultural identity. The war has made their ethnic divisions more conspicuous. Ondaatje contemplates that an individual is treated depending upon the racial and ethnic differences during the times of war and political upheaval.

Ondaatje in his novel gives voice to the subaltern characters such as Hana, Caravaggio, Almasy and Kip. They narrate their personal and national histories, whereas the dominant British characters such as Lord Suffolk, Katharine, Madox and other members of the Sand Club are denied voices of their own. He subverts the dominant position of Western hegemony by allowing the subaltern and their stories to be the prime concern of the novel. Ondaatje considers that though the three characters such as Hana, Caravaggio and Almasy belong to the ethnically dominating white race, they are regarded as subaltern characters as they are also victimised by the evil effects of war.

Hana and Caravaggio belong to the nationality of Canada, the country which is itself known for its subaltern status due to its colonised condition. Almasy, on the other hand, is a Hungarian whose nation is tormented and constantly dominated by a foreign political power such as Russia. The subaltern quality of the characters is explicated by virtue of their oppressed condition in the novel. Ondaatje demonstrates as to how the characters strive to live through the remains of war are rendered powerless in an isolated villa and are subjected to the hegemonic power of the British colonisers.

Kip is the most obvious persona who is dominated and pinned down by the Western hegemony. Ondaatje considers him as the most marginalised characters among the four due to the racial difference that is evident between him and the other members of the

villa. He is recognised and valued in terms of his cultural origins and a colour coding appears throughout the novel. He is a Sikh sapper from India who has been sent to England at the beginning of the war. Ondaatje portrays a stereotypical image of a Sikh through Kip with his long hair, turban, steel bangle, courage, hardwork, and nostalgia for his home. Kirpal Singh's name is Anglicised and abbreviated to Kip illustrating the ethnic differences that is evident between them. He recollects how his colleagues named him,

‘Here comes Kip.’ The name had attached itself to him curiously. In his first bomb disposal report in England some butter had marked his paper, and the officer had exclaimed, ‘What’s this? Kipper grease?’ and laughter surrounded him. He had no idea what a Kipper was, but the young Sikh had been thereby translated into a salty English fish. Within a week his real name, Kirpal Singh, had been forgotten. He hadn’t minded this. (93)

Kip consents to go to fight the wars of English unlike his brother who has been imprisoned for refusing to fight for India's colonisers. He is contended with human relations as opposed to national relations. He has been educated by an Englishman, Lord Suffolk in military discipline and explosive technology and their relationship is grounded on the basis of mutual love and respect. He has remained loyal to Lord Suffolk until his death and it is his adoration of Suffolk that motivates him to take up the most dangerous job of diffusing bombs and work in the foreign lands, he “assumed English fathers, following their codes like a dutiful son” (229).

Kip gets irresistibly drawn towards Western culture and its art forms with the faith in its ability to provide recognition and sense of belonging. He seeks solace in their art in the midst of the chaos of war to overcome the feeling of being haunted by the endless

trauma he witnesses, “Every night he had walked into the coldness of a captured church and found a statue for the night to be his sentinel. He had given his trust only to this race of stones, moving as close as possible against them in the darkness” (110). He admires the Western art forms like ‘Marine Festival of the Virgin Mary’, the ‘Michael Angelo’s fresco of the Prophet Isaiah’ and ‘Piero Della Francesca’s panel of The Queen of Sheba Meeting King Solomon’ in Arezzo. He gets drawn towards Western music even while defusing bombs. Ondaatje relates the way in which Kip works according to the music, which suggests that his professional skills are enabled by his embrace of Western culture.

He was pulling the radio earphones on over his head, so the sound came back into him fully, filling him with clarity. He schemed along the different paths of the wire and swerved into the convolutions of their knots, the sudden corners, the buried switches that translated them from positive to negative. (108)

Kip is sent to Italy to detect and disarm the mines planted by the retreating Germans as part of the Allied invasion in Italy. He ensures the safety of the sojourners at the villa in Italy. He gets nearly electrocuted while defusing a multi graded bomb, a task he completes at grave personal risk. Shannon Smyrl in the article “The Nation as ‘International Bastard’: Ethnicity and Language in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*” remarks that the white noise of the radio and the popular music helps him in repressing the dangers of war and “serves as a distraction, creating the illusion of recognition while obscuring the underlying structures of power that naturalize Kip’s identity as foreign ‘other’” (33). Kip is aware of the ambiguities inherent in dealing with individuals from different ethnic background but he remains friendly with English and

Europeans. He notices the extent of disparities that exist between their cultures and even remarks of the economic discrepancies between the countries. He considers that the amount of surfeit resources available in England would keep the continent of India sustain for two hundred years.

Kip confronts how much he and his countrymen have assimilated the values of Europeans. He also explains why fighting on the side of English has not been problematic for him in the beginning. The distraction of unsuspecting cultural consumption enables him to do his job in the service of the British military. He has admired prudent behaviour and the abstract order in Western civilisation. This enables him to defuse the bombs. His affinity with technical issues and his admiration for the rationality of Western tradition has helped him to emerge from the mines with calmness as opposed to the trauma of the outside world. He maintains balance even at the time of chaos as he affirms that “the dangers of being killed by lightning [were] pathetically minimal compared with the danger of his daily life” (296). He has remained innocent and he has not allowed any negative influence to enter his mind. He appears to be unaffected by the horrors of the war. This seems to give him a positive worldview, for he has always been able to find solution to the trials around him.

Kip gains professional respect for his extraordinary skills as a sapper but the brigade commanders, taking advantage of his racial difference and innate courage, give him the most dangerous, life threatening tasks as the army moves through heavily mined towns. He is entrusted with the duty of finding out hidden mines left by the retreating army. He has the enterprise and courage in dismantling and defusing delayed-action bombs, and is adroit in blueprinting each new trick as soon as it is discovered. His caution

as a sapper permeates his character, “his mind, even when unused, is radar, his eyes locating the choreography of inanimate objects for the quarter-mile around him, which is the killing radius of small arms” (93).

Kip has a breakdown when he comes to know of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His training by the English has made him especially equipped to understand the implications of the event. The contradictions he has suppressed about the English as friends and allies during the war, explodes to confront him. He has been carried away by the distraction of unlimited cultural consumption but the news of the bombings, exposes him to the structures of power and authority that position his experiences of cultural diversity, limiting him to the identity of ‘other’. The news shocks his notion of unity and inturn dissuades him from his intention of assimilating with the European culture. He relates the guns that are made of Indian metal and later how they are used to kill Indians:

. . . the gun – the Zam-Zammah cannon – is still there outside the museum in Lahore. There were two guns, made up of metal cups and bowls taken from every Hindu household in the city. . . . These were melted down and made into guns. They were used in many battles in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries against Sikhs. . . . (125)

Kip colligates the invention of atomic bombs as the disastrous weapon of Western hegemony because unlike their earlier inventions like ships and the printing presses, the bombs pose a threat to the lives of entire humankind. Meanwhile, he apprehends the workings of colonialism on the life of people in his homeland. The Hiroshima-Nagasaki incident has brought an outright change in his attitude towards the white races of the world. He understands that the colonial power has compelled him and a million of Asian

youths to join the war. Even when Caravaggio, the Canadian thief explains that the patient is a Hungarian who has acted against Allies, his anger is not appeased. Kip says, “American, French, I don’t care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you’re an Englishman. . . . They would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation” (304). Caravaggio also agrees with the Sikh soldier who claims that they would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation.

Kip’s experiences of cultural mobility and diversity result in his self-identification as an alien, silenced and invisible. He has been accustomed to his invisibility and his self-sufficiency ensued as a result of being the anonymous member of another race. It is only when the atomic bombs have been dropped in Japan that he reacts. In the article “Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* [1992] and Postcolonial Impatience,” J. U. Jacobs avows that “It is a moment of self-confrontation for the young Indian: he acknowledges that he too has become a casualty of Englishness, and he rejects his colonisation by an essentially destructive and self-destructive force” (109-10). He denounces the customs and manners of the colonisers which take precedence over those on the Indian subcontinent. He vocalises the anger of the colonised in order to initiate a process of healing. He says,

My brother told me. Never turn your back on Europe. The deal makers. The contract makers. The map drawers. Never trust Europeans, he said. Never shake hands with them. But we, oh, we were easily impressed – by speeches and medals and your ceremonies. What have I been doing these last few years?

Cutting away, defusing, limbs of evil. For what? For *this* to happen? (302-03)

The single incident of dropping atom bombs disillusioned him and his newly developed Asian identity leads him to abandon Italy and go back to his homeland, Punjab.

He has earlier told Hana repeatedly that he does not share his brother's attitude towards British against whom he struggles in India but after the attack, he deserts Hana in the Italian villa, and heads for his native land, Amristar. He reiterates that it is her character, her effort to assert her individuality that has impressed him but he finds it impossible to associate with people having an European identity. He has attempted to keep his relationship with her outside the realm of nationalities, still the racial difference between them is made evident throughout the novel. Ondaatje makes a remark of Hana's intention to note the 'kara' on his 'brown wrist' and her amusement at his flowing hair. Malshri Lal in the article "Translating the 'Indian'" actualises that the "trajectory of love plotted by Ondaatje begins by placing Kirpal Singh as an exotic racial 'other' to Hanna's incomprehension and curiosity" (242).

Ondaatje reinforces that the colour coding is the basis of Hana's continued attraction towards Kip and he mentions that during the intimate contacts between them, "She learns all the varieties of his darkness. The colour of his forearm against the colour of his neck. The colour of his palms, his cheek, the skin under the turban. The darkness of fingers separating red and black wires, or against bread he picks off the gunmetal plate he still uses for food" (134). The relationship between Kip and Hana is a direct consequence of British colonialism which has adversely affected their sense of individual and national identity. Hana discloses to the English patient about the absurdity inherent in fighting the wars of the coloniser, "Kip and I are both international bastards – born in one place and choosing to live elsewhere. Fighting to get back to or get away from our homelands all our lives. Though Kip doesn't recognize that yet. That's why we get on so well together" (188-89).

Ondaatje registers Kip's gradual self-consciousness as a subaltern subject. His consciousness makes him aware of his people's history and identity. He forsakes the Anglicised version of his name and reclaims his Indian identity as Kirpal Singh and journeys down Italy which signifies his conscious reversal of his Western acculturation. Ondaatje affirms that the anti-colonial struggle creates new and powerful identities for colonised people. It enables them to challenge colonialism not only at a political or at intellectual level, but also on an emotional plane. During his journey, he keeps Hana away from his mind but he feels as though he is carrying the body of the English patient with him in the flight. Kip falls into a dream-like state during his trip along the Italian coast and feels that,

He was travelling against the direction of the invasion, as if rewinding the spool of war, the route no longer tense with military. He took only roads he knew, seeing the familiar castle towns from a distance. . . . He carried little, all weapons left behind. The bike hurled through each village, not slowing for town or memory of war. (308)

Kip's anti-colonial nationalism helps him in recovering his culture and selfhood that has been systematically repressed and eroded during colonial rule. He challenges the authority of the West to define an identity of his own. The decentralisation of political and cultural power ensures Kip, the opportunity for a new understanding of identity, organised around difference and disunity, responsive to his own peculiar experiences of cultural diversity. Ondaatje's final vision of Kip is of a man involved in his community's welfare as a doctor, riding his bicycle for the four-mile journey home settled with his wife and children. As Josef Pesch points out in the article "Post-Apocalyptic War Histories: Michael

Ondaatje's *The English Patient*" that Kip becomes "a doctor, a professional healer, someone who still is a saver of lives" (129).

The novel suggests the possibility for the subaltern characters to resist total domination of the colonisers by ascertaining an identity of their own. Ondaatje suggests that the idea of the nation is a powerful vehicle for harnessing anti-colonial struggle. He reckons that colonised intellectuals must consistently raise the question of their cultures, both as sites of colonial oppression, and as vital tools for their own resistance. The construction of national identity is therefore an adequate ground for forging an anti-imperialistic struggle.

Ondaatje posits as to how by the end of the novel, each character finds a way out of their misery and manages to storm out of the trauma of war and begin a new life outside the villa. The marginalised characters are thus granted a chance to narrate their histories while they are haunted by the discrimination they face during their life in alien land. The novel demonstrates that the marginalised characters can certainly speak for themselves.

In the novel *Running in the Family*, Ondaatje has recaptured the Sri Lankan history that is neglected by the colonial rulers who promulgated an envisioned version of the country instead of delivering a true account of the natural resources of the country. He discovers his family lore within the wider framework of Sri Lanka's colonial and postcolonial history. He composes the fractured, fragmented glimpses of the way Sri Lanka is interrogated, re-imagined and revisioned from the perspective of the postcolonial individuals in contrast to the colonisers' reports of the sufferings they have endured while living in the country.

Ondaatje explicates the extent to which the country has become a mirror reflecting the imagination of the invaders who seized it. Anisur Rahman in the article “Versions of Subversion” insinuates that the country “has passed through the vicissitudes of history to acquire its new identity” (149). The colonisers who invaded the country renamed it to make a significant mark on its history, “And so its name changed, as well as its shape – Serendip, Ratnapida (‘island of gems’), Taprobane, Zeloan, Zeilan, Seyllan, Ceilon, and Ceylon,” and to its latest appellation, ‘Sri Lanka’ (60). The country’s name, shape, religion, and language kept changing with the reign of different nationalities.

The map that represents Sri Lanka’s history brings a new, provisional knowledge of the island into existence. The discourse of the colonisers gives a story that is different in scope from that of the unofficial history of Sri Lanka. They do not trace any definite shape of the island as the shape of the island has also kept changing with each colonial succession. The official version of the map cites only few cities, few rivers and lakes, and just a handful of other places of interest. On the contrary, the villages such as Wattala, Kalutara, Usetakeiyawa and Pelmaduma which are inhabited by indigenous people are not labelled in the map.

The map narrates a tale of conquest and exploitation in which both land and people are dominated and expropriated by those who speak English. The map does not deny the presence of indigenous people but it inscribes them only to record how they have been overwritten and, hence, silenced from history by their invaders. Ondaatje criticises the exclusion of indigeneous places and their people as a discriminatory gesture that openly avers the hierarchisation of land and people. Graham Huggan in the article “Exoticism and

Ethnicity in Michael Ondaatje's *Running in the Family*" remarks that "Historically, the island has been the exoticized/eroticized object of imperial ambition . . ." (123).

The European invaders believed that by writing about their experiences and adventures in the expeditions and exploration of distant lands, they are certainly reshaping and remapping the rest of the world. They exercise their power and superiority over the colonised land by formulating reports on the expanding territories and by casting their new impressions of the new found land. European travel reports and experiences written for European readers create a European way of seeing the world. They stimulate the imagination of Europeans by delineating the lives of people and histories of places in different parts of the world. The actual conditions of colonisation and the underlying commercial reasons of exploration are intentionally distanced from the reader.

Ondaatje makes reference to the authors of the colonising countries such as Oderic the Friar, Douglas Amarasekera, Robert Knox, and Paul Bowles. Moreover, he makes reference to some of the writers of canonised travel literature such as D.H. Lawrence, Leonard Woolf and Edward Lear to highlight the way in which they produce documents that belong to the dominant Western discourse and accentuate their policy of civilising the colonised people.

The novel begins with two epigraphs—the first by Oderic, a Franciscan Friar of the 14th century written during the discovery by the island by the Western world where he observes that "I saw in this island fowls as big as our country geese having two heads . . . and other miraculous things which I will not here write of." The second epigraph that Ondaatje has appended in the novel is that of a contemporary news-clipping from a Sri Lankan newspaper in 1978 by Douglas Amerasekara, a Sri Lankan journalist who views

that “The Americans were able to put a man on the moon because they knew English. The Sinhalese and Tamils whose knowledge of English was poor, thought that the earth was flat.” This epigraph expresses the historical perception of the colonisers about Sri Lanka. The two epigraphs complement the overarching sentiments and the arrogance of the people of the West to map the realities of the colonised country about which they are ignorant.

The foreigners who come to the country mould their experience in Eurocentric terms and their colonial notion remains enigmatic and fictitious. Their reports range from the falsification of facts to openly hostile attempts to render the exact condition of the country beyond recognition. For instance, Oderic transforms Sri Lanka into a dangerous land, whereas, D.H. Lawrence who has stayed in Ceylon for six weeks unwittingly reveals his xenophobia that Sri Lanka is “only the negation of what we ourselves stand for and are” (77). The canonised voices of D.H. Lawrence and Edward Lear similarly reiterate the colonial view that Ceylon is a ‘dangerous jungle’. Lear reports in his journal that “The brown people of this island seem to me odiously inquisitive and bothery-idiotic. All the while the savages go on grinning and chattering to each other” (77). He explicitly names the aliens as savages who chatter the language different from that of the colonisers.

Robert Knox who has been held captive in the island for twenty years in the seventeenth century feels that in Sri Lanka, he has been “left Desolate, Sick and in Captivity, having no earthly comforter, none but only He who looks down from Heaven to hear the groaning of the prisoners” (80). He has presented a biased view of the country owing to his experience in an isolated domain but ironically, his writings became the primary source for Daniel Defoe who then shaped his novel into a master narrative of colonial hegemony.

Ondaatje reminisces several versions of prejudiced notions of the country and its geography, and to quote one such remark of an Englishman called Leonard Woolf who stated that the entire country is a jungle, so ““All jungles are evil”” (77). He articulates the complexity of the colonial inheritance as a marginalised oriental and his discourse remains distinct from the authentic narrative of Leonard Woolf. His remonstrance of some of the versions of European writers and visitors to the island evince how his homeland’s history has been affected and twisted by the European powers. He suggests that the Europeans have attempted to justify the colonisation of the island by impersonating fantasised views of Sri Lanka. They distort the experiences and realities of the colonised people by creating a false image of the island to the world.

Ondaatje emphasises that the writing of the colonisers is stereotypical and twisted. He criticises the colonisers’ fake sense of superiority, their lack of understanding and respect for what is different, their false and hypocritical values but above all, their destructive and murderous policies. He also posits his writing as a way of writing back, a way of reconstructing his identity, recalling his past, and realising it in a fragmented way through memories. He points out that, “During certain hours, at certain years in our lives, we see ourselves as remnants from the earlier generations that were destroyed. So our job becomes to keep peace with enemy camps, eliminate the chaos at the end of Jacobean tragedies, and with ‘the mercy of distance’ write the histories” (201).

Ondaatje subverts the dominant western discourse by revealing the hidden knowledge of the country. He substantiates that the intricate arts, customs and religious ceremonies have been hidden due to the partial view of transcribing the resources of the colonised countries. The European invaders were unaware of the arts, customs and

religious ceremonies of the island. They plundered the island in all ways possible, without taking any effort to understand its history or even being part of it. Ondaatje on the other hand, shares the local legends and tales that are believed by the inhabitants of the country to commemorate the innumerable geographical and cultural richness of the country. He cites a legend which says, “‘From Seyllan to Paradise is forty miles,’ . . . ‘the sound of the fountains of Paradise is heard there’” (80). He even makes reference to some of the rarest species of the world that are found in Sri Lanka. He comments on some of the varieties of crocodiles like Kabaragoyas and Thalagoyas that are found commonly in Sri Lanka but are seldom found anywhere else in the world.

The novel acclaims the inherent richness of the native language of Sri Lanka. Ondaatje refers to the Sinhalese alphabet as the most beautiful alphabet with “the bones of a lover’s spine. . . . The self-portrait of language” (83). English language is posited as the language of unimaginable conquest and dominion which towers over those who are excluded from its mastery. The inhabitants of the country have utilised the native language as the most potent tool to protest against the authority. The graffiti poems that are scratched onto the rock of Sigiriya in the fifth century echoes the vernacular language and the native form of expression of the common people. They are inscribed by anonymous poets who are not part of the official history of Sri Lanka. The poets being confronted with limitations to voice their community’s narratives use the rocks to articulate the native community’s sense of solidarity and a collective resistance to the domination over them.

The hundreds of protest poems that are written during the insurgency in 1971 on the walls, ceilings, and hidden corners of the University of Ceylon portray the violence behind the struggle, the stories of torture and of lost friends. These poems symbolise that

the native language, Sinhalese is employed as the primary source of resistance against oppression. Ondaatje considers the vernacular language as the best means to express their solidarity; resistance and suffering; their love and friendship; their desire for truth and beauty. The old and new histories of Sri Lanka have been covered by censorship in layers of “whitewash and lye” (85). Ondaatje considers that the discourse of the marginalised people remain invisible to the outside world as they are engraved only in the walls of prisons and universities instead of getting published in books.

Ondaatje regards that the voices and visions of the anonymous rebels remain unrecorded in the official versions of history. He highlights the lost voices of the island by recording some of the miscellaneous sources such as the inscriptions on a gravestone, the church register, the map of Insular Ceilan, and the popular songs and archival materials. He implicitly criticises the imperialist tradition and the devastating effect of colonial missions by quoting the poem of the Ceylonese poet, Lakdasa Wikkramasinha who portrays the intensive violence aroused in the country by the colonisers, “*the beauty robbed of savages: to our remote / villages the painters came, and our white-washed / mud-huts were splattered with gunfire*” (86).

Ondaatje finds it hard to accept the fact that the roots of his homeland and his family ancestry are ignored by the policy makers. The version of the subalterns’ history is susceptible to damages as it is not properly preserved by the policy makers who disregard it to be ineffectual. The sense of inadequacy, the anguish of having been severed from history strikes across him when he observes that the history of his family which is intertwined with three hundred years of local history is not mentioned in any of the official records of the country.

Ondaatje seeks the help of the ledgers of the church which record the local history and formal signatures of the people in the country during the time of funerals and baptism in the church. The names that are chiselled on the stone floor of the church demonstrate the ambivalence of Ondaatje's family existence as it reminds him of some of his ancestors and gives him clues of the descents of his family name. He feels excited and exhilarated in seeing his name cut across the stone floor of a church:

To kneel on the floors of a church built in 1650 and see your name chiselled in large letters so that it stretches from your fingertips to your elbow in some strange way removes vanity, eliminates the personal. It makes your own story a lyric. So the sound which came immediately out of my mouth as I half-gasped and called my sister spoke all that excitement of smallness, of being overpowered by stone. (61-62)

Ondaatje's version of history has enabled to apprehend the history of the postcolonial Sri Lanka as opposed to the colonisers' image of the country. He exemplifies the way colonisers' have envisioned the rest of the world, creating fictions to stimulate the imagination of Europeans. He criticises the imposition of power upon them by exposing the hidden knowledge of the island. His perpetual attempt to revise history and articulate muted voices by incorporating vernacular forms of expression shows how people of the island attempt to resist and fight back the invaders.

In the novel, *Anil's Ghost* Ondaatje evinces the trauma of millions of subaltern people in Sri Lanka whose lives are disproportionately circumscribed by the intense suffering caused by the changing face of power structures. Victoria Burrows in the article "The Heterotopic Spaces of Postcolonial Trauma in Michael Ondaatje's *Anil's Ghost*"

remarks that “the island has a complicated history of inter-ethnic tension and violence that both predates colonialism and was exacerbated by colonialism . . .” (167).

The chaotic condition of the country is represented by the vignettes of violence in the Buddhist cave temple, the random killing of government officials on speeding trains and the poignant list of some of the Sri Lankans who have disappeared while conducting small acts of daily living. The novel shifts the emphasis from monumental historical events and heroes to the subaltern characters and their life during the civil war, “The most precisely recorded moments of history lay adjacent to the extreme actions of nature or civilization. . . . Tectonic slips and brutal human violence provided random time-capsules of unhistorical lives. A dog in Pompeii. A gardener’s shadow in Hiroshima” (55).

Ondaatje invokes the discourse of the victims of the civil war who are marginalised and tormented by the policy makers. They are subjected to a series of violence during the war but their sufferings remain unknown to the outside world as the officials do not disclose the exact state of the country. Anil Tissera who functions as an emissary of human rights attempts to expose the condition of the country to the entire world. She is a western trained forensic scientist who has been sent to Sri Lanka by an International Human Rights Centre in Geneva. She is paired in her work with a native archaeologist named Sarath Diyasena who assists her in all her investigations. They investigate the widespread and systematic murders being carried out on the island by the government against anti-governments and insurgent guerillas.

Anil utilises her professional training in deciphering the condition of people in war-torn places like Guatemala. The fear of Guatemalans who gather at the excavation site and wait silently for the disinterment of unnamed bodies conveys the extent to which the

continuation of the war around them affects their life. The unspeakable fear of Guatemalans is that the bodies excavated by the Western forensic scientists might be their kith and kin. The profusion of deaths and atrocious violence is made infinitely harder to bear because of the void left by the condition of disappeared relatives and the cause that has led to their disappearance.

Ondaatje draws a vivid picture of the devastating trauma that accompanies widespread murders. The Amnesty International list that is quoted in the novel demonstrates how the lives of the individuals are interrupted and made to disappear in the midst of everyday activities, “*While playing cricket . . . near his house while talking to a friend . . . while walking along the road . . . at a teashop 15 yards from Serena army camp . . . while going for a bath . . .*” (41). Anil is moved by the plight of a particular Guatemalan woman whose husband and brother have been abducted. The isolated woman who has lost her entire family keeps waiting to see if any of the skeletons strewn in the field belong to that of her loved ones. Anil finds it difficult to describe the anxiety and grief that has enveloped the face of the desperate women who has come in search of her loved ones.

Ondaatje emphasises the need for closure following the loss of family or friends to violence. The people are caught in a vacuum of grief and it cannot be assuaged until they know what has happened and where the remains of their loved ones lie. Anil finds ongoing value in her forensic work by believing that it will assist those who have lost family or friends through disappearance. It is a lack of closure that causes unbearable grief for the families of the lost, “Wrapping them in their shirts or just cradling them. Someone’s son. These were blows to the heart. There was only one thing worse. That was when a family

member simply disappeared and there was no sighting or evidence of his existence or his death” (184).

Anil’s investigation in different areas of Sri Lanka reveals gradually that the whole country has become a killing field. She learns how the secret gangs take away people suspected to be associated with the rival group, or having given evidence against them, “A couple of years ago people just started disappearing. Or bodies kept being found burned beyond recognition. There’s no hope of affixing blame. And no one can tell who the victims are” (17). The major crimes are considered as insignificant and trivial. Anil and Sarath on their way to Colombo find a truck driver, Gunasena nailed to the tarmac. They take him to Sarath’s brother, Gamini for the first aid but Gamini who fails to find a bed for the patient with such relatively minor injuries remarks that “crucifixion isn’t a major assault nowadays . . .” (130).

Anil finds the pervasive violence erupting everywhere, the shootings, crucifixions, and tortures that appall the consciousness of the entire humankind. It is considered as ‘a hundred year’s war’ fought with modern weaponry and it has been sponsored by gun and drug runners. She realises that “*The reason of war was war*” (43). She gets repulsed by the civil war that has torn the country apart, and has fostered a climate of fear, mistrust and almost endless evil on the citizens of Sri Lanka. Her investigation is carried out in the background of uncertainty, anxiety, fear and random violence and the abysmal depth of sorrow is evident in the description of the civil rights movement offices, where the fragments of collected information reveals the last sighting of innocent and unarmed people.

Anil strongly believes that she can change the condition of people in the country by detecting the reason behind the massive violence. Her search for strong evidence materialises when she excavates a number of skeletons in an archaeological expedition with Sarath in Bandarawela. She realises that most of the bones date back to the sixth century, but some among them are contemporary. She utilises these bones to discover the role of the rulers of the country in the mass scale murders and disappearances. The murderers believe that by hiding the bodies in reserved areas, they could conceal the truth from public exposure but the trace minerals that Anil finds around the dead body helps her in ascertaining that they have been buried in the paddy field before they are shifted to the reserved area. She claims that since these fragments of bodies are found in a government protected area, the government's responsibility is undisputable.

Anil pulls the hidden horrors of the country by unveiling the identity of the murderer who is behind the years of night visitations, kidnappings and murders into limelight. She asserts that by identifying the victim, she can give voice to the millions of people who have encountered similar incidents of violence, "Who was he? This representative of all those lost voices. To give him a name would name the rest" (56). The repeated incidents of violence reveal the collapse of the law and order of the state. Anil and Sarath observe the virtual breakdown of the state's governance as their investigation becomes increasingly difficult with the violation of human rights, freedom and security. She tries to establish that innocent and unarmed people are being killed.

Anil resolves to seek the help of unauthorised and unrecognised archaeologists and sculptors of the country like Palipana and Ananda to discover the identity of the body that is discovered in the archaeological reserve. She believes that the bureaucrats have the

power to reframe the historical event in favour of the policy makers instead of presenting a true account to the world. Palipana is also a victim of official history. Antoinette Burton in the article “Archive of Bones: *Anil’s Ghost* and the Ends of History” opines that “Palipana is an anti-colonist who does not reject history, but seeks to re-imagine it on a new procedural grounds: a kind of fictional Subaltern Studies hero, a albeit, a fallen one” (45). His seclusion from the history has enabled him to recognise the real skills of local artificers. He has depended on the relics he collected from dhobi women and other common men in order to approach the excluded and unprovable truth. He looks for banned and untold official discourse and so when Anil approaches him, he consents to assist them. He directs him to Ananda, the sculptor who is similarly victimised by the violence of the civil war.

Anil engages Ananda, a skilled artist who has learnt the traditional Buddhist art of sculpting heads, to reconstruct a head and a face for the skeleton which is arbitrarily named as Sailor, “We have a skull. We need someone to re-create what he might have looked like” (96). They resort to this as the only means for determining Sailor’s identity. Ananda reconstructs Sailor’s face by touching its skeleton but in the process of sculpting the face of the unknown victim, he gets engrossed with his own struggle. He has practiced the traditional art of Netra Mangala, the ritual painting of the eyes on a holy figure but he gave up his art to work in a gem mine after the death of his wife Sirissa. The memories of his wife intervene and he actualises the pain she must have experienced while she has been tortured by the revolutionaries. The impact of her loss is such that the sailor’s face that is reconstructed by Ananda depicts a face that resembles his wife who is also a victim of violence. He succeeds in replicating the calmness which he has known in his wife.

Anil and Sarath gradually realise that ‘sailor’ belongs to the region of miners by identifying his identity with the stretch marks on his body. They identify his name as Ruwan Kumara, a toddy tapper turned miner belonging to third Plumbago village. He has been abducted from the village by the Government forces as they identify him as a rebel sympathiser. So, they ostensibly attempt to verify whether Kumara’s name can be found “in a list of government undesirables” (269).

Ondaatje shows that the truth remains mysterious unless people volunteer to prove the state of affairs in the country but they face several hindrances during their attempt to claim the truth. Anil who attempts to project the country’s chaotic state confronts the malfeasance of several government officials whom she has approached during the course of her investigation. She experiences a major setback in her investigation when her father’s former colleague deceives her when she seeks his help to transfer Sailor to the capital city after her investigation. The officials believe that she would become helpless without evidence as her findings will have no real value even if she is permitted to report to the police and the counter-insurgency experts in an anti-terrorism unit.

The discourse of the marginalised people is hardly acknowledged by the bureaucrats who credit reputation more than truth. The voice of the subalterns gets muffled and becomes powerless before the more dominant and authoritative persons in power. Anil who appears before the ad hoc tribunal to testify the truth that thousands of innocent people have been killed in the course of war realises the dangers of exposing the truth in public. She finds that the officials have turned hostile towards her except Sarath who is aware of the dangers that such truth would bring. He tries to distract the attention of the

officials by discrediting her evidence, ““I believe in a society that has peace, Miss Tissera. What you are proposing could result in chaos” (275).

Anil escapes the fearful retributions from the authorities with the help of Sarath. He plans a way for Anil to escape with some of her findings by wheeling off the corpse of Ruwan Kumara to her lab. She proceeds further, refusing to be baited, taping every word of her testimony in the tape recorder that is secretly buried in the rib cavity of the body. She eludes the notice of the authorities and writes her report so as to give voice to the victims of war, “Anil made the tape roll back on the rewind. She walked away from the skeleton and paced up and down the hold listening to his voice again” (284).

Ondaatje registers the ongoing trauma connected to unexplained deaths that remain mystical and instead are encrypted in the interminable silence of not knowing how and why these deaths have occurred. However, the effort taken by the victims to claim a voice of their own takes away their life. Sarath for instance, sacrifices his life for the sake of truth as he gets eventually killed and tortured by government officials for his involvement with Anil’s investigation. His body is found and tended by his estranged brother Gamini at Kinsey Road Hospital who notices that his entire body has been wounded with scars representing the price he has paid to disseminate the condition of deprived people. Gamini contemplates over the torture encountered by Sarath, saying that,

He had seen cases where every tooth had been removed, the nose cut apart, the eyes humiliated with liquids. . . . He had been, as he ran down that hospital hallway, most frightened of seeing his brother’s face. . . .

The shirt they had dressed Sarath in had giant sleeves. Gamini knew why. He ripped the sleeves down to the cuffs. Below the elbows, the hands had been broken in several places. (289-90)

Ondaatje's mission to project the voice of the marginalised victims becomes true as Anil reports the state of the society to the International Human Rights Centre. He challenges grand narratives of the authorities who privilege the voice of the powerful and negate the experiences of the marginalised. By acknowledging the experience of the unknown victims, Ondaatje gives his marginalised characters a voice and a place in history.

Ondaatje colligates the predicament of marginalised individuals like the Orientals of Sri Lanka with that of immigrant Canadians. In Canadian society, the immigrants are reckoned as cultural, linguistic, and racial outsiders. They are looked down upon by the dominant ethnic and linguistic groups as the economically marginalised members of the working class. Moreover the linguistic barrier renders them inarticulate rupturing them from the rest of the society. Despite their labour and sacrifice, the poor immigrants are accorded no recognition for their contribution in the new world enterprise.

In the novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, Ondaatje delineates the role of the immigrants in the construction of Toronto's Bloor Street Viaduct between 1917 and 1918 and of the Victoria Park Waterworks in 1938. He rewrites Canadian history by focusing on the immigrant groups of Canada who are considered as the disenfranchised members of the society, instead of monumentalising the elite class of people. He depicts the power struggle between these immigrant workers against the more powerful and established people of British ancestry to acquire a voice of their own. Winfried Siemerling in the article entitled

“Oral History and the Writing of the other” deciphers that the novel “invents the signs of another world coexisting silently with Toronto’s written history and the surface of its present-day reality” (92).

The marginalised characters in the novel like Patrick and Nicholas Temelcoff are immigrants who have arrived in Canada and have worked on the two major construction projects overseen by the Commissioner of the public works, Rowland Harris. The names of the immigrant workers who build the structures ordered by Harris are easily ignored whereas the official history records the names of the rich and politically powerful persons like Harris who is regarded as the brilliant individual who ensure that the construction becomes a success. Ondaatje addresses the issue of these immigrant working class whom history has silenced in the official versions of public events. Gerry Turcotte in the article “Finding an ‘Immigrant Voice: Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*” says that the novel is “about story-telling, about naming, about whose version of the world will triumph and be remembered. And it is about those people who are part of all stories, although they are rarely written about, and it is about their place in the narrative” (44).

Patrick, the protagonist of the novel arrives the urban arena seeking work leaving behind his familiar environment. He is drawn into the immigrant groups from different parts of the world by their common social conditions of poverty and work. His affiliation with them helps him to perceive that the immigrants are displaced people who live apart at the periphery. Their origins are often unknown and no one in the town of Bellrock really knows where the men come from. These men are seasonal, transient workers who come and go away like the seasons. The only connection that the immigrants have with the town is when they emerge to skate along the line of river, on homestead skates. They remain

anonymous or sometimes they are re-named by the English-speaking officials who cannot pronounce the migrant names.

Ondaatje catalogues different types of blue-collar jobs such as logging, tunnelling, dyeing, steel working, tanning and slaughtering animals. The immigrant workers who work in the mills die of pneumonia. The porous environment such as the pools at the leather factory where Patrick and the other dyers work waist-deep in colour, the tunnels dug out by construction workers to build the water tanks, and the mushroom caves threatens to engulf the life of the workers. They sweat and toil the whole day but their contribution in the development of the city is unacknowledged in the official documents.

Ondaatje explicates how the immigrant workers are treated like animals in the slaughter houses where “men stood, ankle-deep in salt, filling casings, squeezing out . . . waste from animal intestines. In . . . the killing floors where you moved among the bellowing cattle stunning them towards death with sledge hammers, the dead eyes still flickering while their skins were removed” (131). They become the sacrificial offerings to new world enterprise like the cattle on the killing-floors which are stunned with sledge hammers and whose eyes will flicker as they are being skinned. The immigrants do not gain anything out of their work except that they become affected by several deadly diseases like tuberculosis, arthritis and rheumatism.

Patrick realises the dreadful living and working conditions of the immigrants as he works with a group of Macedonians, Poles and Lithuanians at the dyeing factory. The dyers are paid only one dollar a day and they do not continue for more than six months as they become affected by some sort of diseases. The desperate workers, who do not have any other option, choose to continue with the same so as to sustain their life. The dyers who

step into the various colour dyes symbolise the conglomeration of people from different parts of the world and they are considered as “the representatives from separate nations” (130). This difference based on colour is imposed upon them by capitalism as they are made to sacrifice their very essence, their health, their scent, their colour, for the sake of work. Catherine Delmas in the article “‘The quicksand of the New World’ in Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*” comments that “the Janus-like portrait” of the immigrants “is illustrated by the pun on the words ‘dye/die’ and ‘consume’: the dyers consume the smell of death, and die of consumption” (30).

The immigrants remain so uncommunicative and reticent as the authorities have imposed laws against their communal gatherings. They are even penalised if they speak in any language other than English. They are devoid of the democratic right to express their feelings to anyone. This confines them to their native communities, intensifying their sense of division and exclusion from the main stream of the Canadian society. The inability to speak English restricts their ability to communicate and make them feel that English language

. . . can by no means be open heartedly adopted. This non-acceptance is due to the immigrants’ illiteracy and the long working hours, which leave them neither time nor energy to deal with a new idiom. In addition English is perceived as the language of the oppressor and the enemy of the working class, who attempts to enforce his discourse on the immigrants. (133)

Patrick’s awareness of the quandary of the immigrant group intensifies with his participation in the puppet show held illegally by his lover, Alice at the waterworks. He acquires a political sense of history with her initiation at the show. She is a socialist

revolutionary who detests the power of the rich. She instigates him to embark on a power struggle defending the workers on the periphery against the dominant capitalists. The tiny puppets, which represent the masses of migrants to Canada, take exaggerated steps “on this dangerous new country of the stage. Their costumes were a blend of several nations” (116). It is the most dramatic metaphor of the migrant situation in Canadian society as it provides a paradigm of the prospect of the immigrants to conciliate and excel in the new world.

The large human puppet which is considered as the hero of the show decides to break out of the mass but he is cautioned by the conservative mass around him. They warn the hero for being overambitious and request him to abide by the rules of the law, but the hero resents. He is finally brought before the authorities to be admonished for his transgressions but when the authorities question him, he does not defend himself because of the lack of language for communication. The tiny puppets notices that

His face was frozen. The others began to pummel him but not a word emerged – just a damaged gaze in the context of those flailing arms. He fell to the floor pleading with gestures. . . . They were all waiting for the large puppet to speak, but it could say nothing. . . . It stamped a foot to try and bring out a language. The other puppets shifted like bamboo to the side of the stage. The figure knelt, one hand banging down on the wooden floor as if pleading for help - a terrible loudness entering the silent performance.

(117)

The puppet show reflects the sense of impotency and frustration that results from linguistic and political exclusion of the immigrant workers. Patrick who has been ignorant of the drastic conditions of the workers finally bridges the space between him and the

community through his relationship with Alice. He realises that he must participate in the revolt against the oppressor. Alice further enlightens Patrick to move through a complex social network in which cultural differences between the rich and the poor are clearly explicated. She expresses that,

‘I’ll tell you about the rich’, Alice would say. ‘The rich are always laughing. They keep saying the same things on their boats and lawns: *Isn’t this grand! We’re having a good time!* And whenever the rich get drunk and maudlin about humanity you have to listen for hours. . . . There are a hundred fences and lawns between the rich and you. You’ve got to know these things, Patrick before you ever go near them. . . . (132)

Alice’s political show specifically targets the history of the nearly completed waterworks by foregrounding the lives of the workers who have actually built the construction works as opposed to the history of the authorities involved in planning. She enlightens him by saying that “the rich will keep you in the tunnels and stock yards” but they “do not toil or spin themselves” (132). She avows that the rich does not know of the stenching smell during the dyeing process in the tanneries. The people are segregated based on the class differences where the rich people live a life of ease and luxury, dwelling in fine mansions in the better parts of the town. This stands in stark contrast to the meagre accommodations of the poor. The loggers live in cold, crowded, smoky shacks where “*Fires die out at night and men wake with hair frozen to damp icicles on the wall*” (154). It is their labour, their death, their sacrifice which has shaped the city. But this contribution is easily ignored in official documents. The rich does not make any contributions to the society; instead they hold power. They attend parties at the Yacht Club on Toronto Island

during the winter, and in the summer they stay in luxury hotels listening to the Anglo-Canadian Band.

Ondaatje engages Alice as a representative of marginalised people in the novel *In the Skin of a Lion* to expose the predatory relationships between people like Harris and immigrants like Patrick who are differentiated based on the quantity of power and money. The millionaires like Rowland Harris, Commissioner of Public Works, visit the construction sites in the evenings and sit at the edge of the viaduct for a while whereas there has always been a night shift of thirty or forty construction workers involved in the construction. The irony in the formulation of history is that the historians value the imagination of Commissioner Harris and his vision of the bridge than the effort of the builders who paved way for the actualisation of Harris' schemes.

Alice instigates the people of her community to struggle against authority and power. She changes Patrick into a powerful weapon to be utilised against the centre of power and in doing so, she feels that he will be liberated. She even provides him with a strategy and says, "You name the enemy and destroy the power. Start with their luxuries – their select clubs, their summer mansions" (124-25). His relationship with Alice's and his role as Hana's adoptive father gives Patrick a role in the community of immigrants, activists and artists of which Alice is considered to be a hub. As a consequence of this new role, Patrick suddenly "saw the interactions, saw how each one of them was carried by the strength of something more than themselves" (144).

Patrick does not "believe the language of Politics" (123) which endorses violence but when Alice gets killed in an explosion as a consequence of her involvement with a radical political group, he eventually begins to embrace her principles. He responds to her

death by revolting against the forces which Alice has tried to abolish throughout her life time. His revolutionary sentiments finally prompt him to carry out acts of sabotage against symbols of money and power. He begins to destroy the properties of the rich along with the buildings they constructed. He destroys the Muskoka Hotel by setting fire and bombing the dock and even destroys some of their club houses. He is conscious of the fact that he will be caught by the officials “probably imprisoned, but for now he thrills to this brief freedom” (173). His desire to avenge Alice’s death leads him to be imprisoned in jailed for a time but he does not give up the struggle.

Patrick sets out to destroy power by destroying the water tunnel project after his return from prison. He aims more precisely at the demarcation line between the anonymous deed of history and those who are granted immortality by its monuments. He notices that many dissident groups are voicing themselves within the city and so the military troops are made to be in vigilance everywhere. All the public buildings including the water tunnels are obsessively guarded. The army officials have taken over the responsibility of guarding the water-filtration plant when the workers moved out after the completion of the work. He considers the demolition of the filtration plant as the main target as it has taken away the life of many of his friends during the construction work. So, he tries to swim through the intake of water tunnel setting explosives to it.

Patrick as a representative of the nameless, forgotten labourers confronts Harris to acknowledge the contributions of thousands of workers who have experienced mistreatment during the construction work. He insists that Harris must recognise the identity of the workers like him and says, “I worked for you, Mr. Harris. I helped build the tunnel I just swam through. . . . I am Patrick Lewis” (235).

Patrick and the other workers who have worked hard for the new world enterprise are “among the dwarfs of enterprise who never get accepted or acknowledged. Mongrel company” (238). His outrage is mainly owing to the fact that the hardworking poor like him and other immigrant workers who worked have been easily forgotten even if they sacrifice their life for the sake of the new world enterprise. Ondaatje reckons that the marginalised people should actively protest against the powerful persons so as to establish a place of their own. He considers that the only way to achieve this is by making the policy makers aware of the sufferings of the innocent people. Patrick enlightens Harris by providing him with the list of innocent people who died during the work and meanwhile demand to know how many have faced death in the construction of the building. He insists that Harris should empathise with the total darkness of their lives by prompting Harris to face him in his world of darkness but Harris reveals himself as a visionary dreamer who can see a potential world beyond the visible realities of daylight.

Patrick accuses Harris of the extravagant nature of the capitalists by accusing him of the excess amount of money that is spared during construction, where “herringbone tiles in the toilets cost more than half our salaries put together” (236) but Harris defends himself by saying that it is necessary for the waterworks to live on. The conversation between Harris and Patrick is a summation of the quandary of the workers who have sacrificed their life for the growth of the country and meanwhile explicates the capitalistic attitude of the policy makers.

Patrick’s confrontation with Harris at the waterworks is the final completion of Alice’s strategy, but more than that, his confrontation with Harris is symbolic of the power struggle between the marginal characters and authority. Ondaatje reasserts that the voice of

the subalterns becomes weak as they continually struggle to grasp the attention of the authorities. Patrick who gets exhausted from his ordeal, and gets drawn into an inconclusive debate with Commissioner Harris about the attitude of the rich and the powerful towards the less fortunate, Patrick falls asleep before he blows up the filtration plant. His aim to demolish the waterworks does not go according to the plan as he becomes weak in the process of making Harris acknowledge the contribution of the workers.

Patrick however makes Harris realise the contributions of the workers, as it becomes evident when he forgives Patrick for his attempted backlash against the waterworks. He acknowledges that Patrick is “as much of the fabric as the aldermen and the millionaires” (238). In acknowledging Patrick Lewis as hero, Ondaatje highlights the gradual realisation of Commissioner Harris, who professes to give power to people who are politically powerless. His decision to nurse Patrick rather than calling the police signifies the guilt consciousness of Harris who accepts his role in the death of Alice Gull and his amateur status in the midst of the truly powerful. Ondaatje has validated the immigrant experience by subverting the traditional notions of grand narrative. Glen Lowry in the article “The Representation of ‘Race’ in Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*” comments that

Ondaatje’s ‘fictional history’ provides more than a positivist attempt to add the stories of the disenfranchised to the history. More than simply expanding the parameters of Canadian literature to include writing about the working class and ethnic minorities forgotten in the ‘Official histories and news stories’ of Toronto’s metropolitan expansion, the novel challenges a dominant discourse which is ‘always as soft as rhetoric, like that of a

politician making a speech after a bridge is built, a man who does not even cut the grass on his own lawn.’ (66)

Ondaatje’s motif in his novels, *Coming Through Slaughter*, *Running in the Family*, *In the Skin of a Lion*, *The English Patient* and *Anil’s Ghost* is that the public monuments usually commemorate undeserving persons and their ideas, but these monuments can be reread, refigured by articulating the hidden and suppressed accounts beginning with the history of the struggle of the marginalised people. He attempts to use his postmodernist texts as weapons against the orthodoxies of the dominant discourses. He focuses on the past events and historical personages which history chooses not to include. He self-consciously constructs alternative stories surrounding disempowered, displaced and marginalised people whose experience and contributions to documented historical events have been ignored.

Ondaatje’s novels force revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives of the past. He does not restore their presence, instead highlights the absence of the subalterns from the official documents. He reframes and refocuses dominant narratives intending to represent universal experience. The new ways of seeing the world has allowed the marginalised people to find the voice and position necessary to enter and shape the revision of history. In the book, *The Canadian Postmodern*, Linda Hutcheon asserts that the novelist has the “power to change how we read history and fiction and to change how we draw the lines” (103).

Ondaatje has suggested the ways in which historians should be impartial in their treatment of historical events and personages to give an authentic version of history. In the novels *Coming Through Slaughter* and *The English Patient*, the characters like Bolden and

Kirpal Singh who become the victims of the colonised power sort out the means of liberating themselves from the bonds of the colonisers when they realise the threatening impact of racial difference on their life and career. Bolden achieves a unique place in the minds of the people by enchanting his audience with his musical skills. His name remains forever associated with the jazz music even if the official documents do not acknowledge his role in the jazz history due to his African American identity.

Kirpal Singh similarly moves out of the colonised land and seeks refuge in his homeland when he realises that he is used as a mere tool for colonial expansion. He realises that millions of innocent men like him are exploited based on the racial differences. The awakening of Kip's national consciousness symbolises his decision to identify himself with the history of India. Ondaatje considers that the marginalised people should resist the seclusion based on ethnic and racial difference instead of being subservient to the makers of history. They should strive to create a new record instead of seeking ways to acquire a place for them in the chronicle of the colonisers.

Ondaatje has manifested in his novel, *Running in the Family* that the discourse of the colonised people remains preconceived. They fail to cherish the real treasures of the colonised land like Sri Lanka. On the other hand, he considers that the history recorded by the inhabitants of the country gives an exact account of the resources. The love that natives have towards their arts, customs and religion along with their knowledge of the resources of the country enables them to give a truthful account of the country. They formulate the discourse in their native language so as to contradict the dominating influence of the English language.

In the novel *Anil's Ghost*, Anil succeeds in formulating an unbiased version of events contrary to the suppressed accounts that are submitted by the government to the International Human Rights Centre. Anil and Sarath strive to achieve this by volunteering to sacrifice their lives for the sake of truth. Anil attempts to employ her forensic skills and other archeological studies conducted by scholars like Palipana and proves the chaotic state that is prevalent in the country. Ondaatje offers hope to people that the reports prepared by Anil will help in diminishing the atrocities ventured out on the common man.

Ondaatje has demonstrated that the subalterns make great sacrifices to expose their real state of life. In the novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, he explicates how the effort that is taken by Alice and Patrick help in enlightening Harris about the interminable efforts taken by immigrant labourers to acquire the dream of forming a new world with effective infrastructural facilities in Canada. Ondaatje articulates the need for acknowledging the endeavours of each and every member of the society so as to pave way for an egalitarian society.

Ondaatje appeals to the humanity in general to nurture the ability to esteem the life and culture of all people irrespective of the differences in race, class and nation. He calls for a reformation in the attitude of the rulers of the country who play a great role in framing history so as to render a complete view of the world. He reiterates that the communal solidarity will help in disseminating the virtues of individuals and cultures of the nation and thereby achieve a borderless universe.