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**REFLECTION OF DIASPORA IN MICHAEL ONDAATJE'S
 COMING THROUGH SLAUGHTER**

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Abstract:

Michael Ondaatje (1943) is a Sri Lankan born Canadian novelist and poet. He is one of the most well-known diasporic writers in the post-modern era. He is looked upon as one of the promising writers of Canada. Ondaatje has written six novels. All his novels are diasporic novels. In his novels Ondaatje depicts the people of different cultures living together and coming from different countries. As a writer of diaspora, in Ondaatje's novels we come across various aspects of diaspora. These include the theme of identity crisis, migration, hybridity, multiculturalism, transnationalism, intertextuality, historiographic metafiction, space, place, alienation and displacement. Ondaatje himself is an immigrant novelist who thinks that all people should live together. In all his novels he highlights his life and importance of immigration. The different characters in his novel represent different cultural and racial background. Through these characters Ondaatje portrays the condition of the contemporary society. In fact he wants to alter the existing condition of all immigrants. The aim and objective of the present article is to highlight the attempt of Ondaatje in focusing the lives of immigrants through different diasporic concerns and to enable them to join the mainstream of society by bringing equality among all peoples depicted in the novel 'Coming Through Slaughter'. Before we take a glance at the novel 'Coming Through Slaughter' as a diasporic novel, it is necessary to have a brief idea of the concept of diaspora and its various aspects.

Key Words: *Diaspora, identity crisis, migration, hybridity, transnationalism.*

What is Diaspora ?

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines diaspora as "the process by which people of a particular nation become scattered and settle in other countries, especially the Jews who left ancient Palestine in this way "In the words of James Clifford "Diaspora is a history of dispersal myths and memories of homeland, desire for eventual return, alienation in host land, ongoing support of homeland and a collective identity" - James Clifford (403)). . People migrate from their country to another country for fulfilling their dreams of jobs, businesses, services etc. These migrants are known by different names such as exile, expatriate, refugee etc. They are called as diasporic groups or communities. Diasporic communities constantly move themselves in the homeland as well as in the host country. These communities come across the other communities, other cultures, other races, other conventions and condition in the host or settled country. In addition to their language, culture and tradition of their home country they have to get acquainted with the language, culture and tradition of the new country, where they have migrated. In a sense, the immigrants mix up with the new country and there only they experience a sense of negligence and otherness, a sense of homelessness, sense of not belonging and not possessing anything in the new country culturally, socially, racially, economically and politically. The immigrants come across multicultural transnational experiences. They also experience a sense of alienation, identity crisis, space and time, displacement etc. In this sense Michael Ondaatje's novel 'Coming Through Slaughter' is a good example of diasporic fiction. All in all, the novel portrays the various aspects of diaspora.

The novel 'Coming Through Slaughter' is published in 1976. It is the first novel of Michael Ondaatje. The novel throws light on the problems of immigrants due to their acceptance of diasporic ideology in their life. The novel focusses marginal characters, multicultural relationships and cultural clashes. In this novel Ondaatje tries to bring equality among the marginal, minority people and the natives of the host country. The novel depicts the history of two legendary figures 'Buddy Bolden and E. J. Bellocq'. Both are from the marginal sections of society. Buddy is a hard working barber at night and a jazz musician in day time in New Orleans whereas Bellocq is a photographer who wants to keep record of the common women like prostitutes through their photographs. Both are treated as migrants in New Orleans. Their history is not included in the official history of Canada. They live in a multicultural society. The novel depicts the problems faced by these legendary figures in New Orleans. The elements of multiculturalism, transnationalism, hybridity, intersexuality, identity crisis, displacement etc. are represented in this novel through the plot, characterization, setting, language, theme of the novel. The reflection of all these elements in this novel has ultimately made the novel 'the novel of diaspora'. All these elements of diaspora and their reflection in the novel 'Coming Through Slaughter' can be studied in detail as follows:

1) The reflection of elements of multiculturalism in the novel :

Multiculturalism means a co-existing and presence of diverse cultures. It includes different religious, cultural or racial groups. It is reflected through habitual behaviour, cultural conventions and values. In the novel, 'Coming Through Slaughter' we come across various aspects of multiculturalism. These include marginalization, violence, sufferings and humiliation, cultural clashes and multicultural relationships.

In this novel Michael Ondaatje depicts the life of the marginal people in the Canadian, New Orleans society. These marginal people are but immigrants from Africa, Asia, Europe etc. These include Dalits, the Black slaves, minorities, Negroes, women etc. In fact, these people are the real contributors to the development of their host country, but they are excluded from the official history of the nation. They are neglected from the main stream of society. The characters like Buddy Bolden, E. J. Bellocq are marginal characters in the novel even though they have their own heroic contribution to their culture and country. Buddy is a well-known jazz musician and Bellocq is a famous photographer. But they are marginalized in the Canadian society. Even other characters like Nora and Bridget are marginalized.

As a multicultural society we see the reflection of violence, sufferings and humiliation existing in it. Buddy lives an insulting life in Shell Beach district. He has to do menial and lower types of works like picking up dirt, cleaning toilet and rubbing phones. People from backward countries are exploited by the people from the forward countries. The black suffer at the hands of the white.

The murder of Nora Bass, a black women in the novel represents violence in New Orleans. Buddy has popularized jazz music in the country, but he is neglected there. It shows his sufferings. The book 'A Blue Book' by Tom Anderson, gives a factual account of sufferings, violence and humiliation of the marginalized class. Even the horrible death of Bellocq, a marginalized photographer, represents his sufferings.

Buddy is a wanderer to different countries. He lives in a multicultural society. His culture is but the culture of a nomadic, across the borders of all other cultures. He establishes multi-cultural relationship in case of his married life and in case of friendship. By leaving his homeland, Buddy travels to England, Canada and mixes up with people there. He forgets his earlier environment, community, language and culture of the home country and follows a new environment, community, languages and culture of the host country. However, we find him in full despair because he finds that he is undertreated in the new culture and knows that there are clashes within people at cultural level. The black, the women, the dalits etc. are looked upon as marginalized people in Canada.

Buddy is not restricted to any particular society. He had pre-marital, extra-marital relationship with

women beyond his culture. He is foolish for relationships without which life is miserable for him. In his life he doesn't consider a binary opposition of black/white, poor/rich, animal/human in his life. His establishment of relationship with Nora, her sisters and Robertson Brewit shows multicultural relationship. Their relationships blur the boundaries of cultures and nations. This multicultural relationship shows multiculturalism in the novel. Thus, the novel 'Coming Through Slaughter' is a good example of multiculturalism.

2. The reflection of transnationalism in the novel :

In the novel 'Coming Through Slaughter' we come across the reflection of transnationalism and its connection with Canada. Transnationalism is a term at first used by the thinker Randolph Bourne in his article 'Transnational America' in 1916. In the words of a well-known critic Glick Schiller, "Transnational migration is the process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement". (Schiller et al.; 48). The migrants migrate to other countries in search of job and business and settle in other countries. They maintain connection, build institutions, conduct transactions and influence local and national events in the countries from which they have migrated. Transnationalism is something beyond family and household. It includes organizations that link the home country with another country where all immigrants settle. Even though the term transnationalism is opposed to diaspora, it is often used synonymously with diaspora. In this novel the reflection of migration, alienation, historiographic fiction, narration of the self, transnational identity of characters etc. represent transnationalism.

Buddy Bolden, a new jazz musician is a representative of Ondaatje himself who has migrated from Sri Lanka to Canada at an early age of eleven. His identity is obliterated. He doesn't know from which country he has migrated. There is no official record of Buddy. All other characters are in search of Buddy. His friends, the Detective Webb and the photographer E. J. Bellocq also have migrated like Buddy. Even many other characters like Robin Brewit, Buddy's beloved have migrated.

The migrated Buddy is an immigrant, a music genius, isolated from friends and family and finally leading his life at the southeast Louisiana Hospital in Jackson. As a musician Buddy was unsurpassed in his time. He struggled to transcend life, miseries as he frequently lapsed into despair, loneliness and madness. The society portrayed in this novel is immoral and depraved and all the characters come from different locations.

Alienation is an important theme of diasporic writing. Isolation, exile meaninglessness, rootlessness etc. are all features of alienation. In this novel we see alienation in the lives of Buddy and Bellocq. Both Buddy and Bellocq live a life of isolation. They are totally immersed in their works. Buddy tries to overcome isolation by engaging himself in music. But it brings his self destruction : His love for music made him to leave his wife Nora and two children. Later on he finds that he is not able to fulfill the demands of the people who need variety in music. In this regard Alice Van Wart writes : "Bolden is socially alienated, he is outside the moral and social boundaries of the society and is isolated and alienated from the structure of control and order". (Ibid, 1). Bellocq is a famous photographer in New Orleans, he took the photographs of prostitutes and tore them. It shows his isolation. Later on he committed suicide because of discontentment in life.

Thirdly, historiographic metafiction is also one of the features of transnationalism and the novel 'Coming Through Slaughter' is a fictionalized biography of Buddy Bolden, a New Orleans Jazz musician. The novel depicts the forgotten history of Buddy. People admired his music. In the novel, the novelist has used real as well as fictional incidents. The use of facts and fiction has made this novel a metafiction. In this regard the critic Wolfgang Iser writes : "While I have used real names and characters and historical situations, I have also used more personal pieces of friends and father. There have been some date changes, some characters brought together, and some facts have been expanded or polished to suit the truth of fiction". (Iser, 450).

In the opinion of Jon Saklofske the information in the novel is collected by Ondaatje. This information includes partial accounts official records, numerous perspectives, invented fictions and we can see it as a private narrative collection that has been published in a non-traditional form. It simultaneously challenges the past with its own forgotten fragments.

Next to this the novel is an expression of the novelist, Ondaatje himself. Narration of the self is but one aspect of transnationalism. Michael Ondaatje narrates his own history through the character of Buddy Bolden. Both Buddy and Michael are from Asian countries and live in Western countries. Both face the problems of identity and loneliness in the alien land. Ondaatje narrates this as follows :

"What was there in that, before I knew your nation, your colour, your age that made me push my arm forward and spill it through the front of your mirror and clutch myself? Did not want to pose in your accent but think in your brain and body, and you like a weather bird arising round in the middle of your life to exact opposites and burning your brains out". (Ondaatje, 157).

The story of Bolden continues throughout the novel. Ondaatje's success fulfills the gaps as he draws much from history as from memory, re-mixes facts with fiction, reality with imagination, even mixes Bolden with Ondaatje's personal pieces of friends and father. It is but the narration of the self, the novelist himself, a typical feature of transnationalism.

The identity of the characters in the novel also represents transnationalism. The relationship between Tom Pickett and Hon can be seen as a transnational relationship. The novelists portrays various transnational relationships among the characters. The extra-marital relationship among various characters can be seen as transnational relationships when Pickett boasts about his relationship with Nora, Bolden doubts the stability of Nora's love. Bolden is neither killed nor murdered but is slaughtered on the altar of injustice. He withdraws from Nora and Storyville fame to lead a silent life with Robin and Javelin Brewit. Thus, Buddy has a transnational identity. He kept relationship with the western and eastern countries.

Bolden loves music and is isolated from his family and friends. The novel depicts his last months of madness when his music is more radical and his behaviour becomes more erratic. The portrayal of prostitutes in the novel also represents their transnational identity. Buddy and the prostitutes have no history of their own like the photographer Bellocq. All of them have different national roots, racial roots and cultural roots. In this sense they have a transnational identity, not belonging to any particular country.

3) Intertextuality of the Novel :

Ondaatje has used many intertextual references in the novel 'Coming Through Slaughter'. Intertextuality is one of the themes of the diasporic novel and the present novel is not an exception to this. Like all other novels of Ondaatje, the present novel also is a good example of intertextuality. The number of quotations and allusions from other texts are included in this novel. The references of the Jazz story, Bolden's profession as a barber are from the journal and other instances are incorporated in this novel. Like his extended poem 'The Collected works of Billy the Kid', in this novel also Ondaatje chooses to reshuffle the different truth to find a new meaning. The mysterious death of Buddy's wife's mother is also an incident picked up from an article. The story of the novel is also biographical in which Ondaatje has put in incidents from some other biographies. Thus, as a diasporic novel this novel represents intertextuality.

4) Hybridity in the Novel :

The novel 'Coming through Slaughter' is a diasporic novel. The immigrants migrate from their home country to the host country. In fact it is a cross cultural journey. Bolden is born in Sri Lankan eastern culture and now he lives in western culture. The immigrants settle in the host country and try to mix up with the western culture in the host country. In this host country we come across immigrants from different Asian, African countries carrying with them their different cultures, histories and trying to cope with the culture of the host countries. Thus the conglomeration of all cultures creates a hybrid culture. In this novel we come across the hybrid culture developed by Buddy, Nora, Bellocq and other characters.

5) Displacement :

The characters in this novel don't belong to any particular country. They are not a citizen of any country, but they are a citizen of the world. In this sense they are non-belonging. Thus, they have a sense of non-belonging. They migrate from one country to another and they don't belong to any place and thus get displaced. Buddy, Bellocq, Nora and other characters are displaced. Their global attitude doesn't restrict them to any particular origin or land. To sum up, we can say that the reflection of transnationalism, multiculturalism, intertextuality, hybridity, displacement etc. in this novel in a true sense enables us to look upon this novel as a diasporic novel.

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