CHAPTER V
THE REFLECTION OF TRANSNATIONALISM IN MICHAEL ONDAATJE’S NOVELS: COMING THROUGH SLAUGHTER, IN THE SKIN OF A LION AND THE ENGLISH PATIENT

5.1.1 Introduction:

Michael Ondaatje is a Sri-Lankan Canadian writer who migrated to Canada at the age of eleven. In his all novels, he depicts the transnational identity of the immigrants. His novels focus the lives of immigrants. In the novel *In the Skin of a Lion*, Patrick Lewis and Nicholas migrate to the city of Toronto and they have to adjust with the new environment. In the novel *The English Patient* all the characters migrate from different countries. They all settle in the deserted Villa. Transnationalism is a new theory which we need to study for understanding these novels in detail. The critic, Elleke Boehmer writes about the migrant writer:

Migrant writer is more likely to be a cultural traveller, or an ‘extra-territorial’, than a national’ who lives in a Western country and also keeps some “connections” to “a national, ethnic, or regional background” but whom she clearly sees as not belonging to either country. (Boehmer 227).

Ondaatje proved that all his characters reflect the transnational migration and their involvement in the host country and simultaneously kept their connection with their home country or the country of origin.

Transnationalism not only transcends the nation but it also begins in the nation states where people live. Nation state is not the beginning point of the migration but it is the source of identity. The critic, Steven Vertovec writes in Migrant Transnationalism:

“People within the state are different from those who are outside borders because of the different norms, rules and social behavior.”

(Vertovec, 158)
He says that transnationalism is not only begins after the crossing the border. It also begins in the state. Ondaatje’s characters cross the boundary of their nation and live in a transnational world.

5.1.2 TRANSNATIONALISM IN COMING THROUGH SLAUGHTER

5.1.3 Introduction:
Michael Ondaatje’s novel Coming Through Slaughter is about the transnational identity of Buddy Bolden and E.J. Bellocq. Buddy Bolden, a Jazz Musician and E.J.Bellocq, a photographer lived and worked in Storyville, New Orleans, a famous district. There is an important gap about the information available to us about Bolden and Bellocq. All the information about these legendary figures is from Ondaatje’s Sources. These sources for these legendary figures range from historical research and archival documents to popular culture such as films, comics and records. The writer made some changes in the material to suit the truth of his novel. Ondaatje depicts the identity of Buddy Bolden and E. J. Bellocq. Buddy Bolden is a cornet player who totally immersed in the music. Buddy Bolden migrates from New Orleans and lives in St Lousian State Hospital.

The insane life of Buddy Bolden is portrayed in this novel. He is one of the famous and loudest musicians of that day. He lives alienated life throughout his life. There is no record of his birth. He lives in New Orleans as a migrant. He displaces from New Orleans. All the characters are in search of him. Webb is a detective who searches Buddy. He is a African American musician. His interests for music isolate him from his family and friends.

The novelist portrays an extramarital love relationship between the characters. Patrick keeps relationship with Nora Bass. The novel focuses on the silent suffering of the characters. These characters belong to different nation. The identities of Buddy Bolden and E.J.Bellocq are erased. They are not from any one country. Buddy’s music is famous in all over the world. The love relationship between Buddy and Robin is also portrayed in the novel. Buddy keeps relationships with Robin who is a dancer. He left his wife Nora Bass and his children for the sake of this lady.

Ondaatje portrays the theme of transnationalism in this novel. Transnational migrants face number of problems in host country. Ondaatje portrays various aspects of transnationalism. The transnational aspects such as migration, alienation, nostalgia,
historiographic metafiction, transnational identity, narrating of the self are portrayed in this novel.

5.1.4 The theme of Migration:
Buddy Bolden is a new jazz time musician. He is a representative of Ondaatje who is migrated from Sri Lanka to Canada. He is a New Orleans famous jazz musician. He migrated from his own place and lived elsewhere. There is no information of his migration. Ondaatje writes:

> Where did he come from? He was found before we knew where he had come from. Born at the age of twenty two. Walked into a parade with white shoes and red shirt. Never spoke of the past. Simply about which way to go for the next 10 minutes. (37-38)

His identity is erased. He doesn’t belong to particular country. He belongs to all countries and he is the citizen of the world. He doesn’t know from which place he migrated.

All the characters are in search of him. Nora contacts Detective Webb who is the friend of Buddy since his youth. He starts his search for his friend. He contacts Bolden’s other friends and acquaintances. He meets E. J. Bellocq a photographer to find out a photograph of Buddy.

Buddy Bolden disappeared from the place and all started to search for him. Ondaatje depicts about his departure as follows:

> As he watched Crawley lift his great weight up onto the train he could see himself live with the Brevitts for years and years. He did not have any baggage with him, just the mouthpiece in his pocket. He could step on the train or go back to the Brevitts. (39)

He started his journey to the unknown place. He does not have anything with him. He came alone in this world and went alone. And all says good bye to him. Many people died by listening to music.

Webb learns that Buddy is in Shell Beach, lives with Jaelin and Robin Brewitt and makes love with Robin. Bolden is fainted when he meets Robin Brewitt, He loses his senses and also his heart.

The novel is about the identity of Bolden and his identity is articulated in his music. It is also as an identity of black musician in New Orleans where the racism is in bad patch in
the twentieth century. The writer portrays Bolden who is isolated from his friends and family and it leads insanity.

Bolden ended his life at the Southeast Louisiana State Hospital in Jackson. He lived all his life in nearby Jackson which shows his migration to the place where he is not born and brought up. He returned to his homeland only for burial in 1931. He visited many places in his lifetime. It is shocking to gaze him in confinement, suffering, abusing and insane. A blue musician, Bolden’s work of his time influences the music for several generations. In his time he could not transcend the miseries of his life. He lives in despair, loneliness, and in madness throughout his life. The society portrayed in this novel is immoral and depraved and all these characters come from different locations. Lee Spinks writes:

> The essence of Bolden’s nature does not disclose itself an idea, memory or image, it lies in his capacity to transcend the limits of the autonomous self and accept the ceaseless self-differentiation of the world as its immediate element. (Spinks, 91)

Bolden goes beyond his self and accept the world as global village. He played cornet and worked at N. Joseph’s Shaving Parlor. He played music in the night. Ondaatje repeats these lines in this book and explains the meaning of these lines. Ondaatje develops a language that creates jazz with words at the time of Bolden’s speech. The language is more powerful and useful at Bolden’s frantic music which inspired by the movement of a dancer. In this regard, Ondaatje writes:

> I speed again and she speeds tired again, a river of sweat to her waist her head and hair back bending back to me…my heart is at my throat hitting slow pure notes into the shimmy dance of victory, hair toss victory, a local strut, eyes meeting sweat down her chin arms out in a final exercise of pain. (131)

Lee Spinks rightly says about the novel:

> It represents Ondaatje’s most far reaching examination of both the claims and the limits of art and the closeness between art and life. Nowhere else in Ondaatje’s oeuvre is the power of art imaginatively to transcend
historical consciousness depicted with more force or originality; and nowhere else does this power lead to greater pain or despair. (Spinks, 79)

Ondaatje blends forgotten history of the musician by connecting with recollection and imagination to recreate jazz music. Ondaatje is a creator of this transformed replica of Buddy Bolden

**5.1.5 The theme of Alienation:**

Alienation is an important theme of diasporic writing. Isolation, exile, meaninglessness, rootlessness etc are all features of alienation. Alienation is seen in Buddy Bolden and E.J. Bellocq. Ondaatje has selected two legendary figures and transformed their life that suit to the novel. The novel explores the theme of alienation which destroys the life of Buddy Bolden. Buddy Bolden and E.J. Bellocq, both are living a life in isolation. Buddy Bolden was a musician and E.J.Bellocq is a photographer. They are totally immersed in their work. Buddy Bolden keeps different types of relation to overcome the life of isolation. He has created his own life. He was totally involved in New Orleans rag time music. This involvement in music brings his self-destruction. His music has made people mad. His love for music made him to leave his wife Nora and two children. Ondaatje writes:

He was the best and the loudest and most loved Jazzmen of his time, but never professional in the brain….. He was obsessed with the magic of air, those smells that turned neuter as they revolved in his lung then spat out in the chosen Key. (14)

He started living an isolated life because of his love for music. His behaviour became strange and he started breaking the glass and attacking Tom Pickett for composing his wife’s past life. After that gradually he started living in silence. He thinks that he is not able to fulfill the demands of the people who need variety in his music. The critic, Alice Van Wart writes:

“Bolden is socially outcasts, he is outside of all the boundaries of the society and is isolated and alienated from the structure of control and order.” (Ibid 1)

Bolden is living totally outside the society, friends and his wife. He lives isolated life in Shell Beach. This isolation and alienation made him to remember his near and dear ones.
To overcome this isolation and alienation he kept illegal relationships with prostitutes. He lives in Shell Beach all his life. He lived his life as a picaro. Finally he became mad and he spent his isolated life in the East Lousiana State Hospital. His later life was very difficult for him. He goes into insanity because of his unsatisfactory experience of his life. He goes into madness because of his cut off relationship with his own society.

E.J. Bellocq is a famous photographer in New Orleans. He took the photograph of prostitutes and tore them. It shows his isolation. Later he committed suicide because of discontentment in life.

5.1.6 The theme of Historiographic Fiction:

Historiographic Metafiction is also one of the features of transnationalism. The novel *Coming through Slaughter* is a fictionalized biography of Buddy Bolden, a New Orleans Jazz musician. He was African and American who played rag time music. The insane condition of Bolden is depicted in this novel. The novel depicts the forgotten history of Buddy Bolden. He is the first man who created rag time music known as Jazz. People admired his music and they became mad of his music.

Wolfgang Hochbruck says that Ondaatje’s novels use “historical characters by using his own invention with facts and made it to ensemble the reality of fiction”. (Hochbruck, 450) He declares:

> While I have used real names and characters and historical situations, I have also used more personal pieces of friends and fathers. There have been some date changes, some characters brought together, and some facts have been expanded or polished to suit the truth of fiction.

( Hochbruck, 450)

Michael Ondaatje used some facts and invention which is reliable to the fiction. Buddy Bolden is a musician, we haven’t heard or listened his work because There is no recording of his music exists today, and photographer, Bellocq’s work we have not seen because we have no pictures of him. It motivated Ondaatje to fill the gap and he has seen the gaps in the historical record as a chance to make his own unique artistic mark.

Michael Ondaatje with his self-conscious combination of recollection and imagination infects the forgotten past of Buddy Bolden. The mixture of individual viewpoint along
with the history presents Bolden as a dynamic character shatters the silence of nearly forgotten figure, confronting the history.

5.1.7 Theme of Narrating the Self:
Michael Ondaatje narrates his own history through the character of Buddy Bolden. Buddy Bolden is portrayed against the writer Michael Ondaatje. Both are from Asian countries and live in western countries. The fondness of music is similar to both of them. He is mad when he returns to New Orleans. Both Ondaatje and Bolden faced the problem of identity and loneliness in the alien land. Ondaatje writes:

> What was there in that, before I knew your nation your color 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 arcing round in the middle of your life to exact opposites and burning your brains out. (157)

Ondaatje narrates the story of Buddy Bolden which is hidden underneath several years. Bolden continuously exists throughout the story. Ondaatje successfully fills the gaps by using the materials from history, through his memory, fact with fancy. He rewrites the legend of Bolden’s tragic life, he also reflects upon what Lee Spinks succinctly describes as:

> The story of Bolden’s tragic career and radically his innovative improvisatory style reflect both the relationship between art and life and the political and social forces that determined the emergence of the New South. (Spinks, 8).

Michael Ondaatje narrates the story of Bolden and Bellocq in his novel. He represents himself through the character of Buddy Bolden. Bolden is Ondaatje himself. Ondaatje also faced similar problems in his life.

5.1.8 The theme of Transnational Relationships:
The novelist portrays various transnational relationships among the characters. The relationship between Tom Pickett and Nora’s can be seen as transnational relationships. Nora, Bolden’s wife is only a part of business endeavors. After Pickett develops his relationship with Nora, Bolden is in doubt about his stability with Nora.
If Nora had been with Pickett. Had really been with Pickett as he said. Had jumped off Bolden's cock and sat for half an hour later on Tom Pickett's mouth on Canal Street. Then the certainties he loathed and needed were liquid at the root. (75)

The extra-marital relationships among the various characters can be seen as transnational relationships. The musical progress of Bolden is distinguished from his followers and contemporaries when he goes into madness. This talented man lives his whole life in the mental asylum and dies. He is slaughtered because of infidelity. He withdraws from Nora and Storyville to resume a silent life with Robin and Jaelin Brewitt. Buddy says:

Where I am anonymous and alone in a white room with no history and no parading. So I can make something unknown in the shape of the room…And the fear of certainties I had when I first began to play …Robin and Jaelin brought me back to that open fright”. (83)

He entered into a love triangle rather than his escape from possession and certainty. Due to the feelings of jealousy and possessiveness he breaks windows and chairs and comments:

Look, you’re either Jaelin’s wife or you’re my wife. I’m Jaelin’s wife and I’m in love with you, there’s nothing simple. Well, it should be. (66)

The reason of his madness is mysterious. His wife and his friends present different portraits of Buddy. He had lived a variety of life with everyone. Bolden and Robin’s relationships are marked by the loss of Bolden’s control that his life with Nora. Robin seems to be an alternative for Bolden. It is a second chance to construct a truth for himself. Many women follows Bolden in his life but he loves Nora only. Bolden was without Nora when he was out of New Orleans. He does not truly love Robin. She is his only an outlet. The critic, Kamboureli writes in his article:

This is the new geography of passion and escape, which complicates but does not deny the reading of Robin’s and Jaelin’s names as implying “a sense of enclosed space” and of Bolden being “robbed of his mobile state of mind” and “jailed” in her husband’s house. (Kamboureli, 123)

Buddy Bolden sacrifices everything in order to get something from Robin. His last performance was in the fifth morning in the Parade. He liked a dancing girl during the
performance at the Liberty-Iberville. That girl follows the rhythms and dances on his tunes. Bolden is totally involved in the music and he forgets everything including audience. The love of Bolden and the girl is portrayed in novel by breaking the sentences. Bolden’s love life with the girl leads to his destruction.

The prayer and the instrument become one. He is totally diffused, melted in the music. Everything is involved in his music. His body, nerves, sperms etc are immersed in his music. The pitch of the music is so high, it reminds to all about their sin. The dancing girl appears to be a nymph and Buddy becomes the mystic piper.

The novelist portrays the transnational identity of the Buddy Bolden. He kept relationship with the Asian and Western countries. Ondaatje has filled the gap of the novel with his imagination and memory. Michael Ondaatje is a transnational writer and writes about the people who migrated from the place of their origin and settled in the host country. These people are actively involved in the work of the host country.

5.1.9 Transnational identity of the characters:

Charles Buddy Bolden is an African American musician. He is one of the important figures of New Orleans style for the development of rag-time music which is known as jazz. His musical talent isolates him from his friend and family. The novel depicts Bolden's last months of his madness in 1907 when he becomes more erratic and mradical. Bolden ends his life in insane at the Southeast Louisiana State Hospital in Jackson. The writers concern is not with real story of Bolden as he says:

There is little recorded history, though the tales of The Swamp and Smoky Row both notorious communities where about 100 black prostitutes from pre-puberty to their seventies would line the banquette to hustle, come down to us in fragments …History was slow here. (8-9).

The novelist also portrays the black prostitutes to treat them like normal human beings. The novel projects historical figure in such way that represents his actual life. Ondaatje understands Bolden’s thought process and actions by reconstructing the setting at the time of Jazz in New Orleans. Garry Giddins states about the racism which is the policy of the city. He writes:

Racism, in fact, stimulated the creation of jazz: as a result of the city’s discriminatory policies, the disenfranchised Creoles were forced to mingle
with blacks. The social and musical blend of French, Spanish and Negro influences helped give New Orleans jazz its distinctive character.  

(Giddins, 69)

Buddy Bolden is an African-American man who has an interest in music. The influence of black man on New Orleans gives importance to this style. He is a normal and hard drinking and gossiping barber by day and jazz musician by night at the beginning of the novel. The life of Bolden is “a fine and precise balance to it” and he is a barber and good cornet player.

There is only silent suffering instead of accusations, cold revenge, plotting, cursing, murdering and also totally immersed in the art i.e. music. The main struggle in this world is survival and pure relationships of love are difficult in this unjust world. The wounds of infidelity is very hard to express and it is the curse of all ages, tribes and civilizations.

Bellocq is another historical figure recorded by Ondaatje. Webb gets a photograph from Bellocq to trace out Bolden. He is known for taking pictures of Storyville prostitutes and later scratches the pictures and destroys them. This indicates his mental delirium. Bellocq who is an artist destroys his own art. His friendship with Bolden comes to an end when Bellocq commits suicide.

Bellocq is an imaginary creation of Michael Ondaatje. Ondaatje mingled fact and fiction to create this historical character to a high level. The police always suspected Bellocq’s whenever a prostitute is killed or molested. He is a Cephalic from which he suffers in his life. He always tears and damages the picture of prostitutes like a psycho neurosis. One day he committed suicide after setting fire to his studio. His suicide was an adverse effect on Bolden because he told him about the danger behind his popularity.

Bellocq is not interested in the music of Bolden and this is the only man Bolden sees who has no interest in music. Bellocq gives photograph of Buddy to Webb and dropped his negative into acid after his departure. He wants to erase the identity of Bolden in this way. This black man needs white privacy.

Bellocq allows Bolden to sink into indefinite sanity like the negative which bleaches to grey. Bellocq doesn’t wish Webb to find the disappeared Bolden. It is Bellocq’s friendship which introduces Bolden to other path. Bellocq gives photograph to Webb and commits suicide by the fire around him. He kills himself in a fire with most of his
negatives. Bellocq’s suicide, his absence is seen after the absence of Bolden’s photograph. E.J. Bellocq, a historical figure, a secret character photographer, is also not recorded in history. There are no prizes for the artist like him. His pictures are not available for watching. Like Bolden he also experiences identity crisis.

5.2 TRANSNATIONALISM IN IN THE SKIN OF A LION

5.2.1 Introduction:
Ondaatje’s novel In the Skin of a Lion depicts the history of migrant workers and labourers. It recounts the history of the migrant workers who were responsible for building the Toronto and Prince Edward Viaduct. These two buildings are national monuments of Canada. Transnationalism means migrants keep multi-stranded social relationships in between two countries. People migrate from their country to fulfil their dreams. Patrick is aware of immigrants from his childhood. These immigrants came as loggers in winter season and disappeared as a moth.

Ondaatje portrays the theme of transnationalism in this novel. Transnational migrants face number of problems in host country. Ondaatje portrays various aspects of transnationalism. The transnational aspects such as migration, alienation, nostalgia, historiographic metafiction, transnational identity, narrating of the self are portrayed in this novel.

5.2.2 The theme of Migration and Immigration
Migration is one of the features of transnationalism. In the novel In the Skin of a Lion, the characters migrated from their homeland to another county. Ondaatje depicts the history of immigrants who builds the city of Toronto. The characters portrayed in the novel are from different countries. They crossed the border of their country and live in the host country as an immigrant worker.

The critic, Avinash Jodha in his book The Poetics of Exile, writes about the reason of migration. He writes:

The immigrants arrive in the city escaping economic depravity or political persecution at home, fuelled by dreams of success and tall tales of the returned immigrants.(Jodha, 82)

All the characters migrated from their home country to host country to get success and also they listen to the tales of previous migrants. Ondaatje begins his novel with the
epigraphs. The first epic is the Epic of Gilgamesh and second is from John Berger. The novel describes the story of migrants such as Pati rick, Nicholas Temlcoff, Caravaggio, Harris and Ambrose Small. The novel is set in Toronto where all the characters migrate from different countries. The novel is divided into three parts i.e. Little Seeds, The Bridge and The novelist portrays the reality of workers and labourers in host land. Patrick is a protagonist of the novel migrates from his small town Ontario to Toronto. He experiences the struggle and suffering of the workers. He is born into that area which did not appear till 1910. He is a motherless boy who lives with his father in rural Ontario. 

Ondaatje depicted immigrant family in this novel. Immigrants came from different country and settled in Canada. Avinash Jodha writes:

‘This time the family of the immigrants who came to Canada, his adopted home, in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The novel has received critical acclaim for voicing of the un-official histories of the making of Toronto and in some ways of Canada. (Jodha, 79)’

The novelist narrates the story of marginal people in this novel. All immigrants are from Macedonia, Greece and Finland who have crossed the border of their country and choose to live elsewhere. They are displaced people who are living outside their home country and work in woods, mines and tunnels. They work in tanneries and tunnels causing disgusting smells, living in temporary places amidst freezing snow-covered peaks yet vibrate with best of life, dare to dream and toil to achieve.

At the time of writing Toronto’s history, many of the characters are left out when retelling the history of the city. There is a constant arrival of immigrants from different countries for getting jobs and a better life. The portrayal of the immigrant experience and identity is one of the main facets of the novel.

Avinash Jodha writes in his book about the situation of migrants in the 20th century. The twentieth century is the beginning of new era. People migrated from their home country and lived elsewhere. He writes:

The twentieth century to a great extent was the era of immigration, which brought the people of different racial and ethnic origins into close proximity, juxtaposed the colonizer and the colonized and thereby brings the given inherent differences between them into sharper focus and
making the questions of identity, roots, the notion of selfhood and
otherness crucial to contemporary enquiry. (Jodha, 64)

The novel explores the lives of labour immigrants, mainly Macedonians, Italians and
Bulgarians of the Toronto city between 1918 and 1938. All immigrant workers came
from different countries and lived in Canada. Their culture is mixed with the culture of
Canada. Diaspora is now closely related to the concept of hybridity. Homi K. Bhabha.

Bhabha in his *The Location of Culture* write about hybridity:

Hybridity is the name of this displacement of value from symbol to sign
that causes the dominant discourse to split along the axis of its power to be
representative, authoritative. (Bhabha, 162)

All the immigrants are mixed with different cultures and their identity becomes hybrid
identity. Displacement is a feature of transnationalism. All the characters in this novel are
displaced from their original homeland. They face number of problems in the place where
they are displaced. This novel portrays the experience of the displaced people. Patrick
and Temelcoff are displaced from rural Ontario to Toronto where number of migrants
arrived in search of job.

Patrick is migrated from his rural Ontario to urban Toronto. He faces the problem of job
security in the city. He had migrated at the age of twenty one. Nothing is remained with
him when he arrives in Toronto. Ondaatje writes:

What remained in Patrick from his childhood were letters frozen inside
mailboxes after ice storms. What he remembered was loving only things to
do with colour, hating the whiteness, stepping into the warm brown
universe of barns, the breath and steam cattle rolling out, the acrid shit and
urine he could summon up even now in the heart of Toronto. (53)

At last he got job as a searcher in Toronto. He is searching Ambrose Small who is
millionarie. He was stranger to the place and observes everything mutely. He met two
sisters of Small. He continuously displaced from one place to another.

Displacement is a complex phenomenon and it involves a transition from the known to
unknown. It is a movement from a set of values and relationships at home and to a set up
values and relationships with another land.
The displaced people in the host land are treated as a marginal because of their race, region and history. Patrick later migrated to Paris. He met Clara Dickens who is working as a radio actress. Clara told him all about her childhood history from beginning to the end. Avinash Jodha writes the advantages and dilemmas of migrant labourers and workers. He writes:

> Immigration had its advantages both in terms of Canadian economy and culture at the same time it brought its own problems, which ironically had to do with the economy and the culture of the country. The immigrants settled primarily in the cities as they required jobs and the industries located in the cities fulfilled the requirement but somehow the meager wages failed to provide them decent conditions of living. (80-81)

Nicholas Temelcoff is also displaced from his own native land to Toronto. He faced different problems when he displaced to the new place. Everything is new to; language, culture etc. are totally different from his own culture. He learned English language when he migrated to Toronto. All the migrated people learnt English language from recorded songs and through mimicking actors on the stage.

Patrick and Temelcoff both are socially and culturally displaced from their place and they are struggling for their own identity and it is expressed through the language used by them. Both are unable to adjust in the host city because of the language barrier. They are not able to communicate in the language of the natives. They are displaced linguistically and culturally. The immigrants have to depend on the authorities under whom they are working. The language in which they are not able to communicate is a disadvantage for them.

Ambrose Small was a missing millionaire and he was the jackal business world of Toronto. He was doing business in various countries. He is not a man of one country. He purchased theatres of all the near provinces such as Arkona, Peterborough, Paris etc.

All immigrants are from Europe and they are treated as outsiders. They have left their own country, known spaces and cultures and are displaced to the strange land of Canada.

5.2.3 The theme of Language Barrier:

Language plays an important role for creating an identity and also it is one of the most important signifiers of class and cultural or regional background. All the major and minor
characters face the problem of language in foreign country. Their inability to speak English language shows the status of outsider.

Patrick Lewis is an immigrant in his home land. He observes foreign loggers who go to work, earn their living. He could not understand the language of the man he saw near railway station. Ondaatje writes:

He saw a man with three suitcases, well dressed, shouting out in another language. The man’s eyes burned through everyone who at first received his scream personally. (54)

Patrick faces the problem of language in Toronto where he arrived. This is the problem of the displaced people. He faces problem of lack of language like an immigrant people. Language plays an vital role in the process of identity. He observes the people who go to the work by walk twenty miles into land they don’t know.

Language barrier is important factor faced by the immigrants. Lack of English language cuts them off from the world. The consequence of language barrier shows their inability express their ideas.

Rod Schumacher writes about Patrick’s alienation in his article Patrick’s Quest: Narration and Subjectivity. He writes:

Any feeling of alienation that Patrick experiences, either in the wilderness or in Toronto, arise not from some calculated withdrawal from the world, but rather from his inability to use language effectively. (4-5)

Nicholas Temelcoff also faces the problem of language when he arrived in the country. He decided to learn the language as early as possible because language is the first step to involve in the society.

Workers also face the problem of language barrier in Toronto. Only few are able to understand and speak English Language. Rowland Harris, Commissioner of Public Works, always visits to the site of construction. Ondaatje writes, “he slipped past the barrier and walked towards the working men. Few of them spoke English but they knew who he was.” (29)

And also, Alice’s silent puppet shows the language barrier prevents the access of ethnic minorities to society’s institutions. Language shows cultural and national identity of Patrick. It is described on the position of marginality. Patrick is treated as a marginal
figure in the city of Toronto. Alice Gull describes a pantomime play where we can see the power of language when all actresses took the role of heroines.
In this Pantomime play each person had to take responsibility of the story and they have to assume the skins of wild animals. Language is one of the important tools in the foreign country. All the characters face the problem of language in the host country. They have to depend on expressions and gestures.

5.2.4 The theme of Alienation:
The characters feel isolated at the migrated place. Patrick is migrated from his home town to Toronto. Patrick discovers everything when he reads the history of the Bloor Street Viaduct. Many workers died and injured at the time of the construction still there is no record of these people in the history of Toronto.
Patrick thinks himself to be an immigrant to the city. He is lonely and withdrawn, alien by nature; he does not make friends easily. His natural silence results in a self-imposed elimination from society that equals the linguistic isolation of the immigrants. He also works with them and lives among the immigrants with whom linguistic barriers prevent communication. Patrick is to buy food and dive over the code of languages between him and the Macedonian clerks. So he is totally isolated and excluded, an outsider among outsiders, and feels himself to be an alien. Encyclopaedia Britannica defines, ‘alienation means separation from the self, work and milieu.
Patrick feels isolation when the migrants disappear in winter. Winter is a blue river for him. Ondaatje writes:

He sits down at the long table and looks into his school geography book with the maps of the world, the white sweep of currents, testing the names to himself, mouthing out the exotic. Caspian, Nepal, Durango. He closes the book and brushes it with his palms, feeling the texture of the pebbled cover and its coloured dyes which create a map of Canada. (9)
Patrick conceals on an island at the time of his quest to revenge the death of Alice who fought for the rights of labour and immigrants. Patrick swims through the intake tunnel of the Waterworks confront Commissioner Harris. He swims for dynamiting the plant and changes the colour of his skin. The title of the novel indicates the story of historical silences, as Alice states:
Patrick has clung like moss to strangers, to the nooks and fissures of their situations. He has always been alien, the third person in the picture. He is the one born in this country who knows nothing of the place. The Finns of his childhood used the river, even knew it by night, the men of burning rushes delirious in the darkness. This he had never done. He was a watcher, a corrector. (156-157)

Patrick is a stranger in his own land. He lives lonely life among the immigrants. The epic of Gilgamesh is reiterated in the figure of Patrick Lewis. He walks throughout the Toronto as an outsider. He was alien to become a part of society; the immigrants need to adopt the skin of Toronto. Patrick migrates to Toronto and the Finnish loggers who are the transnational migrant to Toronto and they do not claim for the land because they don’t have any permanent home. All the workers in the tunnel feel isolation. They work in eight hours shift. They are silent and are not talking with each other. Ondaatje writes:

> During the eight hour shifts no one speaks. Patrick is a silent as the Italians and Greeks towards the bronco foremen. For eight hours a day the air around them rolls in its dirty light. (106)

Rod Schumacher writes in his article *Patrick’s Quest: Narration and Subjectivity in Michael Ondaatje’s In the Skin of a Lion*:

> Any feeling of Alienation that Patrick experiences, either in the wilderness or in Toronto, arise not from some calculated withdrawal from the world, but rather from his inability to use language effectively. His desire is not to seek silence, but to break out of it. (Schumacher, 4-5)

Patrick has to work alone in a tunnel. He has to wonder through the tunnel alone. So Patrick is isolated from other workers. He reached the place where there is no noise, no work and wander alone in the darkness. Patrick was living among immigrants who came from Macedonia and Bulgaria. He feels alienated among them. He could not understand their language. He came from Eastern Avenue. They understood little about him. Ondaatjt writes:

> And suddenly Patrick, surrounded by friendship, concern, was smiling, feeling the tears on his face falling towards his stern Macedonian style moustache. Elena, the great Elena who had sold him vetch for over a year,
unpinned the white scarf around her neck and passed it to him. He looked up and saw the men and women who could not know why he wept now among these strangers who in the past had seemed to him like dark blinds on his street, their street, for he was their alien. (113)

The novel includes various characters in a quest, different journeys, adventurous incidents, fights, etc., for example, Temelcoff’s journey from Macedonia to Canadian shores, Patrick’s journey from rural to urban, Ambrose Small’s disappearance from the underground, Cato’s efforts and Caravaggio’s escapes. Avinash Jodha writes in his book Poetics of Exile about the migrants. He writes:

Everyone is a stranger in the city, they have come across physical and mental landscapes to be a part of it. They chart and map the city in their own ways, holding on to their versions, relating to it, claiming it in their ways. It is not only the immigrants but also people born in Canada like Patrick, Commissioner Harris, Alice, Clara and Hazen Lewis, are strangers in the way they forge their identities and relate to the city in their characteristic manners. (Jodha, 80-81)

All are strangers in the city of Toronto and they are living their life in isolation. Nicholas Temelcoff is another important character in the novel. He has migrated from Macedonia. He feels isolated in the strange land of Toronto. The first problem he faced is English language. He is unable to communicate in English. This language barrier makes him to feel alien. He immediately starts learning the language. He tries to overcome this barrier and mix with the people.

5.2.5 The theme of Nostalgia:

Migrants face the problem of Nostalgia in host country. They always think about their country of origin. Nostalgia is a recollection of past memory and its attachment with the present. Nicholas Temelcoff who is Macedonian migrant always feels nostalgic about his country. Nicholas faces the problem in acquiring the new language. Nicholas saved the nun on the bridge. This memory has haunted to him in his life time. He remembers later that women’s arm is reaching for him and her curiousity of his name. Ondaatje describes:

He is aware of her now, the twin. What holds them together is not the act which saved her life but those moments since. The lost song on the radio.
His offhand and relaxed flattery to a nun with regard to her beauty. Then he had leaned his head back, closed his eyes for too long, and slept.(49)

Patrick got job as a searcher. He went to Paris and met Clara Dickens who is a lover of Small. He met also Alice in Paris. They immersed themselves in their bygone days. Alice tells the history of his family. He helped his father and loved him. They remember their childhood days. The past days are very happy one. He describes:

Those were favourite times. All day we talk about things I was not sure of. About plants, what wine tasted like. He put me right on how to have babies. I thought I had to take a watermelon seed……..Great times. Then my father died of a stroke when I was fifteen. (74)

Patrick remembers his past days with his father. His father was killed in feldspar mine and was buried in feldspar.

5.2.6 Narrating the Self:

This is also transnational feature in which the characters develop their transnational identities. Because of their connection with different places there is a transformation in their understanding. Patrick and Nicholas migrated to different place and came in contact with the migrated workers. Both these characters express their transnational selves. Sonja Lehman comments “Patrick and Temelcoff connects their life with new environment and became part of transnational social field.”(Lehman, 330) Both try to understand themselves in this new country. At the end of the novel, Patrick and Temelcoff narrate their own story. They give information about multiple places they visited and the variety of cultures they have seen. Both Patrick and Temelcoff try to connect to this new environment and try to develop their transnationalism. Temelcoff tells that he is citizen of this country and successful with his own bakery. The critic Sonja Lehman quotes, “the desire of immigrants is to integrate and Nicholas tries to curb his old identity.”( Lehman, 328) He is still living in the immigrant community as a stranger. Ondaatje writes:

He moved tentatively into the city, standing in front of strangers, studying the new fashions. He felt invisible. Outside Union Station the streets were deep in snowdrifts.(210)
Patrick is also an immigrant to Toronto from his rural Ontario. Patrick adopts Hana as his daughter in the immigrant country. Adoption of Hana in an immigrant country shows Patrick’s sense of belonging. He has not taken any responsibility on the part of Hana and even himself. At the end of the novel, he takes the responsibility of telling Clara that he is the father of Hana.

Patrick learns the language of the native i.e. English Language. He speaks very effectively in English language because of Alice. Canada becomes the country of transnationals where people can live a life full of joy and happiness.

5.2.7 The East – West Encounter in the Novel:

The East and West encounter is reflected in the novel. All the characters are from the East and now they are settled in the Western country. Everything is different for them in this foreign land.

Patrick asks Harris about the death of many workers. Harris replied him that there was no record of the workers and workers are never accepted or acknowledged. When he stops his conversation and says that he doesn’t want to talk on this. Harris replies:

“Then it will always be a nightmare.” Patrick then confirms that “It will always be a nightmare, Harris.” (236)

Patrick understands that the immigrants face the major problems in the host country. He says that cultural clashes are inevitable in the transnational identity. Commissioner Harris recognizes that the centre is shifted away from him and he calls for a nurse with medical treatment instead of the police. Harris agrees his involvement in the death of Alice, Patrick too admits his involvement in the accident that killed Alice. He puts down the mantle of a victim and identifies that he has been an invader too. After the realization he turns away from his rage and finally finds release from the burden of the past. He discovers anchor in Clara who frees him from the isolation, enables him to reunite with the human urge to forge bonds, family ties and embrace the world.

Nicholas Temelcoff has migrated to Canada from his home country Macedonia. He faced the problem of language and culture. He first learns the English language which is spoken by the majority of the people in Canada. The culture of the Canada is different from his own country and he faces the problem of cultural clashes in foreign country.
He emerges as a transcultural writer reflecting his multiple origins and influences. Ondaatje ends and begins the novel in the twilight mood as a father and a daughter travel together in a car. The car ride indicates Ondaatje's capacity to go beyond the time and space. The story ends where it begins and begins where it ends. Ondaatje stresses how the story has to be retrieved from memory. The unhappiness of the past however passes; the novel does not end in the darkness but in brightness which reflects a movement towards the future.

5.2.8 Transnational Identity of the characters:
As an English-speaking Canadian, Patrick becomes a foreigner in his own land. He looks an outsider in his own image. People are only his mirror. Patrick is not an immigrant; he left his rural village Ontario and migrated to Toronto. He has metaphorically crossed the border of his country and now he is a foreigner in his own country. He came across the history of the Macedonian immigrants who spent their life for the construction of the Bridge but there is no record in the official history of Toronto. The migrant workers suffer and die at the time of constructing the building. He lives in the migrant community and could not understand their culture and language. Ondaatje writes:

Patrick Lewis arrived in the city of Toronto as if it were land after years at sea. Growing up in the country had governed his childhood: the small village of Bellrock, the highway of river down which the log drivers came, drinking, working raucous and in the spring leaving the inhabitants shocked within the silence…… He owned nothing, had scarcely any money. There was a piece of feldspar in his pocket that his fingers had stumbled over during the train journey. He was an immigrant to the city.(53)

Patrick finds difficulty in adjusting to the city life like the migrant who faces problem in host country. He is refugee among the Macedonians who migrated to Canada. Ondaatje focuses marginalized characters who are involved in the struggle to transform themselves into a community, dealing with a difficult present and looking hopefully towards a future. All immigrants are exiles and need stability. Patrick’s observation and communication with the immigrants suggest his search for identity.
The critic, Glen Lowry writes in his article, *The Representation of Race in Ondaatje’s In the Skin of a Lion*:

“Ondaatje’s usage of Patrick’s character provides a fresh perspective for the reader on questions of ethnicity, representation, and class”. (Lowry, 3)

He develops his identity in the company of Greek, Macedonian, Russian and Italian immigrants. Patrick got a job as a searcher of Ambrose Small. He develops his love with Clara Dickens and Alice Gull at the time of his adventure. Alice tells him about the class difference between rich and poor. She tells that rich people are always laughing on poor. He develops his love for Alice. He is a stranger in his own country. He feels that he is in another country. It means he has migrated to another country. Ondaatje writes about this:

In the midst of his love for Alice, in the midst of lovemaking even, he watches her face wanting for her to be translated into this war bride or that queen or shopgirl, half expecting metamorphosis as they kiss. Annunciation. They eye would go first, and as he draws back he will be in another country, another century, his arms around a stranger. (152-153)

Nicholas Temelcoff migrated to Canada from Macedonia. He is well prepared because he already meets the people of his county who migrated to Toronto. He takes the advice from the people who already migrated to Toronto. He understands the importance of language and tries to learn the language. He decides to go to school and works in another Macedonian bakery. He saves the nun who is falling from the bridge. Ondaatje writes about the two strangers who came in contact with each other at a strange place:

The two strangers were in each other’s arms, beginning to swing wilder, once more, past the lip of the chute which had tempted them, till they were almost at the lower level of the rafters. He had his one good arm free.

Saving her now would be her responsibility. (32)

Nicholas understands the importance of English language in a host country. He cannot speak a single word. He has to depend on the gestures and postures. He works in Macedonian bakery where he gets seven dollars a month with food and quarters. After six months, he hardly speaks English. Regarding this Ondaatje writes:
He still could hardly speak English and decided to go to school, working nights in another Macedonian bakery. If he did not learn the language he would be lost. (46)

Nicholas decided to go to school and learn the language. He took admission in the school. All the students in his class are ten years old and he is twenty six years old. The immigrants like Temelcoff are conscious of otherness, of not belonging, standing apart and it is reinforced by the host society which refuses to accept them. Marginalization becomes metaphorically associated with historical inarticulateness or exclusion. The writer studies about the inarticulate nature of immigrants or other disenfranchised characters, and their expulsion from the historical record.

Temelcoff is unable to speak English Language. So he cannot express or tell anything to the nun. To fulfill his dream, he started hard work and decides to open the new bakery. He thinks that it is difficult to acquire the language than to work. Here the novelist portrayed the injustice and exploitation of the bridge workers who get low salary.

Nicholas Temelcoff is transnationally connected to this place. He came to this place with full preparation. Ondaatje describes his transnational connection as follows:

He came to this country like a torch on fire and he swallowed air as he walked forward and he gave out light. Energy poured through him. That was all he had time for in those years. Language, customs, family, salaries. (149)

He is a tentative man who started his transnational process before arrival to this country. He maintains successful integration in the host country. He is totally involved in Canada means he is a transnational figure. Ondaatje writes:

Nicholas Temelcoff never looks back. He will drive the bakery van over the bridge with his wife and children and only casually mention his work there. He is a citizen here, in the present, successful with his own bakery. (149)

Nicholas settles in the host country. He started his own bakery in Toronto with his wife and children. Criglington writes in his article about Nicholas, “With his immigrant’s desire to integrate, Nicholas has repressed his old identity” (Criglington, 135).
Nicholas crushes his old identity and creates his own new transnational identity in the host country. He is still a part of that community.

Alice is another important character in the novel. Alice teaches Patrick about the lives of the workers and then he understands his own self and the country: The inspiration and will power is drawn from Alice’s political activism and Patrick fights for the recognition of the marginalized people and participates in a leftist political movement. She is the catalyst that brings Patrick out of his isolation. He becomes a part of the immigrant community in which they live and forms a close bond with Alice's daughter, Hana. Both Alice and Hana become the force in his life that brings about a new awakening, a new consciousness. Alice tells Patrick that she is a migrant to the country of Upper America. She says:

You believe in solitude, Patrick, in retreat. You can afford to be romantic because you are self-sufficient...I’m not talking about money. Working in the tunnels is terrible, I know that. But you have a choice, what of others who don’t? Such as three quarters of the population of Upper America. They can’t afford your choices, your languor. (123).

She is an immigrant worker who longs and craves for joy, love, bonding and protection. She knows the situation of the immigrants in the host country. She can’t afford the choices of Patrick.

Caravaggio is another most important character in the novel. He is a professional thief from Italy. He also comes from the immigrant community. He escapes from the prison by changing skin colour. The changing of the skin colour means the change of his identity. Ondaatje describes:

Demarcation, said the prisoner name Caravaggio. That is all we need to remember. And that was how he escaped- a long double belt strapped under his shoulders attaching him to the cupola so he could hang with his arms free, splayed out, while Buck and Patrick painted him, covering his hands and boots and hair with blue. (179-180)

Caravaggio, the thief, changed his identity and escaped from the prison. He is Italian-Canadian thief. Patrick advises Caravaggio before the attack in his cell one night, and
after Caravaggio's escape and Patrick's release, the two men meet again in their immigrant neighborhood.

Caravaggio changes his own identity in the host country. He changes the skin colour of Patrick. Hana becomes the final facilitator in Patrick’s journey from isolation and otherness and connects him to community. Clara goes to a trip with Hana to rescue from the alienation from which Patrick has suffered. During the journey, as Patrick tells Hana his story, the reader too travels full circle and comes back to the preface of the novel.

The novel ends with the reunion of fractured families by pointing towards establishing a balance in their individual lives. Ondaatje explains, Patrick interacts in multicultural setting and learns to be with new people, to create new bonds and relations, to find light in the darkness, adopting and mingling with other cultures, reshaping yet preserving the cultural roots. The migrants coming from different cultures and languages and finding themselves in an alien culture and amidst new language have to find ways to use elements of all cultures to be able to continue to exist. Ondaatje’s focuses on immigrant labourers of 1920s’ Toronto. The novel depicts how different ethno-cultural groups make efforts to make a home of the alien land as also to forge a community based on cooperation and affinity. Susan Sparey aptly points out:

Ondaatje rejects a simple model of the juxtaposition of cultures within a nation or an individual, and focuses instead on processes of transformation and metamorphosis--of individuals, polities, and geographical spaces - as these notions of community, identity and affiliation are reimagined re-enacted, realigned. (Sparey, 134)

Ondaatje successfully grapples with the problems of transnational identity. The novel depicts marginalized groups of people from various places like Macedonia, Hungary, Polish, Lithuania, Italy and Finland. Patrick felt himself new when he arrived in Toronto.

5.3 TRANSNATIONALISM IN THE ENGLISH PATIENT

5.3.1 Introduction:

Michael Ondaatje’s award winning novel The English Patient explores the issue of national identity. Both The English Patient and Kip are “international bastard, born in one place and live in another place. All the characters have fled from their homeland and living in a transnational space. Kip is from India and fights on behalf of British in Second
World War, Hana is a nurse from Canada and Caravaggio is an Italian-Canadian thief from Canada.

Ondaatje is also an international bastard like the characters in his novel. He was born in Sri Lanka and lives in Canada. His parents divorced in 1945 and his mother moved to England in 1949. Ondaatje moved from Ceylon to England and moved Canada in 1962. This identity spans in various nations such as Sri Lanka, England and Canada.

Ondaatje portrays the theme of transnationalism in this novel. Transnational migrants face number of problems in host and home country. Ondaatje portrays various aspects of transnationalism. The transnational aspects such as migration, alienation, nostalgia, historiographic metafiction, transnational identity, narrating of the self are portrayed in this novel. These aspects are discussed in detail in this chapter.

5.3.2 The theme of Migration.

Migration is one of the features of transnational identity. The characters in this novel are migrated from their original homeland and live in an Italian Villa. The English Patient, Kip, Hana and Caravaggio are displaced from their place. These characters are the war damaged twentieth century wanderers. They are comfortable without possessions, home and attachment. Hana takes refuge in Italian Villa and gardens are like rooms to her. Almasy who is burned in the plane crash lives in an Italian Villa. Hana takes care of this English man who has lost his identity. He says that they all come from different nations and we hate nations because we are deformed by the nation states.

John Bolland in his book *The English Patient* writes:

All the inhabitants of Villa are displaced individuals who shed their skins and are in search of new identities through the relationships they form in their Tuscan refuge. (Bolland, 35)

They have not faced any questions about what happened during the war or to perform what social etiquette they have left during the war. All characters are happy for being separation from the world and not perplexed. The characters discuss where they should go after the war and Kip said that everyone will go to their home once the war is over.

Kip arrives in London from Punjab. He is the only one who is interested to join in the army. He is totally stranger in England. He is away from his family. He gives the exam quickly and inventing other objects in the remaining time. Ondaatje writes:
He had come from a country where mathematics and mechanics were natural traits. Cars were never destroyed. Parts of them were carried across a village and readapted into a sewing machine or water pump. (200)

All these Europeans try to remove their identities. Desert is the place which blurred the boundaries of nation states. The national identity of the characters disappears and they live freely. These characters brought with them their culture and their nationality. These people show their homesickness and also show their strength of adjusting with new environment. The English Patient, Hana, Caravaggio and Kip came from different countries and they adjusted themselves in Italian Villa.

All the characters are unaware about their future. The villa is the place where one cannot expect anything. They can just survive and it is enough for them. They use both places homes and the villa for escaping from their suffering. Kip works as sapper in many countries. He serves in London for five years and then in Italy. Lord Suffolk is his teacher in Woolwich. Pilot is also injured in plane crash. His body moves to different places.

Ondaatje writes:

The---- tribe that had saved the burned pilot brought him the British base at Siwa in 1944. He was moved in the midnight ambulance train from the Western Desert to Tunis, then shipped to Italy….The burned pilot was one more enigma, with no identification, unrecognizable. (101)

The burned pilot is beyond recognizable. He is having no identity and no country. He tells the interrogators to tell him to speak German or ask him to speak about Don Bradman. He knows everything about Europe. He notices a young nurse and tells her glances are more dead like a patient.

Ondaatje focuses on the history of desert explorer. They are Kemal el Din, Bagnold and Madox. They came from different country to explore the lost oasis Zerzura. They know each other’s intimacies, skills and weaknesses. They gather at Dakhla and Kufra.

Ondaatje writes their journey:

Our first journey, moving south from Jaghbub into the desert among the preserve of Zwaya and Majabra’s tribes. A seven day journey to El Taj. Madox and Bermann, four others. Some camels a horse and a dog. As we
left they told us the old joke. To start a journey in a sandstorm is good luck. (145)

They travelled nine days in a storm. They missed the desert where they expected to locate. They lost their horses and camels died due to storm. Almasy joined these desert explorers. They all are from different country. They are from German, English, Hungarian and African. Ondaatje writes:

> All of us, even those with European homes and children in the distance, wished to remove the clothing of our countries. It was a place of faith. We disappeared into landscape. (148)

Almasy is a desert explorer. He had spent his childhood in the Levant and knew the Bedouin. He completed his school education in England and worked as a spy in Cairo. He makes a journey to Cairo. He meets many Englishmen and Germans in Cairo.

### 5.3.3 The theme of Transnational place and space: Villa and the Desert

In the novel *The English Patient* the identity is constructed through the places, such as the desert and the Italian Villa. A place is described with setting, time of the World War II, which shows imaginary boundaries that highlights the significance of national identities. The World War II becomes the enemy of the novel because Hana, Kip, Caravaggio, and the English patient are faced the problems in their life. All the characters in the villa are seen transnationally connected with each other. Sonja Lehman writes in her book about the migrants experience in deserted Italian villa and their togetherness in spite of their different nationalities. He explains further:

> All these migrants share their common experiences and are afraid of the war in which they are participated and live together despite their different nationalities. (Lehman, 331)

All these characters live peacefully without thinking of their national difference. All the characters express their homesickness. Hana expresses her connection with native place and also attached with Canada. Kip expresses his views about his native country, India and its culture. The characters cannot completely escape the places of their origin. The English patient dies in the villa and others leave Italy and returned to home. All these characters are drawn from their past places to develop present relationships that contribute to develop their identities.
Ondaatje’s characters leave the places of World War and live in an alien places such as the villa. The war has destroyed boundaries and formed a large space where the national identities of the characters become more important. They have not prepared in the past properly for the war or for living amongst strangers.

Kip and Almasy are international bastards. They born in one place and choose to live in another place. Kip is from India and lives in desert for some years. He says:

> For some years I lived in the desert. I learned everything I knew there.
> Everything that ever happened to me that was important happened in the desert. (189)

The Villa San Girolamo is a place for the characters to withdrawal. The war has separated many people but it has brought various characters together such as Kip, Hana, Caravaggio, and the English patient in a dilapidated villa in Italy. The villa is an important character which is disturbed by the war like the characters. The characters discuss about unknown history by telling the house was used by famous artists. It is known as the Villa Bruscoli. This place served as a nunnery at the time of war when Germans attacked and now it becomes a war hospital for the Allies. At the end, it is the place of seepage for English Patient, Hana, Kip and Caravaggio. They can forget the place where they travelled and even themselves.

The villa is neither the home nor the world of the characters. It is a place where the characters escape from their problems temporarily. It is a protective and solitary place for them. Ondaatje describes the history of the Villa Bruscoli. He writes as follows:

> I think this was the Villa Bruscoli. Poliziano- the great protégé of Lorenzo. I am talking about 1483. In Florence, in Santa Trinita Church, you can see the painting of the Medicis with Polziano in the foreground, wearing a red cloak….Pico and Lorenzo and Poliziano and the young Michaelangelo. They held in each hand the new world and the old world. (59-60)

This villa is home of all migrants who came from different countries. Avinash Jodha in his book *Poetics of Exile* writes:

> The Villa further becomes the temporary home of the nomads-the patient, Hana, Caravaggio and Kip. The space of the villa never remains static, it is
charged up with each new occupant, the older order is revised with every entrance, stay and exist. (Jodha, 106)

The Villa becomes the place of their national identities. This was the place for German troops and then it becomes the place of hospital. This place looks devastated from the outside. All the migrants’ life was foraging and displayed tentative safety.

5.3.4 The theme of Inter-textuality:
Inter-textuality is one of the features of transnationalism. The term ‘inter texuality’ is coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966. He explains that there are two relationships seen in the text i.e. the relationship between author and reader and the relationship between the text and other texts. The writer has used many inter-textual references in his novel The English Patient. Ondaatje has referred to many works of other writers such as the Russian classic ‘Anna Karenina’, Kipling’s ‘Kim’, Cooper’s ‘The Last of the Mohicans’, Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’, ‘Stendhal’s ‘The Charterhouse of Parma’, Herodotus Histories and his own novel ‘In the Skin of a Lion’.

In Kipling’s Kim is the story of the British boy who involves in the Indian culture and in this novel, Kip is an Indian who involves in British culture. The similarities between them are that both spent their childhood and adolescence in India. Kim is very honest to Lama and Kip is very honest to Lord Suffolk.

The Herodotus History also becomes one of the inter-textual readings. Hana used many quotes from many books to maintain her relationships with the English Patient and Kip. Herodotus’s book was very valuable to the charred patient. He clutched this book when he died. Ondaatje writes:

His 1890 edition of Herodotus Histories, are other fragments-maps, diary entries, writing in many languages, paragraphs cut out of other books. All that is missing is his own name. (102)

Katherine is also included in the text. Katherine is a woman like Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina. Her husband is very jealous about her beauty. He consoles her to read the book of Herodotus for the soldiers.

5.3.5 The theme of Alienation:
Alienation is also one of the features of transnationalism. All the characters are migrated from different countries. Because of migration, they face different types of problems in
the alien land. All the migrants are living in Italian Villa. Hana, Kip, English Patient and Caravaggio came from different country. They are strangers in this Italian Villa. The English Patient’s body is totally burnt and he is living an isolated life with Hana.

Hana is a major character in the novel. She is nursing the body of English patient. She always feels alien in this land. She always reads book for English patient who listens and swallows the words. To overcome loneliness, she turned to read books for the English patient. She lives in the protected place where everything is dark for her. She says:

She entered rooms that had been soiled by soldiers, rooms whose furniture had been burned within them. She cleared our leaves and shit and urine and charred tables. She was living like a vagrant, while elsewhere the English patient reposed in his bed like a king. (15)

Hana was living an isolated life in an Italian Villa. The only companion with her is the burnt English Patient. She was living a dangerous and frustrated life. This also indicates that the migrant people live a deserted life.

Kip’s migration is shown from his relationship with Hana and the English Patient. He was living isolated and alienated life before joining in the Villa. Kip develops his relationship where the nation is blurred. John Bolland in his book comments:

Kip begins to re-establish bonds of relationship again through affection for the patient and his love for Hana. He feels integrated in a community once more and celebrated this by organizing a birthday dinner for Hana.

(Bolland, 27)

Kip loves English culture and his love for Hana shows the blurring of the boundary of the nation. Kip is from India and Hana is Canadian. Both develop their relationship by ignoring the restriction of the nation.

Kip’s service in the army is a crucial importance for him. He remains in uniform and he wears shining buckle, turban is systematically knotted and boots are polished. He lives isolated and lonely life when he arrives at Villa. He visits other’s house at Villa only when he is invited. He basically works on his own, without contact with the rest of the forces, does not change his determination to wear his uniform, since it affirms his sense of being a part of the English army and thus belonging to the English.
He tells about his transnational identity in the Italian Villa where he is living with four other characters. He always sleeps half in the tent and half out of the tent. All are gathered in English Patient’s room to celebrate Kip’s birthday. He feels lonely in that group. He is uncomfortable and alien in Italy. He thinks:

All of the burned man’s desire was in the brain, the sapper had been thinking to himself, sitting in the stone alcove. Then he turned his head suddenly, knowing everything as he heard the sound, certain of it. He had looked back at them and for the first time in his life lied-’It is all right, it wasn’t mine. That seemed to come from a cleared area – prepared to wait till the smell of the cordite reached him. (118-119)

Kip feels isolated in Italy. His loneliness makes him to think of his own country. He says, it is not mine means he does not belong to this country. He always wanders alone in the room. He thinks of Caravaggio, Hana and English patient. He silently comes in the room where the party already began three hours before. He sits alone near the window. Caravaggio lives alone in Italy. The war between two countries unbalanced him. He sits in silence and loses in his thoughts. He cannot return to other world. Ondaatje writes:

He is a man in middle age who has never become accustomed to families. Till this war he has been a better lover than a husband. He has been a man who slips away, in the way lovers leave chaos, the way thieves leave reduced houses. (124)

Caravaggio becomes a good lover than a husband. He wants to reveal the identity of English Patient to Hana.

5.3.6 The theme of Nostalgia:

The theme of Nostalgia is prevalent in all the novels of Michael Ondaatje. The characters from different cultural backgrounds displaced from their country. They are living in an Italian Villa which is in dilapidated condition. The English Patient, Hana, Kip and Caravaggio tell their lost history to each other. The English Patient whose body is burnt in a plane crash. He tells his story to Hana. He is, Claude Almasy, a desert explorer. Hana nurses English patient whose body is beyond recognition. They are living very unhappy life in a desert. Their life is changed after the arrival of Caravaggio. Caravaggio
is a friend of Hana’s father. Caravaggio tells the tragic history of his life. He tells how his fingers are amputated by the Nazis. Hana’s father loves his own country. Ondaatje says:

Her father loved a city of his own invention, whose streets and walls and borders he and his friends had painted. He never truly stepped out of that world. She realizes everything she knew about the real world she learned on her own or from Caravaggio or during the time they lived together, from her stepmother, Clara. (98)

All these migrants are living in Italy. They don’t know why they are living in Italy and why Kip is dismantling a bomb and fighting English wars. They are not happy in Italy. They feel about their homeland. They hate the city where they migrated. They think to move together from this place and leave Englishman alone. Kip remembers the tradition of his family in Italy. His nature is different from his brother. Kip is insulted in Italy. He remembers:

I did not feel insulted by this. I am sure my brother would have been, would have walked in fury over to take well, hauled up the bucked, and washed the chalk markings away. I was not like him. (213)

Kip is less serious than his brother. His brother is hero in his family. His brother never bears the insult made by the others. He refused the tradition of his family to join in the army. He is arrested and kept in a jail. Kip also remembers his father. He says:

My father had a bird, a small swift I think, that he kept beside him, as essential to his comfort as a pair of spectacles or a glass of water during a meal. In the house, even if he just was entering his bedroom he carried it with him. When he went to work the small cage hung off the bicycle’s handlebars. (214)

His father always carried a bird with him. It is the culture of the east where people tame the bird in their house. He also takes it to the working place. Kip is in love with Hana. He remembers his mother when he could not sleep. He reminds:

When he was scared or unable to sleep it was the ayah who recognized his lack, who would ease him into sleep with her hand on his small thin back, this intimate stranger from South India who lived with them, helped run a household, cooked and served them meals, brought up her own children
within the shell of the household, having comforted his older brother too in earlier years, probably knowing the character of all of the children than their real parents did. (238)

Kip loves his mother too much. If anybody asked him whom he loved most he says infront of his mother that he love his ayah.

5.3.7 Transnational Identity of Characters:
The novel *The English Patient* explores the problem of identity faced by the characters. Ondaatje portrays the transnational identity of major and minor characters in the novel *The English Patient*. The English Patient or Almasy was injured in the plane crash. His body is totally burnt and looks purple, it is beyond recognition. His identity is erased and there is nothing to recognize him. Ondaatje writes about his identity:

A man with no face. An ebony pool. All identification consumed in a fire. Parts of his burned body and face had been sprayed with tannic acid that hardened into a protective shell over his raw skin. The area around his eyes was coated with a thick layer of gentian violet. There was nothing to recognize in him.(50).

John Bolland in his book writes on the burnt body of the English Patient which shows the erasure of national identity. He writes:

His physical appearance images the erasure of national identity. His collaboration in the Western project to delineate, name and so possess the unmapped desert has resulted in the obliteration of his own feature, the map of his identity. (Bolland, 32)

The burnt body of the patient is the main symbol of the novel. His unidentified body projects many identities. His body is symbolic of the erasure of the boundaries. Hana nurses him and cleans his body. He has no identity.

He is burning in a desert for a week. He is rescued from the desert by the Bedouin. Bedouins are nomads who know about the plane crash. They dragg him out of the desert. This man has no identity. Desert is a place where he escapes from the world. In this deserted Villa, all the character live together.

All the characters are from different countries. They have crossed the border of their country and are living a very happy life in an Italian Villa. It is possible for Almasy to
cross the border of his nation because of his burnt body. Nobody could understand about his nation. Madox was the close friend of The English Patient. He committed suicide in England during the sermon given by the priest in honour of War. He erased his identity by killing himself. Almasy also hates his own identity in the western country. All these characters came from different nations. They carry with them their culture and language. They are living in a transnational world. In this desert, they lost their nation and hate their nations. Both Katherine and Almasy come from different nations and erased their individual nationalities. Further they say:

All of us, even those with European homes and children in the distance, wished to remove the clothing of our countries. It was a place of faith. We disappeared into landscape. Fire and sand. (148).

The English patient tells his experience of life. The people never look into mirror when they are young and are worried about their future. He is not a young man when he reached to the Italian Villa. He asks Hana to bring a mirror for him to watch his burns and want to free from the society. Name carries negative meaning for him. He says:

The places water came to and touched…..Ain, Bir, Wadi, Foggara, Khottara, Shaduf. I didn’t want my name against such beautiful names. Erase the family name! Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert. (148)

Avinash Jodha in his book Poetics of Exile writes that nation is like a cloth to the immigrants in the Italian Villa. He says:

Almasy and other desert explorer learn an important lesson about identity in the desert. Nations become pieces of clothing that can be removed or put on never completely revealing the person within them. (Jodha, 127)

Almasy wants to erase the name of the family and nations. It means that he wants to be identified with different name. It should be transnational identity of the patient. He says,

But I wanted to erase my name and the place I had come from. By the time arrived, after ten years in the desert, it was easy for me to slip across borders, not to belong to anyone, to any nation. (148)

He heard a voice of Katherine who was reciting something. She describes the stars, Adam in her poem. These lines make him to think of his university days. He falls in love with
married Katherine Clifton. Once he talks about the geography. They are in a desert. He says:

   Give me a map and I’ll build you a city. Give me pencil and I will draw you a room in South Cairo, desert charts on the wall. Always the desert was among us. (154)

Mapping a place and giving a name to it shows a way to the outsiders. And it is the place where they have formed their own identity. Almasy says to Katherine that he will build a city in the desert.

Steven Totosy de Zepetnek in his article writes about Almasy. Almasy was born in 1895 in Austria. He was a desert explorer and pilot. He took part with British explorers in several international expeditions in 1930 to find Zerzura. Zerzura is a lost city buried in the deserts of Egypt or Libya. He writes:

   He was allotted to the German army as a liaison officer and that in July 1944 he helped Vince Gorgey, a Royal Hungarian army officer to escape Berlin with the aid of the German SS. (Zepetnek, 118)

Almasy worked as a desert guide for Germans under Rommels Command in the year 1940. He helps spies find their way across the borders of the North African theater. He is working for the British as well. He spent in a Russian prison after the war. The new communist regime in Hungary arrested him for treason and he escaped because of British intelligence.

Almasy was an international desert explorer before the war. He develops his affair with Katherine, the wife of Geoffrey Clifton. Clifton comes to know about their affair and attempts to kill them by crashing his plane in the desert. He died in the attempt and Almasy and Katherine survived. Both Almasy and Katherine takes shelter in Swimmer’s Cave. By leaving her in the Cave Almasy goes for the long expedition out of the desert to get help. He is caught by German forces and made him to serve as a guide in this desert. In his expedition of the desert, Almasy tries his best to return for Katherine but she is dead now. He finds his buried plane in the desert and repairs it and loads dead body of Katherine and flew away from desert. The plane catches fire and he falls burning in the desert from the sky back. Bedouin nomads save him and take him to an Allies hospital. Caravaggio collects all these information from Patient by giving him morphine..
The English patient considers a national identity is limited one. He opposes nations, places and history that represents and how these restrain his identity. The nation denotes war and restrictions which made people to agree the thoughts of nations’ leaders. All the characters wish to destroy nationality from their own identities and they are unsatisfied with the national identity. Because of nationalities they lose their independence and they disappeared into the landscape. The English patient once tells to Hana:

Kip and I are both international bastards—born in one place and choosing to live elsewhere. Fighting to get back to or get away from our homelands all our lives.( 156)

Almasy moves from one place to another. He is a man of the world and he walks from Dakhala Oasis to the Gilf Kebir ten years ago. He is one of the desert explorers who moves to different locations and worked for the Germans. He spends most of his life in exploring the desert and creates his own identity in desert without thinking of nation and family.

Hana is another important character in the novel. Hana lives in this deserted Villa. She is also nomadic who constantly moved in the Italian Villa. She works among the people of different countries. She is a Canadian and now lives in Italy. She takes care of the burned English patient. Hana has lost everything in her life, her husband, her father and her unborn child during the war. The English patient is the only man for her desires. She finds comfort in serving the English patient and also she feels regret for her absence during the time when her father needed her to nurse him. She draws towards the Villa San Girolamo which is having significance and it has its own history. Hana finds in Kip emotional support, compassion, and intimacy in Kip, which are sympathized in the emotional sense as well as in physical sense. Caravaggio works as a spy in The English Patient. He involves with a group of thieves. Caravaggio carries his history with him and through his body. His thumbs are cut by the Nazi officers in the war and now he is the man with bandaged hand.

Caravaggio enters the story because he has heard that Hana who is caring a wounded man in Small Villa. He believes that Hana should not live in this Villa and cannot cure anyman. Caravaggio is obsessed with the English patient. He looks at him as a kind of
text that should be read, interpreted, excavated, and revealed, or re-created under a new skin. Gregory O’Dea observes:

The English Patient himself is thus seen a palimpsest, like his copy of Herodotus, a dangerous and ambiguous kind of text, written over many times. (O’Dea, 16)

Caravaggio tells Hana about the English Patient. He is a Almasy, a Hungarian desert explorer who worked as spy for the Germans. Count Ladislau or Laszlo Almasy is a real person, a historical figure. The trauma of Hana is overlooked by historians because of her fight with death in a hospital. Her efforts are of greater significance in the war because she had not sacrificed like the other people. For example, Hana’s lost her child and killed before she knows her pregnancy is aborted. Hana sacrificed her child, father and lover:

I had continued conversations with the child. I worked very hard in the hospitals and retreated from everybody around me. Except the child, who I shared everything around me. In my head. I was talking to him while I bathed and nursed patients. I was a little crazy. (82)

Hana stopped speaking with her unborn child when many died. Male warriors are killed in battle as heroes and become tough by doing so, She is criticized when she closed the eyes of a dying soldier who is not dead.

Hana thinks that geography or space denotes to the restrictions of place that executes upon characters. At last she desires to go home where nobody is there and so she is bizarre of Europe. In her letter to Clara, she writes, she wants to go away from Europe. Kip is another important Character in the novel who migrated from India to Italian Villa. Ondaatje describes the arrival of Kip in England. He writes:

Singh had arrived in England knowing no one, distanced from his family in the Punjab. He was twenty one years old. He had met no one but soldiers.(199)

He also possesses different identities. Kip works as a sapper and it is his first hand experience with the English culture. He has a long sighted view of the English. The critic, John Bolland remarks with regard to this as follows:
His expertise, technological knowledge, sense of discipline and order, and courage in defusing bomb, gain him respect and establish in him a confident sense of identity in his adopted land. (Bolland, 27)

Gaur writes, “Kip is constantly moving from his country and discovering unexploded mines in different countries” (Gaur, 139). He moved from India to England and he is a sapper working in the World War II. He adjusted his life in two different countries and it is difficult for him to adopt western culture and to lose his own national identity.

Kip worships and adores the western culture, the madonnas and prophets, the white marble Italian statues and the cathedral frescoes. He is totally mixed with the English culture. He follows life styles of western. Kip’s nickname is finally introduced after becoming more famous in the villa. His name is Kirpal Singh and he changed his name to Kip which is like British. Kip is from Asian country and following everything like a dutiful son. He is totally immersed into the western culture. He doesn’t believe in the concept of nation.

Kip has transformed himself as early in the English culture. When he first time disposed a bomb in England. The officer exclaims:

What’s this? Kipper grease? And laughter surrounded him. He had no idea what a kipper was, but the young Sikh had been thereby translated into a salty English fish. Within a week his real name, Kirpal Singh, had been forgotten. He hadn’t mind this. Lord Suffolk and his demolition team took to calling him by his nickname, which he preferred to the English habit of calling people by their surname. (93-94)

His skill of dismantling bombs is a symbolic of the erasure of self and other. Kip is devastated and disillusioned when he hears about the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on his wireless radio. All his life he had been diffusing the bombs. Kip feels to be an outsider in the group because he is from India. His origin and race is quite different from other characters in the novel. He is the only Indian among the group. He came from India where mathematics and mechanics were natural traits. Kip speaks bitterly against the English while leveling a rifle at the English Patient. His disillusionment with the British comes out in angry words.
Kip informs Caravaggio when he came to know about Almasy from Caravaggio. He replies that he cannot care from which nations they belong. He considered himself as an international bastard. He does not care about American or French. The sudden transformation in Kip when he hears the news on the radio of the atomic bombing of Japan should not be viewed as an isolated incident, for there are many incidents throughout the story where Kip is reminded of his otherness and inability to perform the patterns of Englishness perfectly. Ondaatje writes:

> He lies back and stares into the dark corner of the tent. When he closes his eyes he sees fire, people leaping into rivers into reservoirs to avoid flame or heat that within seconds burns everything, whatever they hold, their own skin and hair, even the water they leap into. (304-305)

The bomb was carried to the eastern side in the plane and dropped on the eastern country. He did not eat anything on that day. Kip is a man who believes in transnationalism.

John Bolland comments about the identity of Kim in Kipling’s novel and Kip in Ondaatje’s novel. He writes:

> The problem of identity is central to Kipling’s novel, as it is to The English Patient. In particular, the theme of hybridity recurs in Ondaatje’s interview, his family biography, and in the figure of Kip who—in a process of reverse colonization—assimilates and mimics English Customs and values as Kim does Indian ones. (59)

In the end, Kip realizes that he has been subjected to other just like the Japanese. He became angry of the man whom he assigns the place of those who forced their culture upon him. He directs his rifle points towards the Englishman. He wants to kill him. It is said that the past cannot be changed; it must be revisited for its better understanding. The Villa San Girolamo is destroyed as the outside world breaks in. Kip and Hana returns to their home countries which shows a new kind of imprisonment.

Kip blames for dropping the bombs on European countries. He shows his anger and revenge to the English patient:

He doesn’t care American or French. He says that when they throws bomb on brown races then they are an Englishman. Kip criticizes the Eurocentrism that has spread worldwide. Kip is representation of Ondaatje himself. At the end, Kip returns to his home land. His return to his home land does not reduce the effect of Europe and the war that have made upon Kip’s identity. Kip experiences that he is a lower in this Eurocentric world and so he belongs to India.

The English Patient lays emphasis on otherness. It describes the historical account, as one critic points out that in Ondaatje’s novel central characters are Hungarians and Indians. If Kip remains in Italy before the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is better for him because he feels to be belonging to the country, he is the only in uniform. The uniform signifies which country and to community he belongs to. The bombs are plunged on other nation. It makes Kip distrustful and irritated.

Kip wanders throughout Europe by adopting European culture. He realizes that he was wandering in a minefield in Europe where he could not understand the white nation. Kip doesn’t belong to the white world.

All the characters are withdrawn from the world and they live in different places. They constructed their own community in the villa which is place for temporarily escape.

Caravaggio is also from Canada and now has migrated to Italian Villa. He sits in a silence and thinks about the war. Ondaatje writes:

> Caravaggio sits there in silence, thoughts lost among the floating motes. War has unbalance him and he can return to no other world as he is, wearing these false limbs that morphine promises. He is a man in middle age who has never become accustomed to famiies. Al his life he has avoided permanent intimacy. Till this war he has been a better lover than husband.(123)

He said that all the other four characters brought the disease of war. He understands about his participation in the war and also thinks that there is not useful to live among ruins.

Avinash Jodha writes in his book about the identity of Caravaggio as follows:

> His country of origin is Italy but now his home is in Canada and he is equally a stranger in Italy. However the war has dislocated them even further but this dislocation forces them to see the other side of location, of
feeling the safety of being located in specific spaces and restricted to certain identities. (Jodha,130)

These four characters are the part of this land where we can find disease, blood, hate, and prejudice. They have seen horrors of war and all are not innocent. They formed their community in Italian Villa and they depend on each other’s company. All are swallowing the dangerous experience of war.

Caravaggio does not want to get separated from the other characters. He thinks that if he stays in the Villa, it will remind him of a war. Hana, Kip, Caravaggio, and the English patient reside in a strange place and they adjust to the weather, food, and the overall way of life during a traumatic war experience. They are adjusting themselves in a transnational world. Caravaggio thinks that they can escape from this land and the haunting memory. Caravaggio works as a thief for his nation. He is more physically damaged by the war. Because of his injury, he cannot steal whatever he needs.

Each character in the novel represents from different country and lives elsewhere and blurs the boundaries of national identity. Now they are transnational. Ondaatje focuses on the relations between the marginal and the central figures to solve the problems of the identity. All the characters have to struggle with the inner conflicts and external conflicts such as migration, belonging and acceptance while facing chaos and difficulties. Identity is constituted within the historical, mythical and fictional discourses. Ondaatje becomes the voice of migrant people and tries to negotiate their identity through the complexities of the present and to secure a place for them in the cultural memory.