

Effect of Trauma on Children in the Selected Novels of Michael Ondaatje

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Abstract: *The present research paper deals with the incidents with children and adolescents in Michael Ondaatje's three novels, The Cat's Table, Divisadero and Warlight. The trauma associated with events in adolescence has an impact on people for life. Many times, due to some incidents in childhood, people are afraid of some things throughout their life or it becomes a disorder of their mind, an attempt has been made to throw light on these points.*

Keywords: Adolescence, trauma, disorder, Mental health, children etc

I. INTRODUCTION

Michael Ondaatje, having been born in Sri Lanka, migrated to England and then to Canada, has undergone all the things that a diasporic community comes across or faces as it tries to hold its identity and culture in a new land. As it is a natural human tendency that a creative mind gets shaped, nurtured and modified by the surroundings as well as the past happenings and incidents that place all around the society or nation at large. Michael Ondaatje has also been a part and parcel of the diasporic community and hence cannot alienate himself from the kind of cultural fissures and challenges faced by such communities worldwide. A creative mind, whether consciously or unconsciously, gets involved in what is going around in its surroundings. In his work, Ondaatje creates a vivid and unique portrayal of life's estuaries. Canadian writing has been influenced by numerous luminaries from throughout the globe, including Margaret Atwood, Alice Munro, Yann Martel, Lawrence Hill, and Miriam Toews.

Ondaatje's remarkable reflective abilities and amazing cognitive processes delight his readers' brains. Ondaatje crafts tales in the pages, carved on geographical locations, together with the unseen thread of family and its links. According to Ondaatje, family relationships extend beyond blood relations and encompass all individuals who support and remain steadfast foundations of a person's development and experience.

Migration is an important event in Michael Ondaatje's life. When he travels from Sri Lanka to England to meet his mother, he gets an opportunity to come face to face with the unknown aspects of life. We can see the transformation of his experience in his novel *The Cat's Table*, how an 11-year-old boy leaves his country and travels alone for 21 days in the desire to meet his mother. That 11-year-old boy Mynah looks at the world with his child's mind and tries to understand. During the 21-day journey, many incidents happen to him, which teach him a lifetime lesson.

First of all, Mynah was given table no. 76 which is given to the people from the lower strata of the society who do not have any respectable place in the society. An innocent child who has no knowledge about the social system and the position of the people in the society, he is faced with his social position for the first time. This incident left an indelible impression on the child's mind. Here at the same table there are two more children, Ramadhin and Cassius. Mynah befriends them. The three boys wander around all parts of the ship trying to learn about the people. Mr. Mazappa, who sits at Michael's table, is a piano artist, while giving information about love and women to the three children, says that - "*Listen my peculiar boy, women will sweet talk, and give you the big eye. ... I am protecting you with what I know. But as an eleven year old I do not feel protected, I feel wounded in advance with possibilities.*" (The Cats Table, 37)

Mynah and his friends listen to Mazappa's words but he is not protected but becomes apprehensive about his relationships with women in the future. Those things have a negative effect on the mind of those children.

Mynah's cousin Emily is also on that ship 'Oronsay,' but she sits at another table. Emily and Mynah's families live nearby in Sri Lanka. He has known Emily for many years. Emily is older than Mynah. Sunil, who is a trickster, traps

Emily in his spell of love and unknowingly makes Emily commit a murder, which has a deep impact on Emily's mind. The incident would haunt Emily for the rest of her life.

Michael Ondaatje's another novel *Divisadero* which was published in the year 2007. This novel also revolves around the incident in the life of three children Anna, Claire Coop. Anna's mother died while giving birth to her. Anna's father brings up Anna and Claire. Claire is also adopted by Anna's father. Later a boy named Coop joins their family. Whose whole family was killed by the robbers but the well was saved by hiding. Coop enters Anna's family as the son and assistant to her father.

The first chapter describes the tragic demise of Coop's biological family and how the little kid was adopted by the man referred to as the father, who saw him more as a helping hand than as a son. "A father, his two children, each 11 years old, and Coop the hired man, who was a few years older than us. These words, which are recounted in Claire's perspective, show how Coop was prepared for agricultural work by being schooled to perform hard labour rather than learning about aesthetics.

The three children grow up together. Anna and Claire look like twin sisters to Coop in childhood. Coop cares for both. When Anna and Coop grow up and reach adolescence, they become very close to each other. Anna reads Coop stories in her Grandfather's cabin, and Coop is lost in those stories, forgetting the dark memories of his childhood and the family's massacre.

Once Anna and Coop were making love in the grandfather's cabin when Anna's father suddenly shows up and beats Coop very badly. After this, he forcefully drags Anna into his truck and but Anna somehow manages to escape from his father's truck and sits in a refrigeration truck.

This incident has a very serious impact on Coop's mind. Coop is in love with Anna, but Anna's father misunderstands the relationship as he has always raised the three children as brothers and sisters. Coop also runs away from home after this incident and becomes a big gambler. Anna arrives in a refrigeration truck in a place south of Paris. Here also she remains fearful remembering that horrific incident. She misses her father, sister Claire and Coop but doesn't want to go back home anymore.

In all these novels, it is seen that how deep is the impact of the events happening with the children on their mind. *Trauma is never simply one's own, and that we are implicated in each other's trauma.* (Caruth 24)

We are all tied together in the tangle of societal stereotypes by an unseen, interconnected thread. Even if it could seem that the trauma of another living being is not something that has to be addressed and resolved, the truth is that it is connected—or, to put it another way, that every person would be impacted by the same thing.

Michael, an 11-year-old boy, grows up and matures from his experiences on a 21-day voyage. For the first time, he encounters the world outside the house, where there are all kinds of people. He also meets criminals like Sunil and Neymar, and also people like Mazep and Lesquety, who teach him how to live life. It is like whatever is written in it. It leaves an indelible impression on their mind and they remember it for a lifetime. Michael also takes in many experiences during this journey and loses his childishness and becomes mature.

Similarly, in *Dividedro*, Anna and Coop's lives change completely because of just one incident. They are going through adolescence at that time, and instead of beating, there was a need to explain them with love and listen to their side.

Warlight is the latest novel of Michael Ondaatje. Central figures of this novel are Nathaniel a fourteen year old boy and his elder sister Rachel. The background of novel is set on the post world war period.

1945 marks the start of the book, just after World War II had ended. In order to spend the next year in Singapore, Nathaniel's mother and father must bid their children farewell. The Moth continues to watch over the kids at their home. Given that they worked together during the war as firewatchers at the Grosvenor House Hotel, Nathaniel's mother trusts him to care for her kids. The kids think their mother and The Moth collaborated on other shady projects.

Although their parents intended to send them to a boarding school, Nathaniel and Rachel persuade The Moth to let them live at home instead. When The Moth asks his musketeers to move inside the house, things rapidly become interesting. One friend, The Darter, illegally imports greyhounds into London to fuel the city's vituperative but expanding assiduity in gambling. Additionally, he illegally imports snares into London by transporting them by water to the Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills. The Darter helps Nathaniel get a job as a waiter in a restaurant. There, Nathaniel and Agnes Street meet. When they start dating, Agnes convinces Nathaniel to join the smuggling business.

Later in the novel, we see that Nathaniel, Rachel and Moth are badly injured by a criminal. In this incident, Nathaniel and Rachel survive but Moth dies. After this incident, Nathaniel's mother joins him and his sister for a short span of time. She explains that she had to leave them as part of a deal that would ensure their safety. She departs once more. Rachel is moved to a boarding school in rural England, while Nathaniel is transferred to one in America. Rachel forgets the old things and try to move forward in life. She also has a son. But Nathaniel keeps on trying to find out the truth about his mother and eventually succeeds.

II. CONCLUSION

Teenage trauma is something that may have an affect on general well-being and mental health throughout adulthood. While the Emotional trauma poses a higher-level hazard to mental health than it does for adults throughout the adolescent years because teenage brains undergo tremendous changes during this time. "The Teenage Brain Is More Susceptible to Emotional Trauma"

In all three of Ondaatje's novels, we see that children are involved in different kinds of problems. When their parents are not with them to support and guide them, they take the wrong path. They do some such wrong things which have a deep impact on their mind and sometimes that incident completely changes the direction of their life. The effect of trauma on the adolescent mind remains for life and sometimes it takes the form of disorder.

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