



Communal Life Besides Chaos: A Reading of Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*

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Abstract

This study examines Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient* through the lens of Trauma Theory, focusing on the interplay between individual and collective trauma, identity, and community formation. Both novels depict characters navigating cultural, linguistic, and psychological barriers in the aftermath of personal and historical traumas. *In the Skin of a Lion* explores the lives of immigrant workers in early 20th-century Toronto, highlighting their struggles with isolation and marginalization and their journey toward communal solidarity through shared narratives. Similarly, *The English Patient* portrays a group of war-torn individuals who, despite their disparate backgrounds, find healing and connection within the sanctuary of a villa during World War II. The novels emphasize storytelling, acts of kindness, and communal bonds as vehicles for processing trauma and reclaiming agency. This research underscores that amidst global disintegration and postmodern uncertainties, acts of empathy and shared experiences foster unity, proving

that community life is possible, even in the face of profound chaos and fragmentation.

Keywords: communal life, chaos, relationships

Introduction

Trauma refers to an overwhelming experience that disrupts an individual's sense of self, stability, and ability to process reality. It is characterized by a profound psychological rupture, often leaving survivors with fragmented memories and a lingering sense of disorientation. Cathy Caruth describes trauma as, "not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its unassimilated nature... returns to haunt the survivor later on" (4). Similarly, Judith Herman emphasizes that trauma "robs the victim of a sense of power and control," underscoring its debilitating impact on personal agency and identity. The nature of trauma is paradoxical, as it resists straightforward articulation, yet demands to be revisited, often through repetitive behaviour or fragmented narratives. Dominick LaCapra explains this duality, stating that trauma involves "both an avoidance and an acting out, a refusal to fully engage with the past that haunts the present (70)." Despite its devastating effects, the trauma theory also highlights the potential for recovery through remembrance, storytelling, and connections. As Judith Herman asserts, "remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims" (78). These perspectives illuminate the complex interplay among memory, identity, and resilience in the aftermath of trauma.

Trauma Theory is an interdisciplinary framework that explores the psychological, cultural, and social impact of traumatic experiences on individuals and communities. Rooted in psychoanalytic traditions, particularly the works of Sigmund Freud, the theory has evolved through contributions from scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, and Dominick

LaCapra. This theory emphasizes how trauma can fragment memory, create a disjointed sense of time, and resist articulation, often manifesting as repetitive behaviours or silences. On the other hand, it also emphasizes the potential for recovery through the processes of remembrance, storytelling, and connection. It examines how communities can work through collective wounds, resist historical erasure, and reclaim agency. By focusing on the intersections of personal and historical trauma, the theory provides a powerful lens for analyzing literary works that grapple with the themes of memory, identity, and resilience.

Trauma Theory offers a powerful lens for understanding the fragmented identities, disrupted narratives, and processes of healing depicted in Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient*. Trauma, whether personal or collective, leaves individuals grappling with alienation, memory, and fractured sense of self. Both novels portray characters navigating these ruptures, highlighting the ways in which shared suffering and human connection can foster resilience and communal life.

Michael Ondaatje, a renowned Sri Lankan-born Canadian writer, was born on September 12, 1943, in Colombo, Sri Lanka. He hails from a diverse background of Dutch, Tamil, and Sinhalese ancestries. Although his early life was one of relative privilege, it was later marked by turbulence due to his father's alcoholism and the eventual collapse of his family. His writing stands out for its poetic language, often identified "half poetry and half novel" (Turcotte 43), profound insights into human relationships, and its ability to bridge historical fact and fiction seamlessly. Michael Ondaatje's works explore themes of displacement, memory, identity, love, and human resilience. His characters often navigate cultural and emotional dislocations, reflecting his own journey as a migrant. Memory plays a crucial role, revealing fragmented identities and histories that shape personal and collective narratives. Love and relationships are central, depicted as transformative forces that connect

individuals across cultural divides. His postmodern storytelling, characterized by fragmented narratives, mirrors the uncertainties of the modern world, while his emphasis on empathy and kindness highlights humanity's ability to thrive despite adversity.

The researchers of Ondaatje have written reviews and articles on *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient* analysing the diverse aspects under various topics such as “Geographical Dislocations and the Poetics of Exile: Ashis Gupta and Michael Ondaatje” by Jasbir Jain, “Ondaatje’s *English Patient*: Ideology and Form” by Sudha Rai, “The colonial Content of Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*” by Paula Garcia-Ramrez, “Dangerous Artisans: Anarchic Labour in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* and Anil’s Ghost and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*” by Devon Campbell-Hall, “Translating the “Indian”: Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient* and Bharati Mukherjee’s *Darkness*” by Malshri Lal, “Passion and Devastation beneath Ethnic and Polytopic Identities in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*” by Rashmi Gaur, “Finding an “Immigrant” Voice: Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion*”, “Cultural and Aesthetic Mediation in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*”, “Polytopic Identities in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*”, Asia’s Europes: Anti-colonial attitudes in the novels of Ondaatje and Shamsie, War and the Book: the Diarist, the Cryptographer and *The English Patient*, Being and Representation in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*, “Identity in the Postcolonial World: From the Vantage of Hanif Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*” by S. Deepakumari, “Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*: A Comprehensive Study” by Santwana Haldar, “And this is the world of nomads in any case: The Odyssey as Intertext in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*” by Annick Hillger, “Kip and Kim: How Michael Ondaatje is Subtly remaking the English Novel” by Pico Iyer, “*The English Patient*: From Fiction to Reel” by Maggie M. Morgan, “Unofficial Collections:

Organic Artifactual Documents and the (Re) Inscription of the Civic Archive in Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion*" by Samuel Pane, "Post-Apocalyptic War Histories: Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*" by Josef Pesch, "Major Themes in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*" by Purnendu Shanker and Jai Ram Prasad, "Traumatic Representation: The and a "Review of *The English Patient*, The Film is based on the Novel *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje" by Jamal Mahjoub. Thus, Ondaatje's works have been analyzed on various topics under the light of diaspora writing, postcolonial writing and other such theoretical perspectives and this investigation of analysis based on trauma, storytelling and human connection is a new avenue to be explored as it is the most applicable area in this chaotic globalized era.

Patric Lewis: From Solitude to Community

In the Skin of a Lion tells the unauthorized tales of the immigrants who built the city of Toronto. It is a circular narrative beginning and ending with a girl who listens to the story told by a man. All the characters find a sense of completion by sharing their destiny with one another. In this novel, Ondaatje has drawn characters with different cultural as well as topographical background. He has picked them up to experiment whether it is possible to experience communal homogeneity in spite of the heterogeneity that includes "new modes of spatial organization, new kinds of habitats and new ways of living together" (Prieto 8).

The plot revolves around the central character Patrick, who is from the unknown part of the country. He is forced to leave his home and go to the city in search of a living. There he is assigned to find out the whereabouts of the missed millionaire. In due course, he fell in love with the woman who is the lady love of the millionaire and befriends her friend who later becomes his mistress. And after their courtship, he meets a man who remains his best friend forever. Through his friendship with him he finds out the past life of his mistress, as

well as the hidden part of certain historical events and finally left to take care of her kid.

Thus, the scheme is a strange web of events and people are interwoven intricately.

The story begins with Patrick Lewis who is a migrant from the remote country, encounters challenges finding his place in a large city. His childhood has been spent in a wilderness home with his father, Hazen Lewis. His father worked for more than two farms before becoming a dynamiter. They earned a living by cutting woods, haying and herding the cattle. Life has been difficult in the place they lived. The weather in the place is far below zero degree and this symbolizes the inactive nature that restricts human activity as it freezes even the lake that connects them with the town. “The only connection ... have with the town is ... the line of the river” (*ISL* 8). The extreme coolness made them to “long for summer” (*ISL* 9). This prevents people from travelling to the town to meet their basic needs. Despite the wild locale and bitter cold, the profession of Patrick’s father holds many risk factors as a dynamiter.

Right from infancy, he does not have much interaction with humans other than his father. His sole interest lies in “Bugs, plant hoppers, grasshoppers, rust-dark moths” (*ISL* 9). At night, he “walks back into the bright kitchen and moves from window to window to search out the moths pinioned against the screens, clinging to brightness” (*ISL* 9). He is inquisitive about the noise that insects make. “He knows the robust calls from the small bodies of cicadas, but he wants conversation- the language of damsel flies who need something to translate their breath the way he uses the ocarina to give himself a voice... (*ISL* 10). This shows how he lived an isolated life with nature as well as his desire to express himself through words.

Patrick is swayed by his father who lived his entire life one with nature “was an abashed man, withdrawn from the world around him, uninterested in the habits of civilization

outside his own focus” (*ISL* 15). He is an aloof man who does not even talk much to his son. “In all his life the longest speech was the one made to the Rathbun staff when he told them what he could do... (*ISL* 16). In short, his character is summed up as, “... a man who with his few props had become self-sufficient, as invisible as possible” (*ISL* 19).

Patrick is highly influenced by his father who preferred solitude rather than communal life and he too has never desired for a collective life. In one occurrence, when he was 12 years old, he encountered a few strangers who were supposed to be his own countrymen ice-skating in the frozen river. Though he longed to have fun with them, he did not trust them and walked back home. Thus, the lack of maternal influence and introverted father crippled his emotional and linguistic instincts. He failed to connect to his own country. Through the characterization of Patrick, however, one can say that cultural alienation can also exist not only between people of different nationalities but also between people of the same ethnicity.

When Patrick reaches the city of Toronto, he felt as if “he had been drawn out from that small town like a piece of metal dropped under the vast arches of Union Station to begin his life once more” (*ISL* 55). At once, he realizes his disconnection from others. He calls out in the middle of Union Station but finds that no-one listens, he “... sat on a bench and watched the tides of movement... He spoke out his name and it struggled up in a hollow echo and was lost in the high air of Union Station. No one turned. They were in the belly of a whale” (56). Even though he is not from another country, he becomes an alien living in his own country, which is an area inhabited mostly by Macedonians.

Patrick’s disability in inaugurating a community life is resolved through his relationships with Clara and then Alice who play a decisive role in his life. He also realizes the importance of intimacy with a woman, and he takes responsibility for Alice’s daughter,

Hana, with whom he starts and ends his story. The author has made the character of Patrick, modelled upon the protagonist of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, named Enkidu with a young priestess, Shamhat offers herself to Enkidu, a wild brutalized man, and they make love continuously for seven days. Enkidu is transformed by that experience and becomes socialized, humanized, and empathetic. Here, Patrick parallels Enkidu, who is transformed through an intimate relationship with the two women. It is his engagement with Clara Dickens and Alice Gull that draws him out of his solitude. It is only during their company that he “feels more community” (ISL 82).

Clara was the first woman whom he allowed to enter her private space. Clara Dickens is a radio actress seduced by the millionaire, Ambrose Small. Patrick meets her when he goes in search of the details regarding the disappearance of Small. In the first meeting, she seduced him. He asserts her as a “rare lover” and a “perfect woman” (ISL 63). They are “outrageous and flamboyant in each other’s company, their arguments like duets” (65). She is compared with the young priestess in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, who makes Enkidu sociable. Patrick thinks that she is like a spirit that entered into him and dared to bully his private nature. Consequently, her departure messed his life, and his self became like a broken glass beyond repair. Even his speeches have become chaotic. “He spoke in bursts. Sentences needed additions, parentheses, to clarify not the information but his state” (90). When Alice meets him, she is taken aback by the miserable state in which he lives. Though he is too sure of the fact that he cannot come out of his obsession about Clara, he manages to say that “I’m trying to get my life in order” (100).

Like Clara, the role played by Alice is quite significant in Patrick’s life. Alice becomes acquainted with Patrick through Clara. After her passionate sensual affair with Patrick, she lives with her lover, Ambrose Small, who is supposed to be the missed

millionaire. Her disappearance left a deep void in Patrick's mind. However, the emptiness that was created due to Clara's withdrawal is filled by Alice when she and Patrick decide to live together. She chose to live with him, not with any egotistical intentions. She desires to take Patrick out of the emotional travails he undergoes. She understands the pain he goes through since she herself is the victim of hollowness after the loss of her husband. In her case, in the early years she has made a decision to withdraw from the society to join a religious institution secluded from the world. Once she also preferred solidarity rather than a communal life like Patrick. However, a chance-fall from the bridge has given her the opportunity of a new life. She chooses a new identity and decides to take up public life. Later in her life she becomes politically active in assisting other underprivileged to integrate and gain a voice in the greater society during the final phase of her life.

Another important character who comes into contact with Patrick as a friend in the due course is his co-worker, Nicholas Temelcoff. He is also an immigrant like Patrick. After a series of adventurous journeys, he reached Toronto and hired to work in the construction of the bridge. When he arrived at the city, language was his biggest obstruction that caught up his communication. Nicholas plays an active role during the absence of Patrick in the plot. After the death of Alice, Patrick is left alone to take care of her nine-year-old daughter Hana. But at that time he has been arrested for the wilful destruction of property and put in jail. And at this juncture, Nicholas offers to take in Hana in his home until Patrick is released. He also became the link to Alice, whom he met when she was a nun. He saved her when she fell down from the bridge.

In this way all the characters become connected to Patrick and in one way or the other and allied to each other like the relation between Nicholas and Alice. At the outset, the plot of the novel seems to be more complex with loose threads but when examined with greater care

it demonstrates the competence and proficiency of the writer who has neither invented nor created the characters but made attempts to reflect the complex nature of human beings.

Ondaatje was at his best in presenting the complex portrayal of characters and circumstances. In this novel, he has exposed them with ambivalence or indecision to perceive whether the characters are able to live in communion despite the factors that challenge their communal life.

The issues that are considered as hindrances that hamper the proximity of the people dealt with in the narrative include lack of language, cultural differences between people who share the same ethnic background, and psychological traumas they have experienced due to isolation, loss of loved ones, and poverty. While discussing the issue of lack of language, it is a disabling and isolating feature that constrains the flow of communication. This problem is elucidated through the struggles of Patrick and Nicholas, who strives hard to find acquaintances with the people around them, and an interesting point to note is that although both of them grieved over the difficulties in leading a life among the people of different languages, in the end they triumph over it, which results in a harmonious relationship with the heterogeneous community. Through them, the author has attempted to point out that a lack of language can never be measured as a crisis for conveying meanings.

In Patrick's case, since his childhood he lived a non-verbal existence with his silent father, who taught him only how to work with dynamites. Because of this kind of upbringing he becomes an onlooker, not participating in life around him but observing. When he begins to work in the tunnel in Toronto, he has no other go except to live in the place exclusively meant for the immigrants. "The south eastern section of the city where he now lived was made up mostly of immigrants and he walked everywhere not hearing any language he knew, deliriously anonymous. The people on the street, the Macedonians and Bulgarians, where his

only mirror” (*ISL* 117). As mentioned he feels like an anonymous being but still he is received warmly by the immigrants there. At one instance, how he has been treated by them is recorded affectionately.

Nicholas Temelcoff is another example who strives to overcome the language barrier, unlike Patrick who manages with the little of what he knew already. Temelcoff became aware of the importance of learning a new language. He has known the fact that “if he did not learn the language he would be lost” (*ISL* 49). And though he is called as a “daredevil” because he fears nothing, for him “language is much more difficult than what he does in space” (*ISL* 45). So he tries to learn the language like his fellowmen choose a movie star whom they can imitate in speaking the new language. At the age of 21, he attended a school to learn his new language with small children who were less than ten years old. Although he strongly believed that language is the only way to establish a harmonious community and manages to mingle with groups of people, setting up his own family, the truth is that he is able to get into the community that withholds a variety of entities not with the help of the language he has adopted but love and affection override language.

Equally, even different cultural identities and the past traumatic incidents that happened in their lives have no place to restrict the sympathy and affection towards each other. Patrick after his father’s death and Clara’s abandonment takes hold of his own life and finds solace in Alice’s company. His love for her has made him explode the tunnel in order to fight against the white man, who became the reason for her unjust death, knowing that many people like Alice lost their lives and became an unknown part of history. Similarly, Alice is able to retrieve her identity after being saved by Nicholas and vice versa. This shows the demonstration of the writer who, through the characterization of Patrick and others, shows a strong need to be part of a group and how they become part of the community they live in.

Thus, Ondaatje has focused on the stories of individual immigrants in Toronto at the beginning of the twentieth century and shows the importance of different people who become assimilated in the due course. The single stories of individuals become part of a “mural, which was a falling together of accomplices ... fragments of a human order” (*ISL* 151). At the outset, the book appears to be about isolation and uncertainty, but implicitly it celebrates connection and certainty. The characters are isolated before meeting each other and they prove that it is not that language or culture connects people but an act of kindness. Therefore, despite different cultural identities and language, communal life is possible, for humans can be understood beyond these things.

The Villa as a Microcosm of Communal Harmony

The same concept of communal life besides chaos has also been dealt in Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*, which is the sequel to *In the Skin of a Lion*. *The English Patient* deals with the relationships among four persons who come together under various circumstances in a villa which was once a nunnery and at present turned as a war hospital. Like the previous novel, only limited characters are portrayed and regardless of their dissimilarities, they share friendship, love, warmth, sympathy and affection.

The English Patient is a tale of four people, set under the backdrop of the Second World War. The characters include: Hana, a Canadian Army nurse, her patient, Almasy, her father’s long term friend Caravaggio and an Indian sapper Kip. They live with a void and in one way or the other try to isolate themselves from the outside world. But after their gathering at the villa, they enable harmonious relationship with the human values in each one of them.

Every character has gone through difficult times due to the war and other reasons. So, they decide to stay disconnected with the chaotic world they live in. But the short stay at the

villa has given them hope and resolution to live the remaining part of their lives. In Hana's case, in spite of the numerous disastrous events in her life that made her to stay out of the chaotic human world around her, been liberated after her relationship with Kip and the English Patient. And Kip who is unsatisfied with his own race is enlightened after meeting Hana, Almasy and Caravaggio.

The female protagonist of *The English Patient*, Hana prefers to lead a nomadic life, a life away from the world surrounded by human beings. She is a twenty-year-old Canadian Army nurse torn between her adolescence and adulthood. She had been trained at Women's College Hospital and sent to overseas during the Sicilian invasion. Once during a battle there, for days and nights, she attended the wounded soldiers. After three days, "she finally lay down on the floor beside a mattress where someone lay dead, and slept for twelve hours, closing her eyes against the world around her" (EP 51). Due to restlessness and agitation, she has grown harsh towards herself and others. She lost concern about the physical appearance.

Hana's life was ruthlessly unbalanced by the war, due to the death of her lover in the cruel war and her unborn child. Again, upon hearing the death of her father, she has an emotional breakdown. As a result, a deep void has been formed in her due to the continuous loss of her loved ones and experience as an army nurse. Thereafter, she hardly needed a human company. When she thinks that she is doomed to live with the void caused by the series of tragic occurrences in her life, she comes across a patient who is burned beyond recognition. To her, he appears as a "despairing saint" (EP 47). She finds solace in washing his burnt wounds and provides him with morphine. In this way she tries to seek consolation for not having attended her father in his death bed. She refuses to leave the hospital that has been mined with unexploded bombs all around the villa. Also, despite of his resemblance as her father she is very curious about him. "There was something about him she wanted to

learn, grow into, and hide in, where she could turn away from being an adult” (EP 54). She desired his company to drive away her loneliness. She would care for him, read to him, bathe him and administer doses of morphine. Her only communication is with him.

At first the patient is presumed to be a pilot whose plane has been smashed in the desert and has been saved by the Bedouin in the desert. He almost looked like a “burned animal, taut and dark” (EP 41). He is further described as, “a man with no face. An ebony pool. All identification consumed in fire. Parts of his burned body and face had been sprayed with tannic acid, that hardened into a protective shell over his raw skin. The area around his eyes was coated with a thick layer of gentian violet. There was nothing to recognize in him” (EP 51). He does not even remember his name and reveals his past life through memories. The only object that he has in possession with him is the heavily annotated book of Herodotus’s *The Histories*. However, in the latter part of the story, his original name is publicized as Ladislaus de Almasy, a well-renowned desert explorer who has gone missing when searching for an oasis.

Hana’s father’s friend named Caravaggio is an Italian-Canadian, works for the British Intelligence in the course of the war but the war callously imbalanced him. His fingers were cut off during an investigation and in order to cope with the pain he becomes a morphine addict. He comes to the villa to persuade Hana to leave the shell-shocked villa and the burnt patient. But as she refuses to leave, he too stays with her. Finally, an Indian sapper joins them after visiting several places that were mined with unexploded bombs all over the Italian desert. He has been trained as a mine-diffuser under the British. In the beginning of his career, the sceptical attitude of his white peers discourages a sense of community for him but later he feels a sense of belonging in a community when he is welcomed into Lord Suffolk’s household. Lord Suffolk and his team are killed while attempting to dismantle a new type of

bomb. Their disastrous death has caused an emotional withdrawal in Kip. After transferred to another unit in Italy, he and his partner reaches the abandoned villa where the other three characters live. He stays at the villa to clear all the remaining unexploded bombs that were buried in the orchards. After a long time, he feels a sense of community and confidence when he becomes Hana's lover. He also sees the interactions and conversation of the people who for a while disregards their own nationalities.

In this novel, lack of language and different cultural identities never stand as an impediment for a communal life but the problem of emotional withdrawal mainly due to the war, is prevalent throughout. But still, the characters are able to share friendship and successfully accomplish a communal life in the face of the cruel war that has destabilized the lives of many people. The characters' ability to form a new home in the villa has given them new sense of belonging to each other, a belonging that transcends their former loyalties to their home countries. This forms the universal theme of belonging.

Personal Traumas and Communal Bonds

In the case of Hana and Kip, they both have experienced a loss of belongingness which has left them with a confused identity. When he was enlisted in the British Army, he knowingly broke with his family tradition where the eldest brother was to enlist, the next brother was to become a doctor and the next a merchant. Then again, Kip's elder brother was engaged in the Indian opposition to British rule and consequently refused to acknowledge British authority. In this way, he has broken up with his own family and nationality. But he has developed a sense of belonging with England.

Kip feels that he has found for himself a new family and adapted to English culture in such a way that his sense of belongingness is attached to England than India. But after some time, Kip's sense of belongingness to this community becomes wounded when Lord Suffolk

and most of his team members are killed while dismantling a new type of bomb. Since Kip is the only one escaped from the accident, he has been asked to be in charge of the team.

Because Kip cannot handle the responsibility of being in charge, or being the person with authority, he disappears into the army and eventually ends up in the villa, wherein he finds a different family, one in need of reconciliation and healing.

When Kip arrives at the villa he does not stay in the house, instead he pitches a tent outside the premises. This sets him apart from the others. He does not share the same roof, or the same home. “At first he will not come into the house at all. He walks past on some duty or other to do with the dismantling of mines. Always courteous. A little nod of his head” (*EP* 76). The villa does not represent a home for Kip the way it does for Hana. Rather, it becomes like a sanctuary, a place free from the atrocities of war where he can relax and recuperate from his wounds. Kip becomes an observer of the other characters; he stays on the outside looking in. Though he participates and interacts socially with the others, he still manages to stay apart as he can retreat to his tent at any time he wishes. He has kept his distance to begin with due to his experiences in the army as “being the anonymous member of another race, a part of the invisible world. He had built up defences of character against all that, trusting only those who befriended him” (*EP* 209). He trusts only himself and isolates himself from the others by keeping to his tent. But, later he becomes more comfortable in the villa as he gets to know the other characters.

Kip begins to feel more like a family when he is with Hana, Caravaggio and the English Patient. His relationship with Hana is playful and without conditions, and he finds a new patron and source of knowledge in the English patient. Still, he has not shed his English identity, or his sense of belonging to the British. It is evident when he seeks advice and wisdom from the English Patient whom he considers as an Englishman. He believes him to

be superior to himself in terms of knowledge. But he is able to step out of his favouritism for the English rulers when he receives the message that the white nation has dropped the bomb upon Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In Hana's case, she decides to stay back at the villa not because she has nowhere else to go but does not want to lead a life with human beings who are mortal. Also, it is evident that she is guilty of having lost her unborn child. She almost gave up everything only after the death of the baby. She says to Caravaggio, "I had continued conversations with the child. I worked very hard in the hospitals and retreated from everybody around me. Except the child, who I shared everything with. In my head. I was talking to him while I bathed and nursed patients. I was a little crazy" (*EP* 87) and confesses that "... the child didn't just die, I was the one who destroyed it..." (*EP* 91). Though she knows that the child was not intentionally aborted, she puts the entire blame on her and declines to take up another life.

Only after her passionate intimate relationship with Kip she feels liberated and decides to leave the villa though they never reunited after that. Similarly, Kip who after the death of his team never dreamt of living a communal life. There he is welcomed as, "... we are going to be working together. We are very much a family here..." (*EP* 201). Also, much of the emotional distance he has built for himself is a result of his incredibly dangerous job in the war. As a man who must descend into deep pits to defuse bombs that could explode at any time, he is aware of the idea of his own mortality. And his job has taught him to distrust everything and everyone. But in the Italian villa, he becomes a part of the small community and enjoys the company of the English patient who goes on to say about his adventurous expeditions in the desert. In the end, he becomes a doctor and lives with his two children and an Indian wife. However, his thought for Hana has kept him tied between their two worlds. Though Hana and Kip had a short-lived affair, their love acted as a liberating force that

helped them to break their emotional ties that suspended their ability to live a harmonious life and they get free of the void and emotional withdrawal from the society they live in.

The novel has presented the “multiplicity of the landscapes, spaces, and backgrounds” and gives us a “polyphonic vision of the characters and their situations” (Mittapalli 57).

Although there are fewer characters, they stand as a representative for a larger community.

For example, Hana for “...so many nurses who had turned into emotionally disturbed handmaidens of the war...” (*EP* 190) and in the end somehow manages to break her secluded life and chooses to live in a society. In the case of her patient, who has been a famous desert explorer almost reduced into nothing stands for the people like him who travel beyond the borders and boundaries and in the process lose their identities and nationality. At one instance, Hana hears the patient saying, “We were German, English, Hungarian, African - all of us insignificant to them. Gradually we became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states” (*EP* 147). And Kip, who has “ethnic insecurity” (Gaur 68), stands for those who disregard their own nationality and try to ape the West. This shows Ondaatje’s skill in bringing out the whole aspects in a single character and by allowing them to meet gives greater perspectives and asserts that communal life is possible despite the dissimilarities.

Conclusion

Michael Ondaatje's *In the Skin of a Lion* and *The English Patient* illustrate that, even amidst chaos, trauma, and fragmentation, the human capacity for connection and communal life prevails. The research aimed to explore how Ondaatje’s narratives highlight the resilience of individuals and communities in overcoming cultural, linguistic, and psychological barriers. In both novels, Ondaatje portrays characters whose individual traumas are intricately tied to systemic violence and historical upheavals. Through fragmented narratives and postmodern



storytelling, Ondaatje captures this duality, presenting personal suffering as inseparable from broader socio-political contexts. Yet, both novels ultimately assert the transformative power of human connection. Whether it is Patrick's journey from isolation to integration in *In the Skin of a Lion* or the sanctuary formed by Hana, Kip, and others in *The English Patient*, Ondaatje's works highlight that "acts of empathy and shared experiences foster unity, proving that community life is possible even in the face of profound chaos and fragmentation" (Prieto 8). This affirmation of communal life amidst disintegration reflects not only resilience but also the possibility of reconstructing meaning in a fractured world. Thus, the research underscores despite global chaos and cultural alienation, the values of empathy, kindness, and shared narratives can bridge the divides. Ondaatje's works remind us that while the postmodern world may lack unified meaning and absolute truths, the essence of human connection transcends such uncertainties, reaffirming the possibility of communal harmony.



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