Chapter 1

Introduction

The purpose of study is to focus upon and explore the issues related to transnational and transcultural identity in the works of Michael Ondaatje. The study investigates multiculturalism and issues of migration implicit in the migrant experience. The focus is on ‘in between world’ of migrants and negotiations of identity around the notions of alienation and belonging in the transcultural/transnational context. The significant aspects of the transnational experience relates to the issues of identity, language, space/place, family and community. The study explores the ways in which transnationalism as a postmodern phenomenon has transformed the perspective on these categories. The study also examines how transnational and transcultural perspective affects constitution of national, ethnic and cultural identity. The study in particular focuses on the fictional works of Michael Ondaatje.

Michael Ondaatje, the celebrated Canadian poet and novelist of Sri Lankan descent, writes works that ‘talk’ from transnational/transcultural locations. Born in Sri Lanka, educated in England and now settled in Canada, Ondaatje draws extensively from his own experiences of transnational/transcultural movement across countries. His works show his major interest in depicting the lives of migrants who leave their roots to find anchor in other countries. His concern in discussing plight of migrants is due to his own experience of moving to different countries. He like all migrants faced identity crisis and has been influenced by multiple affiliations that cut across national and cultural boundaries.
Ondaatje’s complex cultural background enables him to explore conflicts and contradictions faced by identity in several places. Though Ondaatje's works demonstrate that such identities are not easy to cope up with in the environment which are entirely different and which do not welcome them fully, still, he affirms that there is hope and possibility of reconciliation. Sonja Lehmann aptly observes:

Even though Ondaatje’s fiction stresses that such identities are not always easy to live with, especially in conditions where one’s environment does not welcome them, there is still almost always some sense of reconciliation in the texts which makes simultaneously taking part in several cultures and nations seem possible. The sense of loss and displacement that all characters at one point feel as a result of their migrations mostly gives way to at least a little hope for a more positive and empowering sense of belonging to several places. (Lehmann, 282).

In this way Ondaatje’s fiction shows that it is possible to live and adjust simultaneously in different cultures and nations. His major focus is on the issues of displacement and in betweenness, he however does not give any clear solutions to the originating problems.

The present study takes account of Ondaatje’s transnational and transcultural negotiation of identity in the light of contemporary discourse on globalization and multiculturalism etc. Keeping in view the title of the present study, it becomes necessary to first understand the key terms related with the topic, such as, transnationalism, transculturalism, identity, negotiation, migration, culture, multiculturalism, hybridity etc. Hence the present study makes use of Postcolonial theory and practice that lays emphasis on crossing of borders, dissolution of boundaries, spaces and negotiations in the formation
of identity beyond cultures and nations resulting in global identity. All these aspects are repeatedly present in Ondaatje's works which become focus of our study.

In the span of a few decades, the scale of human migration (an age-old phenomenon) has expanded significantly, and the internal experience of migration has changed through the rapid introduction of new informational and communication technologies, which make it possible for twenty-first century immigrants to transcend time and space in a way that was inconceivable a decade ago. The Global Commission on International Migration Report (GCIM, 2005), records that “International migrants and displaced peoples in the world number over 200 million, a number that has more than doubled since 1972”(qtd. in Padmini Banerjee, 11) and is still rising. It results in the various problems related to identity crisis. These issues play an important role in postcolonial, contemporary, transnational era. The issue of identity anyway is always problematic, it however becomes particularly conspicuous in the contexts where different identities are brought into sharp focus. This happens as different ways of life can no longer be maintained as the unquestioned principles of a particular tradition. There are, of course, many and often incompatible views on this issue that need to be negotiated by anyone who at least wants to try to resolve the competing claims on one’s identity.

Transnationalism today is an experience that is a part of the daily existence of a large group of people that live outside their home country. The relative ease of communication and travel, allowed by the modern technological advances, has propelled the era of globalization and influenced the ways migrants live. Migrants are increasingly more able to travel to their home country, communicate frequently with people back home, or engage in cultural and business ventures, while at the same time integrating into the host
society. The possibility of living across two (or more) countries, languages and cultures changes the way new migrants position themselves in relation to their home and host country, and the way they understand the concepts of home, language, family and identity. Even though the move is voluntary, it tends to complicate the relationships these migrants have with their country of origin and settlement. The experience changes profoundly the way migrants think about themselves, their family and their country.

Starting with the early nineties, migration literature began including transnational migration and transnationalism as new ways of understanding contemporary migration practices. The term ‘transnationalism’ was however first used by Randolph S. Bourne in his 1916 article “Transnational America”. Bourne prophetically observed:

America is coming to be, not a nationality but a transnationality, a weaving back and forth, with the other lands, of many threads of all sizes and colors…No Americanization will fulfill this vision which does not recognize the uniqueness of this trans-nationalism of ours. The Anglo-Saxon attempt to fuse will only create enmity and distrust. The crusade against "hyphenates" will only inflame the partial patriotism of trans-nationals, and cause them to assert their European traditions in strident and unwholesome ways. But the attempt to weave a wholly novel international nation out of our chaotic America will liberate and harmonize the creative power of all these peoples and give them the new spiritual citizenship, as so many individuals have already been given, of a world. (Bourne, 95-96).

Bourne thus emphasized the importance for the American immigrants to maintain their links to original culture.
The recognition of the need to appropriately study today’s migrants, many of whom live “dual,” even “multiple” lives spanning national borders connected to social networks in both “countries of origin and settlement” harks back to the questions raised by Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Szanton Blanc (1992). The anthropological work of Nina Glick Schiller and her colleagues has been critical in establishing the concept of transnationalism as a valid theoretical contribution to the study of immigration. In the article “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” Schiller, Basch and Blanc (1995) challenge the traditional understanding of migration as permanent relocation from one country to another, a process that was assumed always culminated in full assimilation. The authors aptly state, “In the past immigrants were forced to abandon, forget, or deny their ties to home and in subsequent generations memories of transnational connections were erased…These ties were discounted and obscured by the narratives of nation that were prevalent until the current period of globalization.” (“From Immigrant to Transmigrant…,” 51). These researchers have asserted that contemporary migrants’ sense of connectedness to multiple contexts is fostered through continuous access to a wide range of media and communication channels, often across vast distances. In S. Mahler’s considered opinion, “Transmigrants should be researched not only as agents of change vis-à-vis their communities and countries of origin but also across entire transnational social fields.” (Mahler, 93-94). For the better part of two decades, researchers have attempted to situate the study of migration processes historically as well as theoretically.

With globalization, the understanding of migration is reconceptualized in the form of transnational migration. Transnationalism can be considered as challenging forms of multiculturalism that are bounded by nation state. According to this concept, immigrants
are not considered as ‘uprooted’ or as having completely left behind their old countries but as maintaining multiple links and networks with their homelands. Schiller, Basch and Blanc(1995) succinctly defined transnational migration as, “process by which immigrants forge and sustain simultaneous multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (“From Immigrant to Transmigrant…,” 48), a definition that is widely used in the literature on transnationalism. Basch, Schiller and Blanc(1994) in “Transnational Projects: A New Perspective” aptly elaborates, “We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders.” (*Nations Unbound*…, 8). Those who are engaged in these cross-border movements and maintain multiple links with host and origin countries are called transmigrants. Transnational migrants are people who are active participants in the social and cultural lives of the host country, Schiller, Basch and Blanc(1995) emphasize, “at the same time, they are engaged elsewhere in the sense that they maintain connections, build institutions, conduct transactions, and influence local and national events in the countries from which they emigrated” (“From Immigrant to Transmigrant…,” 48). This process allows the transnational migrants to fashion a cross-national existence that engages them in the political and social life of both their home and host country. According to Basch, Schiller and Blanc(1994), “Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and develop subjectivities and identities embedded in networks of relationships that connect them simultaneously to two or more nation states.” (*Nations Unbound*…, 8). Thus migrants are viewed as having the capacity to negotiate their places in society, whether in host or origin countries simultaneously. In another text, Nina Glick Schiller(1990) defines Transnational migration as, “a pattern of migration in which
persons, although they move across international borders and settle and establish social relations in a new state, maintain social connections within the polity from which they originated. In transnational migration, persons literally live their lives across international borders.” (“Transmigrants and Nation States: Something Old and Something New in U.S. Immigrant Experience”, 96). The transnational thus acts as a link between two cultures.

Luis Roniger succinctly notes that, “The concept of transnationalism addresses the interconnectivity between societies that is often triggered by, and in turn conditions, those special processes, political movements and cultural networks extending beyond nation-state borders. Such interconnectivity can develop—although does not necessarily unfold—along institutional lines. Yet, often, it becomes equally visible in cultural bonds, historical memories, cross-border networks and unstructured migration flows.” (Roniger, 315). Transnationalism thus emphasizes migrants’ social, economic, political and cultural networks which involve both country of origin and country of settlement. Alejandro Portes enunciates, “Transnational activities can be defined as those that take place on a recurrent basis across national borders and that require a regular and significant commitment of time by participants.” (qtd. in Valtonen, 54). Such activities may be conducted by representatives of national governments and multinational corporations, or by individuals, such as immigrants and their home country relations. These activities range from economic enterprises to political, cultural and social initiatives. This definition indicates the close relationship between transnationalism and globalisation, which also refers essentially to the rapid expansion of cross-border transactions and networks in all areas of life. At the same time, the concept suggests that boundaries between nation-states are becoming less distinct. Rocco Raymond and Fernando J. García Selgas define
Transnationalism as a social space, sphere or field; as:

…a community of relations and communications—-that links people, networks and organizations across the boundaries and borders of different nations; a phenomenon which is particularly evident in the double-edged lives of migrants who have two languages and two homes, as well as in political and economic institutions such as the so-called multinational companies. (Raymond, Selgas, 10).

Transnational communities thus are groups whose identity is not primarily based on attachment to a specific territory. The notion of a transnational community puts the emphasis on human agency: such groups are the result of cross-border activities which link individuals, families and local groups. Kathleen Valtonen defines Transnational Communities as, “those which spread across borders, have an enduring presence abroad and take part in some kind of exchange between or among component groups that are spatially separated.” (Valtonen, 54). Thus there is more or less consensus among various scholars regarding the definition of the term.

Together with globalisation, the sharp increase of transnational communities undermines the means of controlling difference founded on territoriality. Thomas Faist rightly observes that the transnational communities “comprise dense and continuous sets of social and symbolic ties, characterised by a high degree of intimacy, emotional depth, moral obligation and sometimes even social cohesion. Geographical proximity is no longer a necessary criterion for the existence of a community, there are ‘communities without propinquity.’” (Faist, 5). Hence transnational communities represent a powerful challenge to the traditional conception of nation-state belonging. The idea of the person
who belongs to just one nation-state or at most migrates from one state to just one other (whether temporarily or permanently) is undermined by the increase in mobility; growth of temporary, cyclical and recurring migrations; cheap, fast and easy travel, etc. In the context of globalisation, transnationalism can extend previous face-to-face communities based on kinship, neighbourhoods or workplaces into remote virtual communities, which communicate at a distance. The leading migration scholar Alejandro Portes in *International Migration Review*, 1997 succinctly observes:

> Transnational communities comprise dense networks across political borders created by immigrants in their quest for economic advancement and social recognition. Through these networks, an increasing number of people are able to live dual lives. Participants are often bilingual, move easily between cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and pursue economic, political and cultural interests that require their presence in both. (qtd. in Koser, 27)

Transnational communities hence do not necessarily refer only to migrants, since cross-border groups with common cultural, sporting, political or other interests might also consider themselves a community. However, in practical terms, groups arising from migrations are the most significant type, and most research on transnational communities refers to these. Clearly, migrants have always lived in more than one setting, maintaining links with a real or imagined community in the state of origin. The new is the context of globalisation and economic uncertainty that facilitates the construction of social relations transcending national borders. The increase in mobility and the development of communication have contributed to such relations and has created a transnational space of
economic, cultural and political participation.

Transnationalism thus acknowledges the importance of processes of cultural, ideological and emotional hybridization that results in formation of new ethnic identities; the technological advancement and fast means of communication and transport facilitating cultural syncretism, the networks which allows flow of capital linking world corporations, decolonization, blurring of communities and territories to reconstruct the new experience and identity. Thomas Faist highlights three possibilities of transnational migration:

… assimilation: the merging of minorities into the ‘core majority’, i.e. acculturation; cultural pluralism: minorities, by and large, maintain their own culture; often transplanted from country of emigration to immigration country, or indigenous minorities maintain a core repertoire of cultural and identity; syncretism allows a dominant culture to co-exist side-by-side with various sub-cultures, while the latter are influenced by transboundary ties upon the formation of identities. (Faist, 6).

Thus transnational draws attention to individuals, social movements, and activities that transcend national boundaries as people of different cultures mingle to assimilate and become transcultural. Transculturation is a complex term that embraces time, space, place, culture, nation and globalization.

The concept of Globalization however is different from transnationalism. Luis Roniger defines Globalization as:

…the reorganization of production across state borders and the removal of barriers to free trade, finance and investment, with the consequent greater integration of national economies and supposed convergence of consumer
patterns. Correlated are phenomenon not confined to economic realm—such as growth of communication and mass movements of labour migrants across national borders—but attention is mainly drawn to the economic foundations of these processes. (Roniger, 315).

In a similar vein, Thomas Faist highlights the difference between globalization and transnational as, “Whereas global processes are largely decentered from specific nation-state territories and take place in a world context above and below states, transnational processes are anchored in and span two or more nation-states, involving actors from the spheres of both state and civil society.” (Faist, 5). Both concepts no doubt influence each other but the former constitutes a wide range of issues not only related to capitalism, but also to the economic, political, social, individual fields and looks beyond maintaining transnational networks and connections.

Another important problem is to distinguish between diaspora and transnationalism. Robin Cohen draws upon the classical tradition to expand the definition of diaspora to include not just the people involuntarily dispersed from an original homeland, but also those displaced through community expansion due to trade, the search for work and empire building. According to him, “It also conforms to the use of word to describe trading and commercial networks, to those seeking work abroad and to imperial and colonial settlers.” (Cohen, 7). A diaspora community avoids assimilation by using various techniques mentioned by Scott Levi, “These include continued identification or interaction with its unique homeland; use of a specific language; identification with a socio-religious system other than that of host society; the maintenance of a residence in a communal settlement separate from the host society; economic specialization; and the
pursuit of bilateral relations with similar, geographically dispersed diaspora communities.” (Levi, 32). There is considerable overlap between the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism as both the terms refer to cross-border processes. Diaspora however is often used to denote religious or national groups living outside an imagined homeland, whereas transnationalism is often used both more narrowly—to refer to migrants’ durable ties across countries—and more widely, to capture not only communities, but all sorts of social formations, such as transnationally active networks, groups and organisations. Both the terms refer to cross-border processes. Like diaspora, transnationalism is an extraordinarily elastic concept that has been stretched to cover a wide range of activities and individuals.

Various critics have continued to distinguish between the two terms. Thomas Faist rightly brings out the major difference, as he observes that:

…It is not useful to apply the term diaspora to settlers and labor migrants because they did not experience traumatic experiences and it cannot be said that most of the members of these groups yearn to return to their lost homeland…Diasporas can only be called transnational communities if the members also develop some significant social and symbolic ties to the receiving country. (Faist, 10).

Thus the term diaspora is appropriate only if the group has suffered a traumatic experience. Diaspora can become a transnational community only if they develop an attachment to the host country.

Khalid Koser also explains the classical connotations of the term diaspora as:
The term has normally been used to refer to the exodus of the Jews following the destruction of the Second Temple in 586 BC. Until its recent revival the concept was also at times applied to African slaves and to Armenians who fled the massacre perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire during and immediately after the First World War. What these experiences have in common are large-scale involuntary displacements and an inability to return home, coupled with a great yearning to do so. (Koser, 25).

Diaspora thus is a group of people that recognizes its separateness based on common ethnicity or nationality, lives in a host country, and maintains ties, especially cultural attachment to home country. Scott Levi defines, “The term diaspora is derived from the Greek diaspora, derived from the combination of dia, meaning ‘over’, and sperio, ‘to sow’, as in scattering or planting.” (Levi, 31). When applied to humans, the ancient Greeks thought of diaspora as migration and colonization.

William Safran uses the term diaspora to describe different categories of people as “expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, ethnic and racial minorities.” (qtd. in Cohen, 1). Vijay Agnew enunciates, “As a social form, the term refers to individuals who live in different parts of the world but identify collectively with one another, with the countries or region from which they or their ancestors originated and with the society in which they currently reside.” (Agnew, 5). In a way thus social diasporas are those individuals who stress on belonging in their state of mind and their sense of recognition to the community from where they draw a sense of self and identity. Despite the important changes that have occurred in the last 150 years, a great number of similarities can still be found in the migration and integration processes between the past
and the present.

The perspective of transnationalism includes two main conceptual fields of investigation: transnational identities and transculturalism. The transnational and transcultural are not new, since the 1990s a plethora of literature has cropped up discussing the issues related to them. Jeane Pierre Cassarino aptly remarks, “transnational identity results from the combination of migrant’s origins with the identity one acquires in the country of adoption. This combination gradually leads to the development of ‘double identity’. The transnationalists recognize the need for “adaptation” when returning home.” (Cassarino, 262). Thus migrants’ identities become fluid and multiple.

The term ‘transculturation’ has been attributed to Cuban sociologist Fernando Ortiz, who first used it in 1940s to describe Afro Cuban Culture and the processes of hybridization engendered within it by a fusion of indigenous and foreign cultural elements. He coined the term ‘transculturation’ to describe:

… the process of mutual, asymmetrical, cultural influences and fusions between so called ‘peripheral’ and colonising cultures. Since then, the term has come to imply the emergence of new culture as a result of transnationalism. This concept of transculturation comprising the processes of acculturation, deculturation, and neoculturation provides a useful framework for examining the cross-cultural adaptation and hybridization that takes place when two or more cultures meet.” (Ortiz, 1995 [1940]). Thus transculturation is amalgamation of different cultures to form a new culture. It constitutes acculturation--which is the process of change that occurs when individuals from different cultures interact and share a new geographical space. In a process,
individuals lose previous culture i.e deculturation; forming a new cultural phenomena i.e. neoculturation. The immigrants accept the host culture, they assimilate the conceptions of new culture, try to adopt and become acculturated. Kathleen Valtonen considers acculturation as a “pivotal process which refers to the newcomers’ adaptation to the culture of a new society. Individuals adjust to or adopt behavior patterns or practices, values, rules and symbols of the new environment.” (Valtonen, 60). It mainly depends on immigrants how they adopt and adjust in the new environment. This further leads to other kinds of settlements like assimilation, integration in new society resulting in multiculturalism and transculturation. Highlighting the importance of the term transculturation Fernando Ortiz succinctly opines:

… I am of the opinion that the word transculturation better expresses the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture, which is what the English word acculturation really implies, but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as deculturation. In addition, it carries the idea of the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation. (qtd. in Angel, 18-19).

With the advent of globalization and rapid migrations, cultures today have transcended national and ethnic borders. As a result, demarcations in different cultures are being reviewed as societies become transcultural. As Wolfgang Welsch rightly states, “The inherited concept of cultures as homogenous and closed entities has become highly inappropriate in comprehending the constitution of today’s cultures.” (Welsch, 4). Cultures
today are thus merging and blending, transgressing national boundaries leading to transcultural societies in which individual is not of a particular nationality, rather he has become global. The emergence of these hybrid forms has raised complex issues concerning identity, history and migration.

The concept of transculturality seeks conversely to articulate today's cultural constitution, one characterized by intertwinement, and to elicit the requisite conceptional and normative consequences. At micro-level, Wolfgang Welsch describes the various dimensions of the concept of transculturality. He rightly states that, “Transculturality is a consequence of the inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures…Cultures today are extremely interconnected and entangled with each other. Lifestyles no longer end at the borders of national cultures, but go beyond.” (Welsch, 197). Cultures thus are hybrids as they are not isolated from each other. Due to globalization and availability of foreign products, there is nothing absolutely foreign. At the same time it may be noted that nothing can be exclusive either.

Hence, as Welsch argues, transculturality aims for cultures with the ability to link and undergo transition whilst avoiding the threat of homogenization or uniformization. Cultural diversity arises in a new mode as a transcultural blend rather than a juxtaposition of clearly delineated cultures. Transculturalism as a critical concept emphasizes the significance of continual social interactions between and among certain communities as well as individuals. This process gathers the separate dimensions of the multicultural mosaic in an effort to form a plural unity by means of triggering the dynamic potential of cultural diversity, thus enabling the possibility of fluid exchange between ethnocultural groups, while potentially dismantling divisions based on cultural, racial, gendered, or
socio-economic othering. It maintains an open dialogue between different cultural groups/individuals in their contact zones.

While it is currently assumed that we are going global and are, by doing this, uniformizing more and more, the concept of transculturality calls this line of thinking into question. The tendency towards transculturality does not mean that our cultural formation is becoming the same all over the world. On the contrary, processes of globalization and becoming transcultural imply a great variety of differentiation. Even if everyone uses the same media, it does not follow that she or he is making the same use of these media. And new media in particular offer considerable opportunities for variation, selection, and specification. Cultural webs woven from the same sources can differ greatly and be quite specific and even individualistic. Therefore, the process the world is witnessing today is simultaneously a process of unification and differentiation.

A. Renzi succinctly observes that, “The actual process of 'transculturation'--the process of becoming transcultural, revolves around two key concepts: the notion of the 'Other' and that of 'becoming'. It is set in motion by the presence of minorities…and it takes place through the contact between minorities and the majority.” (Renzi, 111).

According to Wolfgang Welsch:

Tansculturality is the existence of cross-cultural commonalities and it is fostered by two quite different factors operating at very different levels. One is the current process of the permeation of cultures--a process creating commonalities by overcoming differences. The other is much older and related to the human condition as such. It underlies all formation of difference. If we
take both aspects into account, then we might, I suspect, arrive at a more complete picture of transculturality altogether. (Welsch, 5).

Hence as Welsch posits that modern society is transcultural and heterogeneous, not intercultural or multicultural i.e. diverse cultures sharing a place in society but still identifying themselves as distinct even while making attempts at mutual understanding. Even if cultures insist they are unique as an ideological expression, “…the praxis of existing cultures in a single nation produces constant cross-cultural and subcultural assimilations into new forms on macro (cultural) and micro (individual) levels. The result is that individuals all have “multiple attachments and identities” or “crosscutting identities” and allegiances to different cultures.”(Welsch, 5). Hence Welsch traces the shortcomings of concepts of multiculturalism and interculturalism. Transculturalism generates identity which is influenced by different cultures. The present study makes use of post colonial theories concerned with the issues of identity, nation states, culture, multiculturalism, negotiations, hybridity, and the paradigm of transcending boundaries, etc.

Over time, the essential experience of migration has been captured in a plethora of expressions--literary, autobiographical narrative, film and fiction. Migration as a topic has caught interest of a number of writers in contemporary literature. The relentless efforts to recreate a sense of home and belonging in the new country through new social networks and rituals and the maintenance of old familiar ones, the sense of nostalgia surrounding festivals, familiar food, music, worship, re-telling of stories and legends, and so forth have been sufficient resource material for many writers of fiction. Migration anyway has never been a one-way process of assimilation into a melting pot or aloofness in a multicultural salad bowl but one in which migrants, to varying degrees, are
simultaneously embedded in the multiple sites and layers of the transnational social fields
in which they live. More and more aspects of social life take place across borders, even as
the political and cultural salience of nation-state boundaries remains clear. According to
Rina Benmayor and Andor Skotnes, “…massive population movements de facto are
accidents of history, the result of unusual circumstances, catastrophes, deviations from
the norm.” (Benmayor, 4). Thus the migrants come to be considered as marginals,
deviants, disruptive.

Whether migrants have moved long or short distances: from countryside to
cities, across national boundaries, from continent to continent, they have often returned to
their point of origin as they experience nostalgia regarding lost roots. Although there have
been lots of ups and downs, migration has been constant from the last five centuries and
has been a key determinant of global developments. It has been taking place among
developed countries from less-developed countries. Today’s migration is typified by the
reshaping of relations with the origin country and the destination country. Furthermore,
the migrants maintain world-spanning relations that include members of their national or
ethno-religious group who, like them, chose to leave their homeland and resettle in some
other country. Hence there is recognition of the need to appropriately study today’s
migrants, many of whom live dual, even multiple, lives spanning national borders
connected to social networks in both countries of origin and settlement.

Basch, Schiller and Blanc(1994) have differentiated between immigrants and
migrants as:

The popular image of immigrant is one of people who have come to stay,
having uprooted themselves from their old society in order to make for
themselves a new home and adopt a new country to which they will pledge allegiance. Migrants, on the other hand, are conceived of as transients who have come only to work; their stay is temporary and eventually they will return home or move on. (*Nations Unbound*…, 3).

Today however, this conception of immigrants does not suffice. Immigrants have developed networks and they maintain their connections in both home and host countries. Migrants face political resistance, with the working of cultural transformations and constructions of complex identities. Problems of migration and resulting reconfigurations of social identities are fundamental issues. The construction and reconstruction of identity in empirical and theoretical framework is complex and multi-faceted. As a result, migrants live in transnational spaces and create complex relations in social, cultural, economic, political spheres, among others. This results in dual or multiple loyalties in different countries and formation of transnational/transcultural identity. Stuart Hall, the immensely influential scholar succinctly views identity “… as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.”(Hall, 222). The question of identity thus is always a difficult one, and especially for those who are culturally displaced. Many social theorists have suggested that we are currently living in a period in which the identities of the past are becoming increasingly irrelevant and in which new identities, and new identity formations, are being created. Hall in his seminal work, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” talks about two kinds of cultural identity. While first one projects an essentialist notion of identity, the second emphasizes it as a matter of ‘becoming.’ Hall elaborates:
The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history… Cultural identity, in the second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Hall, 223-225).

Hence as Hall suggests, identity is not a fixed entity or in itself complete rather it is always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation.

The quest for identity invariably is driven by the desire for recognition in the external world. In Cornel West’s poetically charged words:
Identity is fundamentally about desire and death. How you construct your identity is predicated on how you construct desire, and how you conceive of death: desire for recognition; quest for visibility; the sense of being acknowledged; a deep desire for association-- what Edward Said would call affiliation. It’s the longing to belong, a deep, visceral need that most linguistically conscious animals who transact with an environment (that’s us) participate in. (West, 15-16).

Thus individuals desire for recognition, association and protection wherever they live or go to, whether by will or by force. The question of identities; national, cultural, religious, ethnic, linguistic, gender-based or consumer-based is assuming renewed importance for individuals and groups who see globalization and cultural change as a threat to their beliefs and ways of life.

Identities which cut across distinct frames of reference; multiple identities which have recourse in several cultures; attachments which link up discrete cultural territory; such transgressions bring to crisis a traditional understanding of culture. The concept of transculturality suggests a new conceptualization of culture. Culture is a way of life, set of social practices, a system of belief, shared history or set of experiences. It is different from classical model of single culture. Wolfgang Welsch gives three elements of culture. According to him:

First, every culture is supposed to mould the whole life of the people concerned and of its individuals, making every act and every object an unmistakable instance of precisely this culture. The concept is unifactory. Secondly, culture is always to be the culture of a folk, representing the flower
of a folk’s existence. The concept is *folk-bound*. Thirdly, a decided delimitation towards the outside ensues: every culture is, as the culture of one folk, to be distinguished and to remain separated from other folk’s cultures.

The concept is *separatory*. (Welsch, 194-195).

These three elements are not valid today as the modern societies are not uniform. They are differentiated and multicultural comprising various ways of life. They have no fixed boundary, nor they can be folk-bound. There is threatening element of separatism which is dangerous for the world. Cultures today are mixed, assimilating various characteristics of each other and even lead to acculturation. Thus this concept is not suitable today. Modern societies are multicultural. The concepts of interculturality and multiculturality are more able to provide an appropriate concept of today’s culture. According to Afef Benessaeih, “The term interculturality is often used to express the right to difference in relations of a dualistic nature between minorities or marginalized cultures and the majority or dominant cultures.” (Benessaeih, 19). The term interculturality relates to the cultures constituted in spheres or islands. It tries to find a way of interaction between cultures in spite of the collision of territories. It cannot provide any valid solution because there is intercultural communication problems. Thus it doesn’t get to the root of the problem as it still reflects cultural boundaries, differences and conflicts.

Modern definition of culture as defined in *The UNESCO World Report*, “the creative diversity embodied in particular ‘cultures’, with their unique traditions and tangible and intangible expressions. Secondly, culture (in the singular) refers to the creative impulse at the heart of that diversity of ‘cultures.’” (8). These two meanings of culture are inextricably linked and provide the key to the fruitful interaction of all peoples in the
context of globalization. In these terms cultures are seen as separate, well-defined entities instead of intermingling processes.

Today cultures are complex: externally they are entangled in complex networks of cultures with no fixed boundaries and they are hybrid. Globalization processes are giving rise to more systematic cultural encounters, borrowings and exchanges. These new transcultural links are potentially powerful facilitators of intercultural dialogue. Rethinking our cultural categories, recognizing the multiple sources of our identities, helps to shift the focus away from ‘differences.’ The concept of multiculturality is similar to the concept of interculturality. It takes up the problems which different cultures have living together within one society. The concept seeks tolerance, understanding and avoidance for handling of conflict. This concept is progressive but it is still deficit as it does not achieve the target of mutual understanding or a transgression of separating barriers. Both concepts imply traditional conception of cultures as autonomous spheres. The growing tensions over identity, which are often the result of a culturalization of political claims, are in contradiction with a more general trend towards the emergence of dynamic and multifaceted identities. Political activism related to religious identity can serve as a powerful marker of cultural identity and difference. In this context, there is a risk of religious conviction being instrumentalized for the furtherance of political and related agendas, with the potential for precipitating intra-religious conflict as well as dissensions within democratic societies.

There has been a tendency to equate cultural diversity with the diversity of national cultures. Yet national identity is to some extent a construction, grounded in a sometimes reconstructed past and providing a focus for our sense of commonality. Cultural
identity is a more fluid, self-transforming process, to be seen less in terms of a past inheritance than of a future project. In a globalizing world, cultural identities often derive from multiple sources; the increasing plasticity of cultural identities reflects the growing complexity of the globalized flows of people, goods and information.

In the context of globalization and increasing migration and urbanization, the interrelated challenges of preserving cultural identity and promoting intercultural dialogue assume a new prominence and urgency. The UNESCO World Report begins by considering the impact of accelerating globalization processes on the different facets of cultural diversity, highlighting the way in which strong homogenizing forces are matched by persistent diversifying trends. The report goes on to examine the essential role of intercultural dialogue in bridging cultural differences, while nurturing the diversity of cultural expressions through processes of mutual interaction, support and empowerment. According to the World Report:

…Cultural diversity is above all a fact: there exists a wide range of distinct cultures, which can be readily distinguished on the basis of ethnographic observation, even if the contours delimiting a particular culture prove more difficult to establish than might at first sight appear. Awareness of this diversity has today become much more widespread, being facilitated by globalized communications and increased cultural contacts. While this greater awareness in no way guarantees the preservation of cultural diversity, it has given the topic greater visibility. (3).

As a result it has become a main social issue in various societies. This diversification in societies leads to confrontations socially as well as politically. Authorities of states
sometimes face difficulties in tackling to the problems generated by cultural diversity in the common interest Homi K. Bhabha while defining cultural difference/diversity succinctly observes:

Cultural diversity is an epistemological object--culture as an object of empirical knowledge--whereas cultural difference is the process of the enunciation of culture as “knowledgeable”, authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification. If cultural diversity is a category of comparative ethics, aesthetics or ethnology, cultural difference is a process of signification through which statements of culture or on culture differentiate, discriminate and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability and capacity. (Bhabha, 206).

Cultural difference thus signifies divisions of past and present, relates to history, origins and memory, how the present is reloacted, translated from the past. Today's cultures are characterized by manifold mixing and permeations. This new form of culture is called transcultural, “since it goes beyond the traditional concept of culture and passes through traditional boundaries as a matter of course.”(Welsch, 7). Cultures today multiply, become hybrid due to large scale migrations and development in technology and communication systems. It has increased further due to global networking of communications technology which makes all sorts of information available everywhere.

The idea of multicultural society has its roots in nation-states, which throughout their histories have been confronted with international migration. These include Canada, United States of America and Australia. These states are conventionally referred
to as examples of various forms of multicultural society, accommodated through nation states public policies. In a multicultural context, some people choose to adopt a particular form of identity while others to live in a dual mode, and still others to create for themselves hybrid identities. Many contemporary novelists have been drawn to the theme of men and women confronted with the challenge of fashioning new cultural identities. In the post modern era, the question of identity is complex as it involves the reconstruction of the self as fluid, fragmented, discontinuous, decentred, dispersed, hybrid-like, etc. As a consequence, critical analysis has now come to focus on “… identity as constructed, multifaceted, negotiated, situational, or, according to some fragmented.” (Benmayor and Skotnes, 9). In the context of transnationalism, however, the discussion gravitates towards national or ethnic identity. National identity is becoming a thing of the past, as individuals are adopting cross-national and multicultural identities. This has resulted in origination of many new concepts in literature related to issues of migration and identity such as race, class, inequality, ethnicity, cultural diversity, nationalism, hybridity etc. As Sonja Lehmann aptly points out, “the protagonists of migrant literature are often portrayed as being unsure of who they are, where they belong and how to reconcile their location between several cultures and countries. This perception of identities is closely connected with the notions of place, displacement and exile in postcolonial theory.”(Lehmann, 283). The concept of hybridity thus is central to post-colonial studies.

Homi Bhabha in his seminal work *The Location of Culture* emphasizes that culture is always mixed, hybrid and impure. As he elaborates:

…What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those
moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘in-between’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood--singular or communal--that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (Bhabha, 1-2).

Thus he emphasizes that the coloniser and the colonized are mutually dependent in constructing a shared culture. He argues that the nature of colonial identity is not monolithic, but ambiguous or hybrid. Bhabha further elaborates:

…For me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the ‘third space’ which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (Bhabha, 211).

Thus hybridity may be summed up as the negotiable space existing in between the boundaries of identity. In the globalised world, it is no longer possible to redeem “authentic” cultural identity. Hybridity defines an identity of the postcolonial self. Postcolonial studies have been preoccupied with the issues of hybridity, creolization, the in betweenness, diasporas, mobility and cross-overs of ideas and identities, etc.

Thus to conclude, the issue of identity in transnational/transcultural setting is one of the major themes of contemporary fiction. Celebrated writers such as Salman Rushdie, V.S.Naipaul, Jhumpa Lahiri, Anita Rau Badami, Neil Bissondath, Rohinton Mistry etc. have been repeatedly using these ideas in their fictional as well as non fictional
narratives. Salman Rushdie, the celebrated writer, in *Imaginary Homelands* theorizes the concepts of multiple identities, plurality, migration, feelings of homelessness, displacement as well as fragmentation of identity, etc. Rushdie states that postcolonial Indian writers who have migrated away from India “are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective: because they are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society.” (Rushdie, 19). As expatriates experience physical and mental displacement from their homeland, it is inevitable that their identities also become fragmented and disjointed. Yet at the same time, their displacement provides them with a ‘double consciousness’ lending more power, flexibility and sensitivity to their writing.

V.S. Naipaul of Indian-Caribbean ancestry depicts in his novels existential sufferings of exile in multiracial society, displacement, rootlessness, fragmentation, post colonial identity crisis etc. His novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) shows an attempt of Anglicized Indian to assert his own identity; *A Bend In The River* (1979) reveals search for identity in a newly independent African nation; *Half a Life* (2001) raises issues of colonial power and colonized people, multiculturalism, colonial politics etc. Kamal Mehta rightly observes, “Naipaul's stories present a vision of life, of the rootless individuals…The consciousness of rootlessness leaves a very damaging impact on their minds, making them pitiable, for often their behaviour verges on absurdity. They suffer from inferiority complex.” (Mehta, 280). Naipaul’s writing however has evoked mixed reception as several scholars find his views Eurocentric and an assault on the image of India.

Jhumpa Lahiri of Indian --Bengali ancestry shows the plight of first generation immigrants, their constant sense of alienation and loneliness, the knowledge of and longing for a lost world, are more explicit than their children. Her first collection of short
stories, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), deals with the issues of Indians or Indian immigrants, including their generation gaps in understanding and values. Her novel *The Namesake* (2003), is essentially, a story about the struggles and hardships of a Bengali couple who immigrate to the United States to form a life outside of everything they know. In her another collection of short stories called *Unaccustomed Earth* (2008), Lahiri broke from her previous literary focus on first-generation Indian immigrants and their family problems. The stories in *Unaccustomed Earth* focus on the second and third generations of immigrants and their assimilation into the culture of the United States. Lahiri emphasizes that not only the immigrants who make their new home in the foreign land but also the endless process of coming and going continues, that create familial, cultural, linguistic and economic ties across national borders. Her characters live in between, straddling two worlds, negotiate making their identity transnational and global.

The early 1970s marked the emergence of the multicultural movement at first in Canada and Australia and then in the U.S.A., U.K., Germany and elsewhere. Canada, Ondaatje’s country of adoption, has displayed a long lasting commitment to the principles of multiculturalism, which have played a significant in fuelling transnationalism. Multiculturalism was institutionalized in Canada in 1971 as a form of corporate pluralism. Under this policy, cultural differences were encouraged and protected by the state, while ideologies of cultural assimilation and Anglo conformity for immigrants and ethnic minorities were officially rejected. As Miriam Verena Richter succinctly observes, “Canada remains the only country worldwide which has anchored its multicultural character in its constitution.” (Richter, xii). By doing so, Canada affirmed the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language,
or their religious affiliation. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 postulates, “The Canadian Government will recognize and promote the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian Society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage.” (Multiculturalism, 1893). The act recognised ethnic diversity of Canada where migrant population is much more as compared to other countries. Canadian society, like United States of America, may also be termed as ‘a salad bowl’ i.e., a society where different ethnic cities co-exist without having to ‘melt’ their difference. Immigrants and refugees who resettle in Canada join millions of others who have come before them in search of freedom, human rights and a better life. They bring with them customs, rituals, dress and language unique to their respective ethnic groups. When cultures meet, they come together sometimes in harmony or else at others colliding with one another.

The ongoing dialogue on cultural identity thus is a complex one. The cultural content of Canadian identity reflects linguistic duality and cultural diversity. The situation becomes their more complicated as Canada has allowed immigrants to retain dual citizenship till 1977. Lloyd Wong and Vic Satzewich aptly state that, “One view suggests that multiple citizenship devalues Canadian citizenship and hinders immigrant adaptation. Another view is that it facilitates the incorporation of new immigrants who would otherwise fail to naturalise and who would thus remain socially marginalized” (Wong, Satzewich, 4). Anyway, this has made Canada a dream land especially for people like Michael Ondaatje, moving from country to country. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 has a great impact on academia, writing, publishing and resulted in plethora of migrant literature. There has been an emergence of new minority writers from different
communities, races and ethnicity with new issues and themes. Socio-cultural scenario has enabled a new generation of culturally mobile writers who may be called the transcultural writers. The writers by choice or by life circumstances have experienced cultural dislocation, lived transnational experiences, cultivated bilingual or multi-lingual proficiency and have physically immersed themselves in multiple cultures, geographies, territories. They have had exposure to diversity and plural, flexible identities better suited to the needs of a rapidly globalising society. In this way, they have contributed to the development of a transcultural literature that transcends the borders of a single culture in its choice of topic, vision and scope. They also promote a wider global literary perspective. Michael Ondaatje is one among this august company of celebrated authors such as: Rohinton Mistry, Anita Rau Badami, Bharati Mukherjee etc. Originally from countries such as India, Sri Lanka etc., they are now considered Canadian writers. They have won numerous awards in Canada. To them goes the credit of generating enhanced literary and scholarly attention to Canadian Literature. Conferences on issues related to multiculturalism and ethnicity have been held at different places in Canada and many anthologies of the same have been published. The prominent works include Other Solitudes, 1990 edited by Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond; The Canadian Postmodern by Linda Hutcheon, Intersexions: Issues of Race and Gender in Canadian Women’s writings edited by Barbara Godardand Commi S. Vevaina, 1996 etc.

Over the past three decades, with the evolution of Canadian multiculturalism, stress has been laid on encouraging immigrants to engage in transnational social practices and to develop transnational social identities. The discourse of transnationalism and transculturalism thus has developed in the context of Cultural Studies focusing on the
fluidity of borders and boundaries and it revolves around notions of hybridity, displacement, centre-periphery and diaspora, etc. The Postcolonialist theory deals with the problems of the outcomes of transnational movement, migration, suppression exploitation, resistance, representation, difference, caste, class, culture, gender and place etc. It has its close association with cross-culturalism in which ‘cross’ represents the crossing of discrete barriers from one construction to another which envisages a consequent expansion of boundaries.

Minority transnational writers such as Neil Bissoondath, Anita Rau Badami, Rohinton Mistry as well as Michael Ondaatje, not only explore Canada and its multicultural society but also direct their attention to their respective countries of origin. They have brought with them the experience of living in a range of multi-ethnic societies and much of their work concerns the complexity and tension of immigrant life.

Neil Bissoondath, born in Trinidad, is a Canadian author. He is a noted writer of fiction, and also a critic of Canada's system of multiculturalism. He comes from a literary family. He is the nephew of authors V.S. Naipaul and Shiva Naipaul. He often focuses on the themes of the marginalized and dispossessed. His writing typically focuses on the lives of characters displaced by political violence. In addition to immigrants and refugees, Bissoondath, also explores the lives of those marginalized within their own societies, people alienated by their own culture. His short stories in *Digging up the Mountains* (1986) presents characters of different ethnic backgrounds who try to cope with displacement, change, oppression and migration. Mitali P. Wong and Zia Hasan state, “The emerging vision is almost existentialist, with recurring motifs of alienation and self-division.”(Wong, Hasan, 107). His characters range from Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean immigrants in

Anita Rau Badami is a writer living in Canada with a strong voice of the modern Indian Diaspora. Born in Rourkela, Orissa, she emigrated to Canada in 1991. She made Canadian best-seller lists with *Tamarind Mem* (1996), creates characters from her early life in another country. Badami is an immigrant writer from India who has lived in Canada since 1991. Her novel *Tamarind Mem* (1997) depicts selfishness and greed of colonial rulers. Her second novel *The Hero's Walk* (2000) presents a traumatic intercultural encounter, shows alienation, cultural confrontation, but in the end the cultural differences are overcome. According to Coral Ann Howells, “The novel ends with tentative reconciliations, but it is the difficulty of acculturation which is emphasized here” (9). Here in lies the dilemma that migrants must negotiate while constituting identity. In *Can You hear Night Bird Call*, “Badami calls the reader's attention to differences and tensions within the diaspora as important components in the negotiation of South Asian-Canadian diasporic consciousness.” (Lobb, 192). She however does not provide clear solutions.

Rohinton Mistry, another Indo-Canadian writer from Parsi community, brings to the life characters from Parsi middle class. As a diasporic writer, his works depict identity crisis and alienation from homelands. He is concerned with preservation of the
ethnic identity of his community. Vijay Mishra states, “Mistry's first major work Such a Long Journey (1991), belongs to that vibrant field of diasporic compositions where the migrant reconstructs, in fiction, memories of a past he/she has left behind.” (Mishra, 172). Mistry focuses on the history of his homeland, his community and family and reveals his diaspora consciousness of insider outsider. Mistry's expatriate experiences make him compare India and Canada. In A Fine Balance (1995), he writes about his native country, its history, his community, his family on the basis of memory.

Bharati Mukherjee is an Indian-born American writer. Mukherjee’s works focus on the migration, the feeling of alienation often experienced by expatriates especially women and their struggle. She reflects her own struggle with identity as an Indian expatriate in Canada and then as an immigrant in the United States. Her first novel, The Tiger’s Daughter (1972), tells of an Indian woman, her traumatic experience in American culture and then again shocked by experience of violence when she returns to a Calcutta. Wife (1975) details the descent into madness of an Indian woman trapped in New York City by the fears and passivity resulting from her upbringing. Jasmine (1989) is a story of dislocation and relocation of a young Indian woman in the United States who, tries to adapt to the American way of life in order to be able to survive, changes identities several times. Mukherjee focuses on expatriate sensibility generated due to cultural disparity and emotional disintegration. In this process it is the woman who suffers the most because of her multiple dislocations. She is caught between cultures and this feeling of in-betweenness or being juxtaposed poses before her the problem of trying to maintain a balance between her dual as well as multiple affiliations.

Although his contemporaries have produced works which no longer restrict
themselves to local, regional or cultural boundaries, Michael Ondaatje on the other hand also provides easy and vivid solutions for negotiation and transcending of boundaries to become transnational and global. Ondaatje is one of those transnational/transcultural writers who are shaped by different cultures. His family line is Dutch, Sinhalese, and Tamil. Philip Michael Ondaatje was born on September 12, 1943 in Colombo, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka). Ondaatje was educated initially at St. Thomas College in Colombo, Ceylon. After moving with his mother to England, he continued his education at Dulwich College in London. Between 1962-64, Ondaatje attended Bishop's University in Lennoxville, Quebec. He then went on to obtain his B.A. at the University of Toronto in 1965, and his M.A. at Queen's University, in Kingston, Ontario, in 1967.

Ondaatje began his teaching career at the University of Western Ontario, London between 1967-71. Today he is a member of the Department of English at Glendon College, York University in Toronto, Ontario, a position he has held since 1971. In Editorial of a Journal, Shirley Chew describes the position and efforts of Ondaatje to adopt to a new world, “Here the endeavour of the migrant writer to re-root himself within the landscape and cultural traditions of the original home country becomes also a way of looking outwards and towards the adopted home--in Ondaatje’s case towards Canada through the recall of the petroglyphs of the First Nations on the west coast.”(Chew,1). Michael Ondaatje's cultural positioning is best described in the words of Tangea Tansley “Ondaatje is neither native nor alien, neither settler nor expatriate, and yet, at the same time he is all of these.”(Tansley, 181-182). His family according to Arianna Maiorani has “multicultural roots and he was raised in a multicultural society.”(Maiorani, 395). His works are reflections of the struggle made by Ondaatje in his life to adapt and relocate
himself in another land. Ondaatje currently resides in Toronto with his wife, novelist/editor Linda Spalding, where they edit Literary Journal *Brick*.

A Sri Lankan-Dutch resident of Canada, Ondaatje has written works which represent in many ways the best of contemporary Canadian Literature in English, not only in the context of Canada but also on the International scene. His writings present identity and history of people living in “in-between” conditions. Along with other celebrated Canadian writers such as Susan Swan, Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies etc., Ondaatje’s works have been much acclaimed and appreciated. So far Ondaatje has written six novels. He started his career of narrative art with *Coming Through Slaughter* in 1976 and followed it up with *In the Skin of a Lion* in 1987.

During his career Ondaatje has received numerous awards and honors. Arianna Maiorani acclaims Ondaatje as “a poet, editor and author of several novels and critical works, his literary career is studded with numerous awards.” (Maiorani, 395) such as the Ralph Gustafson Award (in 1965); the Epstein Award, 1966; and the President's Medal from the University of Ontario in 1967. In addition, Ondaatje was the recipient of the Canadian Governor-General's Award for Literature in 1971 and again in 1980. Also in 1980 he was awarded the Canada-Australia price and in 1992 he was presented with the Booker McConnell Prize for his novel *The English Patient*(1992). *The English Patient* also won the Governor General’s Award and the Booker Prize in the same year. It was also made into a major motion picture that won the Academy Award for Best Picture.

Ondaatje continued with his success in 2000 with *Anil’s Ghost*, which also won the Governor General’s Award and the Giller Prize. Ondaatje has also written several books of poetry. His work *Divisadero*(2007) also won critical acclaim. As a product of
this somewhat "colonial" background, Ondaatje's position enables him to explore, in depth, the conflicts and contradictions of the type of identity that incorporates a colonial past and a post-colonial present. Complex cultural backgrounds such as that of Ondaatje may be seen frequently to instigate a literature of dislocation and displacement. According to Sonja Lehmann, “Transnational theories appear very apt to describe the workings of Ondaatje’s fiction since they emphasize simultaneity, the dissolution of boundaries and the importance of spaces in the formation of transnational identities.”(Lehmann, 282). Ondaatje thus is truly a modern writer.

In his works, Ondaatje discusses a variety of themes such as representation of history, issues of race and identity, negotiation of boundaries, the complex cultural effects of war, alienation etc. While all his texts differ in plot, vignettes and cameos, they present characters whose identities are influenced by multiple cultures across national boundaries. His novels though depict difficulties faced by such identities in different regions away from roots, still he gives some solution. His work focuses on identities which are fluid and not fixed. His novels serve as the narrative of the ordinary people, the dispossessed, the forgotten or the silenced minority. These characters struggle to face emerging challenges. There is a sense of reconciliation in the texts which makes these characters take part simultaneously in multiple cultures and become transnational/transcultural. Thus his novels end on a note of hope with a positive sense of belonging to several places. This marks Ondaatje as a writer different from other postcolonial migrant writers who stress on displacement and alienation.

Ondaatje on the other hand focuses on the transnational and transcultural issues. The present study proposes to focus primarily on his fictional works with regard to
portrayal of negotiations of transnational/transcultural identities while reference to his poetry and other works will also be made as and when required.

In order to examine the validity of the study, survey of work already done on the works of Michael Ondaatje was taken up. The survey indicated that Ondaatje has been the focus of study by many scholars. However most of these attempt to study Ondaatje along with other celebrated writers such as Margaret Atwood, J.M. Coetzee, Don Delillo, Anita Rau Badami etc. Various articles have been written by scholars to study and highlight different issues in Ondaatje’s works. Heike Harting studies issues of diaspora and identity crisis in his article “Diasporic Cross Currents in Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* and Anita Rau Badami’s *The Hero’s Walk*.” He examines the personal and cultural dislocation of characters due to transnational mobility. Subhadra Bhaskaran’s focus is on postmodernism, history and fiction in “Intersection of History and Fiction in Michael Ondaatje’s *Anil’s Ghost* and Margaret Atwood’s *The Blind Assassin*.” Carol L. Beran examines revisionist readings of history from marginalized points of view in his article “Ex-Centricity: Michael Ondaatje’s *In The Skin of a Lion* And Hugh Maclellan’s *Barometer Rising*.”

highlighted issues of history, sensuality, gender and disorder and change from the colonial to the postcolonial order in the works of Ondaatje. Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek has edited *Comparative Cultural Studies and Michael Ondaatje’s Writings* (2005). The framework is based on tenets of comparative literature and cultural studies. The book has various critics discussing themes such as problems of displacement, struggle for acceptance, power, diaspora, transnational identities etc. with regard to Ondaatje’s works. It also highlights the complex relationship between religion, politics and violence especially in Sri Lanka. *Michael Ondaatje: Contemporary World Writers* (2009) by Lee Spinks offers reading on the works of Michael Ondaatje as a postmodern and postcolonial writer. It locates Ondaatje in his specific cultural context while highlighting hybrid influences. The book explores the issues of racial, gender, national and cultural identity. Also it examines the writer’s creativity in use of various genres without following trends.

In addition to the above, there are numerous articles on the art of Ondaatje in various journals and anthologies. Scholars such as M.S. Abu Baker, Brenda Glover, Gordon Gamlin, etc have published articles on the works of Ondaatje. Gordon Gamlin in his article on “Michael Ondaatje’s *In The Skin of a Lion* and The Oral Narrative” focuses on the recognition of the marginal workers and their unwritten histories in the building of Toronto’s infrastructure. Ahmad M.S. Abu Baker in his article on “Maps in Michael Ondaatje’s *The English Patient*” examines the importance of maps in exploring the issues of colonization and identity.

As the above survey reveals, Ondaatje has attracted the attention of many scholars. The present study however provides a comprehensive and detailed discussion of Ondaatje’s works and talent from the transnational and transcultural point of view. The
study thus aims at making a modest addition to the existing scholarship on the works of Ondaatje.
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