CHAPTER VI
THE REFLECTION OF TRANSNATIONALISM IN MICHAEL ONDAATJE’S NOVELS: ANIL’S GHOST, DIVISADERO AND THE CAT’S TABLE

6.1.1 INTRODUCTION
The fifth chapter focuses on transnationalism presented in the novels of Michael Ondaatje. Michael Ondaatje, a Sri-Lankan writer, has depicted transnationalism in *Anil’s Ghost, Divisadero* and *The Cat’s Table*.

People migrate from one country to another country for the number of reasons. They settle in the migrated country and start their business. It is necessary to know the history of these immigrants. These people constantly keep their connection with their home country. They think about their home country each and every time. In the novel, *Anil’s Ghost*, Anil returns to her own country as a forensic anthropologist after fifteen years. Ondaatje describes his own story in the novel *Anil’s Ghost*. Anil was in exile for fifteen years. Radojka Vukcevic writes in his article *Memory and Place in Michael Ondaatje’s Anil’s Ghost*, “Anil’s mind wanders to different places like Guatemala, Miami, Pompeii, Hiroshima, Laetoli and Vesuvius.” (ibid, 4).

Anil migrated to different places as a forensic anthropologist. Sinha writes:

“Human Migration which is a dynamic and cultural phenomenon and it is a result of overall design of a society within which economic, social and demographic and other behavior are enfolded.” (Sinha, 403)

All the characters face the problem of nostalgia in the host land. James Clifford explains:

“Diaspora is a history of dispersal, myths and memories of homeland, desire for eventual return, alienation in host land, ongoing support of homeland and a collective identity (Clifford, 305”).

Anil faces different types of problems in the host country. The transnational migration of Anil collapses the boundaries of nation.
6.1.2 TRANSNATIONALISM IN ANIL’S GHOST

6.1.3 Introduction:
Anil’s Ghost is the fourth novel of Michael Ondaatje which was published in 2000. The novel won many International awards like the Giller Prize in 2000, the 2001 Irish Times International Fiction Prize and Canada's Governor General’s Award etc. It is set during Sri Lankan civil war between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority. The novel depicts the investigation of the murder, political killing etc. Anil a forensic anthropologist arrives in Sri Lanka as an agent of Human Right Organization to quest the murderer of many innocent people. She is educated in America and England. She wanders all over the world as an agent of Human Rights Organization. Ondaatje juxtaposes the past experience with the present experience. Her journey return to her native place indicates to rebuild her own culture and nationality.

Anil and Sarath are in search to find out the Sailor. Sailor is the name given to the Sri Lankan man who was murdered many years ago. She uses her knowledge to discover the identity of the sailor. She struggles to get a place in her own country because of lack of language. She is unable to communicate in Sinhala with Lalitha who is the only relative of her living in Colombo. Her inability to speak in Sinhala language makes her to feel isolate in her own country. Anil always tries to connect her past life with the present life. She was living in Europe from last fifteen years. She thinks completely European and American in her manner, life style and in behaviour.

Anil is in tension in Sri Lanka because she is not getting that freedom she got in America and Europe. Sri Lanka is the place where many violent incidences happened. She thinks to do something which is better for the Sri Lankan people. She feels alienated in her own country. She thinks of the past history and connects it to the present means she is having a nostalgic feeling about her country. Anil and Sarath searches the skeleton of many people who were buried in the government protected area. They gave different name to the skeletons such as Sailor, Tinker etc. In their conversation, both belong to different nations. Anil belongs to West and Sarath belongs to East. Ondaatje depicts the east west encounter in this novel through these characters.

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, blurring of boundaries, transnational space, alienation, nostalgia, historiographic metafiction, transnational identity, narrating of the self are portrayed in this novel. These aspects are discussed in detail in this chapter.

6.1.4 The theme of Blurring of Boundaries.

Anil’s Ghost is a novel about Anil who is a global citizen. The writer tries to blur the boundaries of the nation by connecting various countries. Anil visited many countries in her lifetime from the beginning of the novel. As a forensic worker for a human rights organization she visits to many places from Guatemala to the Congo and returns to her homeland Sri Lanka. The protagonist, Anil Tissera came back to her homeland after fifteen years as an anthropologist. The novelist explores the notion of nationality and inspects the roles played by hybrid identity in the novel. Anil’s Ghost incorporates and transgresses boundaries in a way from a transnational perspective. Robert Gross thinks that there is need of transnational thinking. He says:

“In a world people cross border intellectually as they please and national identity is not seen single and unified and says that global culture becomes a transnational mixture. (Gross, 390)

The protagonist of the novel, Anil Tissera, a female forensic pathologist is born in Sri Lanka and educated in the West and she returns after fifteen years to her native country in quest of the murder mystery on behalf of the United Nations. Anil Tissera occupies a dislocated position in this world. Ondaatje reveals Anil's transnational nature and mixture of variety of cultures. He examines his own personal identity in terms of name, language and culture. Ondaatje’s characters suffer from cultural displacement, loss of language, loss of sense of identity, disempowerment and marginalization. Anil spent fifteen years in foreign countries. She read various documents and news reports and now she is living in foreign country and sees Sri Lanka from distance. Robert Kroetsch describes the problem of identity as follows:

Not so much that of knowing one's identity as it is that of how to relate that newly evolving identity to its inherited or 'given' names. And the first technique might be simply to hold those names in suspension, to let the identity speak itself out of a willed namelessness. (Krotech, 51)
Anil Tissera tries to discover the identity of 'Sailor', the skeleton of Sri Lankan man. She has travelled many places to identify the skeleton of sailor. She has to face many problems to identify her place in the country of her birth. She remembers incidents from her past that attach her to Sri Lanka and its people displaying aspects of her own history that disclose her place in the world. She felt complete in America and Europe for fifteen years. She had courted foreignness and she felt to be completely abroad. In Sri-Lanka, she thinks:

She had come to expect clearly marked roads to the source or most mysteries. Information could always be clarified and acted upon. But here, on this island, she realized she was moving with only one arm language among uncertain laws and a fear that was everywhere. There was less to hold on to with that one arm.(50-51)

She feels completely stranger in Colombo when she returns. She says:

“Those first days in Colombo it seemed she always found herself alone when the weather broke. The touch of rain on her shirt, the smell of dust in the wetness.”( 11)

Suddenly clouds gathered in the sky and rains heavily. People are enjoying the rain. She faces different type of problems when she returns to her own country where nobody recognizes her. Here she has completely blurred the boundaries of the country. She visited many countries in her life time and faced so many problems. The novel, *Anil’s Ghost* speaks about the range of transnational identities.

**6.1.5 The theme of Narrating the Self:**

The story of each character is narrated in this novel. Anil who is the protagonist of the novel is a representative of Ondaatje himself. Anil was in connection with her own country through her memory of the past. She was first in connection with her native country by acquiring her name from her brother:

She had been given two entirely inappropriate names and very early began to desire "Anil which was her brother's unused second name. She had tried to buy it from him when she was twelve years old, offering to support him in all family arguments. He would not commit himself to the trade though he knew she wanted the name more than anything else.(63)
Anil had two names but she chose her brother’s unused second name. Her past days are connected with the present days. It shows her transnational identity of the host and homeland. She is continuously shifting from one place to another becomes an excellent model for discovering the transnational identity. She left Sri Lanka and went to England for education, learnt forensic expertise in America, worked for Human Rights in Geneva and returned to Sri Lanka for investigation and again left for Europe. She tries to identify the remains of a man who is murdered by Sri Lankan government. It is a search of her identity and also the true identities of others. The story of Anil is similar to the writer who left his homeland when he was eleven years old and first visited to England and later on settled in Canada.

Anil with Sarath Diyasena finds out a recently buried skeleton in a government protected burial site of the sixth century. They give a name to the skeleton as a “sailor”. They try to discover Sailor’s identity and they started visiting different places to investigate more skeletons which are buried.

Sarath Diyasena a forensic expert is working with Anil in Sri Lanka. Sarath narrates an incident in his life to Anil as follows:

There was a monk. He and his brother were the best teachers in my life and it was because they taught me when I was an adult. We need parents when we are old too. I would meet him once or twice a year when he came to Colombo, and Narada was a great laugher. He would laugh at your foibles.(42)

Both brothers Narada and Palipana taught Sarath. They are very brilliant brothers. Sarath narrates the story to Anil. The narration of the self-story of the past can be seen through the viewpoint of transnationalism.

6.1.6 The theme of East versus West:

Ondaatje has focused east and west encounter in the novel. Anil is continuously on the move of search of the identity of the skeleton. Anil and Sarath have taken four buried skeletons from Bandarawela state to examine and find out the reason of their murdering. Anil tries to prove that the skeleton of a Sailor was a recent one. She establishes his identity and locates all those whom he represents:
“And who was this skeleton?...Who was he? This is representative of all those lost voices. To give him a name would name the rest." (52)

John Bolland points out about the quest of the Sailor. He says:

It is the quest to reconstitute “Sailor”—his appearance, manner and place of work, the location and form of his execution—that becomes the central metaphor of the novel, representing the possibility that the marginalized subject might yet outface the attempt by the powerful to elide his presence from the official account. (Bolland, 27)

Anil and Sarath identify the skeleton of Sailor of a nearby village. It is Ruwan Kumara a toddy tapper and a worker in the mines. Sarath leaves Anil after the identification of the skeleton in Ekineligoda in Walawwa. Sarath goes to Colombo in search of Ruwan Kumara’s name on a list of government records. Anil took the help of her father’s friend Dr. Perara and reached to Colombo. The relationship between Anil and Sarath is a symbolic one. It shows the encounter of the East and West. She behaves like a western and shows her connection to the west. She reads a postcard from her friend from America. The communication from west made her feel better. She shows her western lifestyle by drinking beer, living in luxurious hotels. Sarath represents the East. He is totally opposite to Anil. Anil continues her habit of west in Colombo. Ondaatje writes, “she kept that habit in the West, studying for two or three hours before going off to classes at medical school.” (65)

In conversation with Sarath, Anil represents herself more western than eastern. But when she is in America she shows Sri Lankan characteristics. She says:

We are full of anarchy. We take our clothes off because we should not take our clothes off. And we behave worse in other countries. In Sri Lanka one is surrounded by family order... rain and smoke. (138)

She was too much infatuated with the culture of the American country. She liked America and Europe. When she went to meet Sarath, the owner of the house asked her, “you live in Colombo? She answered, ‘ In North America, mostly. I used to live here. I have a son in Europe—he wishes to be an actor.’” (53)

Her conversation shows that she is most interested in western attitude that the Eastern attitude. She has a connection with western countries such as London, America and
Europe. When she was in England for her education she experiences loneliness only for few weeks.

6.1.7 The theme of Nostalgia:

Nostalgia is also one of the themes of transnationalism. Anil feels nostalgic of her own country when she returns to Sri Lanka. She remembers everything when she arrives in Sri Lanka. Anil migrates to another country but always thinks of her home country. She tries to connect her present history to the past history. The ancestral name of Anil also shows her desire for her own roots and heritage. In eastern countries, the name of ancestors is given to the boys or girls of next generation.

Victoria Cook observes in her article, Exploring Transnational Identities in Ondaatje Anil’s Ghost, “The incestuous act between Anil and her brother may therefore be seen in the light of the conception of a new transnational identity, one that is not prohibited from inter-relationship by any barrier or taboo.” (Cook, 5)

The breaking of cultural taboos shows the new way of transnational identity. The sense of homesickness is also seen in the naming. She fell in bad marriage when she was studying at Guy’s. Her husband talks about her desire for Sri Lanka:

He too was from Sri Lanka, and in retrospect she could see that she had begun loving him because of her loneliness. She could cook a curry with him. She could refer to a specific barber in Bambalapitiya, could whisper her desire for jaggery or jakfruit and be understood. That made a difference in the new, too brittle country. Perhaps she herself was too tense with uncertainty and shyness. She had expected to feel alien in England only for a few weeks. (137)

As a forensic anthropologist, she has visited several places and has come across various characters in her life. Anil leaves Sri Lanka for the purpose of education in Medicine in London. She visits other countries around the world as a forensic anthropologist. She marries a medical student of Sri Lanka in Great Britain. She forms a close friendship with Leaf Niedecker, in the United States. She establishes a close friendship with Sarath and Gamini.
She feels connected with Sri Lanka for her relationship with her Nanny, Lalitha. She is a solitary heroine who pays attention only to the work of investigation. The objective distance between Anil and Sri Lanka:

The island no longer held her by the past. She had spent the fifteen years since ignoring that early celebrity. Anil had read documents and news reports full of tragedy and she had now lived abroad long enough to interpret Sri Lanka with a long distanced gaze.(11)

It shows that she should not be identified with this country which is changed too much in fifteen years. She observes in Sri Lanka various murder cases. Many people were killed and buried and reburied at different places.

6.1.8 The theme of Transnational Belonging and Relationships:
Anil’s transnational movement is for a number of purposes. Her fifteen years absence from her homeland, she feels and her brain held the area codes of Denver and Portland, which are the symbols of foreignness. She also says that she is completely abroad.

Once she told to Sarath and Dr. Perara who tries to remind her that she is also one of the Sinhalese members. She answered, “She is invited here” and She admitted that she is an outsider who has “courted foreignness”, stopped speaking Sinhala and turned fully to inhibited place. Her conversation shows that she is completely involved in transnationalism.

She tries to show her own identity. When she was asked what she liked most in the West, she replied that she missed her privacy. Once, Anil feels danger for her when she makes a conversation with government officials. She says that she will not stay here much longer. She is neither a guest nor a host, but an outsider and westerner. She expresses her identity while appreciating Sarath’s and Gemini’s decision to stay in the island. And it is also not certain whether Anil really desires to be readjusted with the west. David Schneider argues in his book *American Kinship* that in American culture:

Any sexual act outside of the husband-wife relationship is morally as well as legally wrong and states that “the relations between blood relatives is an act of incest and prohibited (Schneider, 38)

So it relates to “Western” American culture and Anil’s transnational identity includes her involvement with the West. She has purchased the name from her brother by making an
incestuous act. This is but her transnationalism to violate taboos. Transnational differentiates insider and outsider, between us and them, national and international.

The incestuous relationship between brother and sister should be seen from the viewpoint of transnationalism. For this, it is necessary to study the relationship between nation and gender. Paul Gilroy argues about the gender differences in his book. He writes:

“Gender differences, are extremely important in nation-building and it can be a nation only if the correct version of gender hierarchy has been established” (Gilroy,127).

Anil keeps relationships with Borrego Springs. She is satisfied only on phone conversation with him. She says that women love distance and he said once to her. So, Anil has accepted both male and female personalities because she has adapted male name and by gender she is female.

The relationship between Anil and Cullis can be seen as a transnational relationship, and also shows the encounter of East and West. Ondaatje depicts Anil through a transnationalism that covers both Western order and Eastern disorder. She trapped Cullis both physically and emotional because of her western liking towards identification and eastern obsession. The love affair with the married man Cullis, sets her free from the confines of marriage. Cullis never controlled her identity. Her constant shifting changes her nature and her personality. She thinks that these are essential to control on her identity. Ondaatje writes about this as follows:

He remembers times when she tried to strip off his carefulness, tried to unbuckle his worried glance. Making him dance on one of the dark streets of Europe to a small cassette player she pressed against his ear. (263-64)

Cullis reveals the term "British reserve", the remains of a cultural code of conduct that was common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. She encourages self-conscious, self-restrained and introverted behaviour. Anil is bizarre and ardent and her Sri Lankan culture makes her to be active and impulsive. She describes her compatriots thus:

We are full of anarchy. We take our clothes off because we shouldn't take our clothes off. And we behave worse in other countries. In Sri Lanka one
is surrounded by family order, most people know every meeting you have during the day, there is nothing anonymous. (138)

She says that if she meets any Sri Lankan in the world, she has a free time for them in the afternoon. Anil's husband provides a symbol for the Eastern culture that she feels for endeavoring to avert her from becoming westernized. Anil leaves her relationships with him early. It is true of Anil who turned fully westernized after her escape from her husband. She refuses to speak in Sinhala and immerses herself completely in her work. She has not disclosed her background to Cullis. Cullis brings out identity crisis faced by Anil in her native place:

Do you speak French? he asked. ‘No. Just English. I can write some Sinhala.’ Is that your background? A no-name plaza appeared on the side of the highway, and she parked beneath the blinking lights of a Bowlerama. ‘I live here,’ she said. ‘In the West.’ (36)

Here she shows the influence of American education on her and she says, she lived in foreign land and mixed up with the western culture. She speaks English and can write some Sinhala, her native language.

Ondaatje empowered Anil from a transnational identity that incorporates both Western order and Eastern disorder and her Western tendency towards naming and appropriation, and her Eastern craving and precipitateness make her to plunder Cullis both materially and passionately. Cullis lack of liberty is hidden in his carefulness. Homi Bhabha in his book *The Location of Culture* talks about the concept of national culture. He states:

The very concept of homogenous national cultures the consensual or contiguous transmission of historical traditions.. are in a profound process of redefinition … there is overwhelming evidence of a more transnational and translational sense of the hybridity of imagined communities.

( Bhabha, 5)

Ondaatje constructs Anil's personal identity on transnational perspective. The individual identity is a subject of transnational identity. In the tussle to gain her chosen identity, She bargained with her brother to get this name by giving hundred rupees and sometime sexual favour he demanded. The novelist focuses on gender differences in patriarchal
society. Women are not treated equally with men. So she adopted a male name. To get a male name, she has sacrificed her life.

6.1.9 The theme of Alienation:
All the characters feel alienated in the foreign land. Anil and other characters alienated from their culture. Anil is now totally westernized and she abandoned eastern i.e. Sinhali language. Ondaatje portrays himself through Anil and he shows Anil as some other person also. The rejection of Sinhali language and acceptance of western language is a notion of transnationalism. Anil is educated in Europe and North America and it shows the cultural clash between east and west. In England she feels lonely at the beginning. She seemed timid in England. She felt to have been lost and emotional. She didn’t eat much for a week and saved enough money to phone Colombo. In United States, she totally immersed and became a westerner. She also drinks beer and eats tacos in United States.
She is a stranger in her own country. Everything is new to her when she arrived to Colombo from America. Ondaatje writes:

She had arrived in Colombo directly from working in sparse high-tech desert towns of the American Southwest. Although her last location, Borrego Springs, hadn’t seemed, at the start, enough of a real desert to satisfy her.( 144)

She is in quest of a Sailor and in that search operation they transgress the boundaries of the country and separate from their past life. This is a transnational understanding. Anil is unable to speak in Sinhala her own language with Lalitha and Ananda. It makes her isolated from her own people. It shows her lack of connection with her own country. Sonja Lehmann writes:

Even when she wants to belong to it again, she is unable to, which is especially painful with regard to Lalitha who is Anil’s last intimate connection in the country.(Lehman,315)

It is very difficult for Anil to cope with the Sri Lankan culture. Lalitha’s granddaughter’s reaction is totally different regarding this. She speaks with Lalitha in Tamil which is not understood by Anil. She understood that she was alone in that strange land. She completely became stranger in her own land. Ondaatje writes:
“On this island, she realized she was moving with only one arm of language among uncertain laws and a fear that was everywhere.” (50)

So the lack of language indicates the lack of connection with her own country. She thinks that social world of Sri Lanka and West is totally different. She feels alienated in her own country. Brenda Glover writes in her article 'Unanchored to The World: Displacement and Alienation in Anil’s Ghost and the prose of Michael Ondaatje:

“Anil moves through a country both familiar and alien to her, a homeland in crisis. (Glover, 76)

Anil is travelling in her own country which is familiar and alien to her. She tries to overcome this alienation by making friends and reading books.

6.1.10 Transnational Identity of Major and Minor Characters:

The transnational identity of Anil can be seen through many perspectives. After fifteen years Anil returns to her own country. She is a stranger in her own country. She faces the problem of identity and language in her home country.

Ondaatje used English as a useful mean of communication within a global context in Anil’s Ghost and it is a part of a diverse and transnational whole. Walder says that "the English that represents now or has represented over centuries of colonization, it belongs to everyone. It is a global language, the first of its kind". (Walder, 44)

The lack of language can be seen as a transnational perspective for insider and the outsider and also useful for the construction of personal and national. Language acts as a means of communication and of isolation for Anil.

Anil goes to see her aunt Lalitha, her ayah who is the only person who taught her real things as a child. This reunion with her aunt Lalitha brings Anil's struggle to reconnect with her childhood identity. She embraces Lalitha and in response to that Lalitha weeps and touches Anil's hair but there is language barrier between them:

Anil sat next to Lalitha and held her hand in silence, feeling an ache in herself. There was a large framed photograph on the table beside them, and Lalitha picked it up and passed it to Anil. Lalitha at fifty, and her ne'er-do-well husband, and her daughter, who held two babies in her arms. Her finger pointed to one of the babies and then into the darkness of the house. So the young woman was her granddaughter. (18)
Anil could understand only a few words when granddaughter talked in Tamil with Lalita. The problem of communication can be seen as transnationalism. Anil faced the problem of language in her home country because of her fifteen years gap. Ludmila Isurin writes about the immigrants:

Most of the immigrants underwent a traumatic process of severing ties with their native land and getting used to a new environment where people not only spoke a different language but often shared different values and traditions. (Isurin, 49)

The communication between Anil and Lalitha shows Anil's transnational identity. This place represents an early and fundamental part of her cultural identity, but she is away from this because of her lack of language. She tries to speak in Tamil to a stranger but fails because of her lack of intonation to make her understood. This shows cultural conflict between the communication of Anil, Lalitha and the granddaughter. Tamil is one of languages spoken in Sri Lanka and other languages are English and Sinhala. The conversation between them shows that Lalitha is embarrassed to speak in Tamil.

Anil speaks mainly in Sinhala to Lalitha, finally ending the language altogether shortly after moving to England:

Her last conversation in Sinhala was the distressed chat she'd had with Lalitha that ended with her crying about missing egg ruling and curd with jiggery. She no longer spoke Sinhala to anyone. She turned fully to the place she found herself in, focusing on anatomical pathology and other branches of forensics, practically memorizing Spitz and Fisher. She was now alongside the language of science. (141)

The language problem of Anil in Sri Lanka questions her sense of belonging to Sri Lanka. Anil is recognized by many countries like Sri Lanka, England and United States. Anil travels to different countries. Because of her displacement and migration, her character encourages dominant models not only of identity but also of cultural knowledge production. In a foreign land, she had expected clearly marked roads as the source of most mysteries. She loves foreignness during her education in Europe and North America. She feels uncertainty in her own country:
In her years abroad, during her European and North American education Anil had courted foreignness, was at ease whether on the Bakerloo line or the highways around Santa Fe. She felt complete abroad. (Even now her brain held the area codes of Denver and Portland). And she had come to expect clearly marked roads to the source of most mysteries…. But here, on this island, she realized she was moving with only one arm of language among uncertain laws and a fear that was everywhere. (50)

This leads to her identity crisis of her roots because she is rootless in west and east. Anil, Sarath and Ananda are separated from the rest of the country in order to search for the identity of sailor. Ananda and Anil continue to work of searching for something more about Sailor. Anil and Ananda cannot share their information to each other because of language barrier between them. They both belong to same ethnicity, culture, language and religion. Anil has lived for many years in foreign land so she has lost Sri-Lankan language, so she cannot communicate with Ananda in Sinhali. It shows the identity problem in her native country.

Finally Anil and Sarath have identified the skeleton of the sailor which is from the Plumbago Village. The real name of the Sailor is Ruwan Kumar, toddy topper. Anil has prepared the report and mentioned that it is a political murder. Finally Anil identifies the sailor not as a foreigner but as a Sri Lankan.

Anil meets many characters in her search of sailor. She also meets Gamini who is the brother of Sarath. Gamini works as a doctor in Colombo’s central hospital and attends the victims of bombing and other atrocities.

Michael Ondaatje through this novel reveals the individual and national identity. Anil returns to her homeland after fifteen years which develops transnational perspective. Ondaatje depicts the identities of characters that cross national boundaries. They feel for displacement, alienation, migration and finally transnational identity.

6.2 TRANSNATIONALISM IN DIVISADERO

6.2.1 INTRODUCTION:

Michael Ondaatje’s fifth novel ‘Divisadero’ focuses on the theme of transnationalism. The novel was published in the year 2007. Ondaatje was awarded Governer General’s
Literary award for this novel. The novel focuses on various themes like migration, diaspora, intertextuality, multiculturalism, parody, transnationalism and memory.

In an interview, the novelist, Michael Ondaatje with Waddell points out, “Divisadero is about many things, but especially about identity and the mysteries of who exactly we are.” (http://quarterly conversation.com)

The novel is about the lives of Anna, Claire and Coop in California and their separation from each other and their displacement to different places. Anna’s father attempts to kill Coop, Anna’s boyfriend. Anna travels to France for the investigation of the life of the fictional writer Lucien Segura etc. represent various themes like transnationalism, displacement etc.

Negi writes in her article that Ondaatje wishes to remove the barriers between nations. He tries to make a world a global village. In this regard he comments:

Ondaatje who wish to erase all boundaries between nations by erasing the identities of nation, ethnicity or any concept of division to make the world a global village. (ibid.88)

Coop migrated to Tahoe area where he faces the problem of identity and Anna migrated to France. Anna started reading of manuscripts and journal written on the life of Lucien Segura. In France, she came in contact with a man of guitar. She feels alienated in France. Ondaatje writes:

If Anna came any closer to the man with the guitar, she would be encroaching on his territory. If she remained more than four paces away, it would signal a fear, though there was none. He seemed a contained man, and he had one arm over his guitar as if it were a favourite hound.(68)

All the time, Anna thinks about her native place. Anna hides her past story from everyone in France. She could not tell the past incidents to anyone but she always remembers it. She says:

There are times when she needs to hide in a stranger’s landscape, so that she can look back at the tumult of her youth, to the still undiminished violence of her bloodied naked self between her father and Coop, the moment of violence that deformed her, all of them. Anna, who keeps herself at a distance from those who show anger or violence, just as she is
still fearful of true intimacy. Her past is hidden from everyone. She has never turned to a lover or friends when they speak about families and spoken of her childhood.(75)

All the characters face the problem of identity, alienation and nostalgia in alien land. Anna always feels isolated in foreign land. Anna travelled all her life. She came to France at the age of thirty four. Then she had flown into Orly where she met her friend Branka. Banita Georgia writes:

Divisadero is filled with the echoes across time and place, and gives an impression to transnational literature related to the cinemating art of editing. (Georgia, 208).

The novel is about the transnational identity of the various characters who cross the border of their nation and establishes their contact with their home country from the host country.

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.

6.2.2 The theme of Migration

The novel was set during the time of Californian Gold rush. Many people migrated to California at the time of Gold rush. The Spanish immigrants arrived to the California at the time of gold rush and they lived in hotels. Ondaatje describes:

More than a century before us, in August 1849, a group of men set up camp in a valley more than a hundred miles north of Petaluma. They built cabins at a place they called Badger Hill and begin to search for gold.(12)

They arrived there in search of gold and sometimes lived in the mountains and they hunt with shot guns and pistols grouse rabbits, cattle and bear to survive. The story is narrated at the time of Californian gold rush. The people migrated from all over the world in search of gold and for better living at Petaluma. Coop shows his interest in search of gold and girls knows the dangerous encounter in that activity but they maintain his secret. When both Anna and Clair grew up as sisters, Claire is disappeared on the horse and
Anna in her book. Anna was fourteen years old and Coop was eighteen years old. She says:

Everything is biographical. Lucien Freud says. What we make, why is it made how we draw a dog, who is it we are drawn to why we cannot forget. Everything is collage, even genetics. There is the hidden presence of others in us, even those we know briefly. We contain them for the rest of our lives, at every border we cross. (16)

Anna is the legitimate daughter of her father and Claire and Coop are later adopted and taken to the part of the family. Both Anna and Claire grew like sisters and after some years, they try to keep distance between themselves. After an incident all the three characters disappeared from the place and lost their connection. Brain Short remarks:

Coop flees to the Tahoe area, where he transforms himself into a successful poker player and card sharp. Anna runs away to France, where she settles in the house of Lucien Segura, a minor poet from the early 20th century. And Claire lands in San Francisco, working for the public defender’s office; she lives on Divisadero Street, formerly the border between the old city and the fields of the Presidio. All the three find ways to avoid or bury their traumas: Coop in chance and risk, Claire in compassion, Anna in research and writing. New makeshift families replace abandoned ones, and it is this search for lost connection and wholeness that motivates each character in Divisadero, that pushes them towards the lives of isolation or service or danger.

(http://fiction writer’s review.com)

This shows that all the characters cross the border of the country and start living at different places for number of reason. This transnational living of the characters brings several problems like alienation, isolation, nostalgia etc. Carmen Concilio in his article Michael Ondaatje ‘s Divisadero and Photography writes,

Many immigrants don’t write about their arrival in the new world, but rather of their departure from the world. It is as if they reached their future, the host country, through looking back to their past, the lost paradise of their homelands and of their childhood. (Concilio, 26)
Coop starts new life in Tahoe area as a gambler. His group in Tahoe is like a conditional society:

There was Dorn, Mancini, and ‘The Dauphin’, so named because he had been seen reading a European novel. They would enter gambling halls like royalty from Wyoming- save for Dorn, in sandals and beads, flash frozen in the sixties. (43)

In Tahoe, Coop faced identity problem and in Santa Maria, he lived with different community people. Coop lived alone, mostly anonymous within the community of the town. Ondaatje describes:

A generation back, Santa Barbara country was populated mostly by migrant labourers, Mexican, Colombian, Vietnamese, Italian-America, who worked on the ranches and vegetables farms that spread over the landscape beyond the highway. (111)

Tahoe is the place where he migrated and settled there. He faced varieties of problems. This transnational migration of the people brings various problems like language, alienation, marginalization etc.

6.2.3 The theme of Transnational Relationship:

All the characters develop their relationship with other people in the transnational world. Coop developed his relationship with a woman, a singer and drug addict Bridget in Tahoe. His relationship with Bridget can be seen as a transnational because they share their experience of their own country with each other. Coop falls in love with a singer and drug addict Bridget which leads to his downfall.

Bridget helps Coop forget Anna and his traumatic past. Bridget who is a broken woman belongs to an unscrupulous gang of gamblers. She is described as a blond; “a tall ripple of energy linked to gold” (112) and ensnares him to a fatal end. Bridget leaves him for some time. This time he found that he was crazy after her. She suddenly disappears from the place. And after some time she sends a post card saying she lives in Tahoe. At that time, he starts searching her. One day she told him about her dept. At the end, Bridget stabs syringe on his neck and the group of gamblers beats him badly.

Coop has deep love for Anna and sometimes he unconsciously calls Claire as Anna. He also has developed his relationship with the woman, a jazz vocalist, drug addict and a
dangerous kind of mermaid second time. Both the relationship end abruptly. He remembers his past days with Anna on the farm and the beating incident on the deck by her father. He lies on his side by the fireplace; at that time she was in Santa Maria, she says:

This is for you. There are five flags. The yellow one is earth, the green one is water, the red is fire- the one we must escape.’ He reminds nothing after that. (132)

David Jonathan Amid writes in his article on *Divisadero*, “it is a relationship between the text and lives and also between structure and themes.”(Amid, 91) and also he points out, “all the characters are emotionally wounded and enigmatic, their intimacy – often enabled through self-expression or storytelling – is especially important and revealing.”(Amid, 94).

Coop loses his past, his love, so he calls Claire as Anna and says Claire “Thank you Anna.” So, now Claire decides to take Coop towards Petaluma in the old farmhouse where her father lives. Coop is still in his amnesia when they reached the farmhouse. His identity is crushed into pieces. He has lost his own identity and now developed new identity. The name of person is taken for granted as a part of one’s identity. People are recognized by the names. All these characters develop their relationship with each other even though they are from different places. Anna constructs her identity out of her broken life. She loves her sister and she feels that her sister is always with her.

**6.2.4 The theme of Nostalgia:**

All the characters in the novel feel a sense of homesickness about their country of origin when they migrated to other country. The feeling and contact of these characters with their home country from the host country can be seen as a transnational identity. Anna travels to France far from her American roots. She crosses the boundary of her own country. Her journey is just like a journey. She describes her journey as follows:

She came to France, in the thirty fourth year of my life, to research the life and the work of Lucien Segura” and tells that “her real world is not France and she says she will not stay permanently here. In France, she got estranged from her family, ran away, studied French at university and eventually became a professor of French Literature.( 88).
Anna tries to be like a French girl after her flight from her own country. She has not done any conversation in English with the man who gives her a lift by his car, She says that he was talking with her in English and she remained in silent and thought speaking of mother’s Spanish or French.

At each and every moment, she thinks her culture and language. It shows her love for her own country and language. It is an attempt to avoid unwanted conversation. The French culture has influenced deeply her later life. She continuously gives references of French literature and it shows that her life is reflected through these books. She tells that people live in the remembrance of their past life. Past life is a guiding principle for them. Ondaatje uses the flashback techniques in his novels. In this novel all the characters attempt to retrieve identity through memory.

Anna remembers how her father and the two siblings confess and all this appears to be too strange to her. She remembers her childhood:

For we live with those retrievals from childhood that coalesce and echo throughout our lives, the way shattered pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope reappear in new forms and are songlike in their refrains and rhymes, making up a single monologue. We live permanently in the recurrence of our own stories, whatever story we tell….. We were alone in the world, in nameless and unseen country.(136)

They face the problem of identity in the unknown country and also feel alienation in the strange country. Ondaatje repeatedly emphasizes the significance of memory which constantly affects the present as well as shaping the future in the novel. She imagines that her father should come to her door step in old shirt and taciturn manners and express with few words. When she read a monograph in which there is description of haunting thing about missing father it makes her to think of her father. She thinks:

And so I hoped that someone would come, a man, why not my father, at night fall. He would stand in front of the door, or on the path leading from the forest, with his old white shirt, the everyday one, in shreds, dirtied by mud and his blood. He would not speak in order to preserve what he can be but he would not know what I do not. (273)

David Jonathan Amid points out:
“Her journey is not a destination it is only a journey, the humour and the philosophical excursion with the people she met in her journey.”

(Amid, 19)

Anna’s travel to France is just a journey where she has enjoyed everything and kept her contact with her own country. This type of new transnational connections is developed in this novel through the character Anna.

Coop always thinks of his bygone days. These days were happy days for him. He thinks that Claire is present everywhere. He says:

In her memory later, in her unforgetfulness of that day, she sensed she had been present everywhere. With Claire by the stove in the farmhouse, saying, ‘Oh, I got caught in the rain. And Claire coming forward to help her. to (again) undress. (27)

Michael Ondaatje deliberately focuses on the bygone days of each and every character. The past days are but the guidelines for future.

6.2.5 The theme of Intertextuality:

Ondaatje has used many intertextual references in this novel. The writer used many quotations and allusions from another text in this novel. He gives the reference of the book ‘Interviews with Californios: Women from Early Times to the Present’. Here he writes the history of the women Lydia Mendis.

Intertextuality means reference of the past and present. The writer has used technique of photography which refers present and past identity. Anna tells about her past, We grew up in the Central Plain, north east of Los Angeles, where my father worked the asphaltum pits. (Mendis, 10)

This is remembrance about her childhood days of Central Plain. The writer has given many references of the books and also the music of Reinhardt and Grappelli by Pagnol and Claudile’s tales by Segura. Lucien Segura reads Three Musketeers by Alexander Dumas and Anna also reads stories of Three Musketeers by Dumas. The book of Cook how to become gamblers is the best example of intertext. A truck driver who gave lift to Anna quotes a line from David Copperfield by Charles Dickens which is about the many openings and possibilities for a man’s livelihood and quotes:
“Whether I turn out to be the hero of my own life or whether that station will be occupied by anybody else, these pages must show” (147).

He also used the reference of Steinbeck, Shakespeare’s King Lear, D.H. Lawrence and Cormac Mac Cathy serve in this novel. Marquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude shows the village life and family relationship. Ondaatje also referred Tolstoy’s Anna Karenina and Nabokov’s Lolita Mark Twain’s Hucklebury Finn as a intertext reference.

6.2.6 The theme of Alienation:

All the characters in the novel face the problem of alienation after their separation. Anna immigrated to San Francisco to study the life of Lucien Segura. She feels to be lonely in the western country. Claire was living alone in the Petaluma farm and she feels alienated from the society. The alienation makes them to think about the society and do something for their country. Webster’s dictionary defines, “alienation is a separation of a person or person’s affection from the attachment of the society.”(www.merriam-webster.com).

The novel was set in the isolated Petaluma farm. All the characters are related to this farm and they are living lonely life at different places. Anna was living in France and totally immersed in the study of Lucien Segura. Claire is living an isolated life in San Francisco. Lucien Segura, a twentieth century French poet lived a very disparate life. He was twice orphaned and never met his biological daughter. Claire and Coop also lived such type of life at Petaluma Farm in California.

Anna at the age of 16 moves to San Francisco and hides her identity. So here she tries to erase her identity and live an isolated life at Divisadero street in San Francisco. She searches past life of Segura and says, “if you do not plunder the past, the absence feeds on you” (141). Anna has not made any company or not shown any affection for the company. It means, she lived alienated life throughout her life. She thinks that her father will come at any time and express his words. Her memory always goes back to Petaluma farm and remembers everything about the childhood days. Once she read about a missing father and it makes her to think of her own father. In this regard, Ondaatje writes:

And so I hoped that someone would come, a man, why not my father, at night fall. He would stand in front of the door, or on the path leading from the forest, with his old white shirt, the everyday one, in shreds, dirtied by
mud and his blood. He would not speak in order to preserve what he can be but he would not know what I do not. (273)

She always thinks of her father, Claire and Coop in her isolated life. She always asks questions to herself whether Claire and Coop will become heroes of their life?. To recall the memories of the bygone days is one of the characteristics of transnationalism. It shows that their memory is connected with the two countries: host country and home country.

Coop, Claire and Segura also have lived life of isolation. Memory plays important role to satisfy them with the past incidents and events. They always think about their past life. Coop always feels alienated and isolated from the life. He was an orphan boy living in a Petaluma farm. Ondaatje describes his solitude as follows:

He was nineteen now, in a desired solitude. He was building the cabin, workings alone. He bathed in the cold water of a hill pond. In the evenings he slipped past the farmhouse and ended up in Nicasio or Glen Ellen, listening to music. (21)

Coop spends his lonely and isolated life listening to music. He thinks himself most gregarious in this solitude. His constant work made him hungry all the time. Most of the evenings, he is away from the Petaluma farm. He always laughs at himself, barely speaks and kept distance from Anna and Claire. He thinks about his act with Claire was a sin or natural act. He was always living in silent and thinks that not to live other life than the silence.

Lucien Segura lives a life in isolation. He decides to leave this solitary life. So he starts searching new region. He left his family and wife. Ondaatje writes:

Lucien Segura in old age, was traversing the region of the Gers in a horse drawn cart, in search of a new home. Now and then he gave travellers a ride in order to escape the strictness of this new solitude. (172)

All the characters lived their life in isolation. Isolation made them to think about their bygone days. Lucien Segura left his family and friends and chose to live in solitary place.

6.2.7 Transnational Identity of Major and Minor Characters:
The novelist portrays the transnational identity of all major and minor characters. Anna, Claire, Coop and Lucien Segura are the characters depicted by the novelist. Lucien
Segura is son of Odlic, an unmarried French woman. Odlic marries a clock maker when Segura was four years old and dies a few years later. His mother married a clock maker. He develops love affair with his childhood friend Marie-Neige, who is of Segura’s age. Segura’s marriages are not successful.

Segura travels the region of Gers in horse drawn cart, in search of a new home north of Marseille with the old thief, his young wife and their son Rafael. There is no fixed or identifying names of thief and his wife. Segura’s dislocation from his own country to Gers region can be seen through transnational perspective. Ondaatje writes:

She is Romani, they have so many names. The secret name, which is never used but is her truest name, which only her mother knows, that is hidden to confuse supernatural spirits—it keeps the true identity of the child from them. And the second name, which is a Roma name, is usually used only by them. And that one is Aria. (175)

Wife of Segura is from different country. The thief is given a name as Liebard and he changes to Astolphe and Rafael’s mother chooses Aria. Segura reads Dumas to her before this incident. He reads loudly to her from the novel:

They had both grown up far from the intrigue of cities, and now they fell upon Dumas as a guide into those cities that were always in peril and where the sight of an emerald on a neck could betray a family dynasty. (201)

His love affair comes to an end when she marries to Roman. After her marries, he takes separate identity. He travels to many places after his separation from his wife and daughter. After World War II, his family shifts to France. When he returns from the war Marie-Neige dies. He makes Roman and Marie-Neige immortal through his writing. He writes about her in his stories:

She entered the story sometimes as a lover and sometimes as a sister. And in this way he spent most of his days with Marie-Neige as an ally in the court, or as a village girl who saves the hero without his being aware of it. (202)

Segura changes his identity and adopts a pseudonym ‘La Garonee’ and publishes many adventure romances in the Dumas. He also faces the problem of identity in other country.
Ondaatje’s characters are separated geographically and emotionally from different locations.

Anna came to France to do research on the life of French poet and writer Lucien Segura. She writes the history of Lucien Segura. She reads manuscripts and journals of Lucien Segura. She starts her new life in France. Segura has written popular fiction inspired by the style of Dumas and is involved with an older married woman called Marie Neige. She meets the son of Roma musical family, Rafael in France. She conceals her past from everyone in France. There is question of her identity in France. Rafael sometimes thinks about her and asks questions himself who is that led who led him in the medicine cabinet room.

Anna faces identity problem in the transnational country France. She translates the books of Lucien Segura who is known as a poet and his identity of author of Jeremiad about the Great War is crushed and he is forgotten by the country men. Anna writes:

> For much of his life the man was unknown, says that he was the poet and later the author of jeremiad about the Great War. And in the years since his death, knowledge of him has sunk into the fabric and soil of this region, so he is almost forgotten by his countrymen. (85)

Anna changed her identity in France. She is living with different cultural identity in France. She is now a research scholar and giving seminars at Berkeley. The relationship is not permanent with her lovers. Rafael’s identity is also in question. He is identified as a donkey in the village Demu. She is totally stranger in France. She crushed her personal identity and entered into unknown world. Carmen Concilio in his article rightly observes:

> They write about what they have lost, or what they have left behind, their homelands/ mother-lands, they write elegies of homecoming with the voice of orphans not only of an almost--mother, but of history itself.

(Concilio, 26)

Anna has crushed her personal dentity in her new life and says that her name is only a mask. She expresses a view that her crisis of identity is due to migration. Anna lives in foreign land by adopting different name. She wears the mask of the author. She involves herself in the foreign culture and looks everything from the distance. She talks about her identity as follows:
What was the fictional street’s name? In a longer remember. I come from ‘Divisadero’ Street. Divisadero, from the Spanish word for ‘division’, the street that at one time was the dividing line between San Francisco and the fields of the Presidio. Or it might derive from the word ‘divisar’, meaning ‘to gaze at something from a distance.’ (There is a ‘height’ nearby called El Divisadero.) Thus a point from which you can look far into the distance.(142-143)

Anna sees her life with Lucien Segura. She says:

There was a sweet shadow and hesitance in Segura. It was like a ruined love, and it was familiar to me. Till then all I knew of his life was his odd departure from his family; that late in life, comfortable, successful, he had climbed into a horse-drawn cart, and disappeared.(143)

Anna’s story and Segura’s world make a novel. The memories make them to recall the past and they are aware who they are. In this novel all the characters go to their different paths and they keep their connection with the country and with the individuals through their memory. The transnational movement of the character does not lead to breakdown of affinity but forms new bonds among them.

Apart from these characters the other character who faces the problem of identity crisis is Claire. Claire finds different way from her previous self after a violence on deck. As a horse woman, she lost her limp and feels that, “someday she will meet and marry a centaur.” (8) She lives two different lives.

Claire lives two lives by travelling continuously between Petaluma and San Francisco. In her mind she always crosses the boundary of her own country. She does not seem to settle at two places of her life. She works at the public Defender’s office in San Francisco. Her connection with the two worlds shows her transnational identity. At the weekend she spends time with her loving father, though “there was no closeness between him and Claire.” (104)

Ondaatje writes about her relationship with Coop, “In Tahoe, she meets Coop and embraced him. It is not expecting this and the emotion of seeing Coop invaded her. “She was a girl he had taught to fish, ride a horse, and drive a car.” (108) Coop did not recognize Claire at that time when he was hardly beaten.
Ondaatje depicted Claire as a one of the good cultured girls. She has lived in her imagination throughout her life. She is not a true daughter but she served her step father as a daughter. Sofie De Smyter writes in his article:

Claire is compared once to Madonna and also no references can be seen about Claire’s sexuality and all the references are ambiguous one and she has to play the role as a lawyers assistant to talk with the people.

(http://journals.lib.unb.ca)

All the characters in the novel ‘Divisadero’ are busy in some form of migration. All the important characters Anna, Coop and Claire are busy in migrating to other places, crossing borders, encountering different cultures, adopting different names and identities in order to forget their past. They feel nostalgic due to displacement and adjust with the new worlds, accepting their cultures, forming transnational identities. Coop was a hired hand who was living with Anna and Claire on Petaluma Farm. He faces the problem of language. His language was uncertain. Claire says:

“He was adept in the physical world where he protected us. But in the world of language he was our student”. (9)

Ondaatje describes about the migration of people crossing cultures and shows their deep insight into transnational spaces. Ondaatje’s character crosses the borders and makes new bonds. The past experiences remained in the memory and continue to affect the present and shape the future. Identity is the connection between the original and the new cultures. The sense of displacement, alienation, loss becomes the basis for assuming the new self in the future. Identity negotiates with the past and the present to emerge stronger and more at peace, at home at several places and cultures, thus truly transnational.

Coop escapes from Anna’s father and invents a new history as a professional gambler. He forms a circle of friends with other Casanovas. A cowboy of the Petaluma farm, a farm hand enters the city of Tahoe in Las Vegas and manipulates the situation. Coop gets a book about card games and casinos and becomes an expert gambler. At twenty three, Coop migrates to Nevada and starts a new life as a professional gambler. He is a careful watcher and observer at Petaluma farm and develops his skill as a gambler. He joins Dorn, Mancini and the Dauphin who form a close relationship but it does not last long. He writes:
The Dauphin is the nickname because the person was reading a European novel and a few months later Dauphin dies. They all would enter the gambling hall like “royalty from Wyoming.” (43).

His gambling group views him as a compulsive risk taker because he was the youngest of the lot. Coop meets an old master ‘The Gentile’ and learned the art for three weeks. He wanted to confront the Dorn, a notorious group and bets the brethren gaining a huge amount. After much training and experience, Coop is able to win the notorious Casinovan group led by the brethren, the powerful Pounce Autry. As a contented man he thinks of quitting the game once and forever.

When Coop is beaten Claire comes to his rescue. Claire expected Coop’s recognition of renewed relationship but his utterance of her sister’s name is slightly disappointing. She could understand that his love for her sister is deeply embedded in his subconscious mind. She is not annoyed or does not have any hard feelings but still feels sad at his state of affairs. Coop wanted to sever his connections with gambling and perhaps wished to join his childhood companion Claire but unfortunately fall a prey to unhappy circumstance.

Due to his unconscious state the memory of his entire childhood is erased. Claire finds Coop and takes him back to her sad and melancholic father living in Petaluma farm house by crossing the golden gate bridge that separates San Francisco and Petaluma. The most prominent farmland of his childhood, where he had been over eighteen years has become strange to him due to amnesia. He drowns into a river of oblivion. Claire is uncertain whether this reunion would be terrible or generous but so much had been lost in their lives and she did not mind taking the risk and felt it worth to take the risk.

6.3 TRANSNATIONALISM IN THE CAT’S TABLE

6.3.1 Introduction:

Michael Ondaatje’s has depicted transnational identity in his latest work The Cat’s Table (2011). The transnational movement leads to a sense of freedom and greater opportunities for fulfilment. Michael Ondaatje’s sixth novel The Cat’s Table is an autobiographical in nature. Ondaatje is an immigrant settler in Canada. In the novel, he puts together an adventurous story of sea voyage. David Fitzgerald writes,
Transnational migrants do not claim citizenship in which country they are living and claim citizenship where they are not living. (qtd. Vertovec, 88).

It means that they show their multiple identities by living in various countries. All the characters in this novel lived in two countries and show their relationship with each country. Michael Ondaatje is a Sri Lankan born and living in Canada. He is living in two countries and having transnational identity. The novel is about the journey of Michael from Colombo to England to meet his mother at the age of eleven. There are many people voyaging from Colombo to England on a ship Oronsay. The ship Oronsay carries people from different cultural backgrounds and from different countries.

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, memory, nostalgia, historiographic metafiction, transnational identity, narrating of the self are portrayed in this novel. These aspects are discussed in detail.

5.3.1 The theme of Migration:

The United States mentioned that more than 200 million people are international migrants. In the 20th century, international migration or cross border is increased tremendously. The transnational activities of the people are rapidly growing. These transnational communities keep their relationship with the host and home country. They maintain their social, political and cultural link with their home and host society. Michael migrates to England in search of her mother who lives in England. He arrives at Colombo harbour and boards a passenger ship, ‘Oronsay’ which is going to England. Michael is like Ondaatje thrown into the hybrid community where there are variety of characters. Michael’s experience of sea voyage is similar to Ondaatje. James Collier in his review writes regarding this as follows:

As the narrative moves between the decks and holds of the ship and the boy’s adult years, it tells a spellbinding story about the difference between the magical openness of childhood and the burdens of earned understanding--about a lifelong journey that began unexpectedly with a spectacular sea voyage, when all on board were ‘free of the realities of the earth.
The journey of Michael from Ceylon to England symbolizes the transformation of Sri Lanka from colonial to postcolonial. On the ship Oronsay, people from different countries, culture backgrounds interact with each other and learn from each other. The voyage is for unknown place where migrants settle due to their changed culture, custom, language etc. The experience of the migrants will be different from person to person. It is not also possible that all the migrants will adjust with the new world. Ondaatje talks about the people who accept the new lands. In an interview with Steven Roberts, Ondaatje Says:

Well, I was talking to my children a few years ago, and they're all adults now, and I mentioned that, you know I had put on this ship without any family control or discipline for 21 days, and they were outraged. This was appalling, we wouldn't put our kids on a bus for half a day, let alone 21 days on a ship. And I realized it actually was a very strange thing that had happened to me, and I also realize it was a gift. It was a gift of an idea for a story, and I don't really remember very much of that journey sadly, and I remember playing ping pong and, you know, swimming and so forth, but I don't remember much of it.

(Michael Ondaatje’s The Cat’s Table: An Interview).

The novel begins with the journey of Michael, who is just 11 years old from Ceylon to England. Ondaatje says that he is travelling to England by ship and he is travelling alone. The author describes Michael’s transnational migration from his known world to the unknown world where everything is different. Many of the ship’s passengers are economic transnationals like Mr. Nevil, who is going back to England after his services in the east, Mr. Fonseka is going to England in search of teaching position and the narrator, his two friends and his cousin Emily to continue their education in England.

Sunil Bhatia says that immigration means permanent dislocation from their homeland and living in a new world. He defines:

Immigration includes images of permanent displacement and a complete break from the homeland and a difficult transition to a new language and life in a new world. (Bhatia, 221)
Transnational migrants are active members in social and cultural life of host society and also build their relations with the country they emigrate. Michael, Cassius, Ramadhin, Miss Lasqueti, Mr. Mazaappa, Mr. Nevil, Larry Daniels, Mr. Guneseeka, Mr. Fonseka, Emily, Asuntha, Sunil, the Hyderabad mind and other passengers are travelling to England and they are from different cultural backgrounds and crossing the border of the country which form transnational world. Ondaatje reveals his worries through the character of Michael about his mother. Michael explained it as follows:

After I had crossed the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea and the Red Sea, and gone through the Suez Canal into the Mediterranean, I would arrive one morning on a small pier in England and my mother would meet me there. It was not the magic or the scale of the journey that was of concern to me, but that detail of how my mother could know when exactly I would arrive in that other country. And if she would be there. (9)

It tells that Michael is crossing the border and now going to settle in another country i.e. England where there is only a person who knows him and that is his mother. All these characters come from different cultural backgrounds and settles in another country. They try to form their transnational identity. These characters keep their relations with their home country in many respects.

Hector de Silva suffers from dangerous illness and now he is on a way to Europe in search of doctor who will save him. Not any single doctor will come to cure him so he decides to migrate to Europe. His journey should be considered as a transnational journey. He is famous on the ship because of wealth but people are not interested in his wealth. At last he changed his plan and boarded the ship Oronsay which is going to England. He is accompanied with two established doctors, his wife and his daughter.

6.3.2 The Reflection of East-West encounter in the novel:

East and West encounter is reflected in this novel. All the characters are travelling from eastern countries to the western countries. They cross their territory and represent their transnational identity. Michael’s voyage from Sri Lanka to England is for twenty one days. This journey provides an opportunity to quest the transnational identity. This voyage for Michael is a transition to a new world and for new culture. It also helps him to identify his own roots. Michael is assigned “Table 76” which is the least privileged place.
He meets two other boys in his journey Ramadhin, who is quiet and Cassius, who is scornful. On the Oronsay, Michael is assigned dining room among nine people at Table 76 which is far from the Captain’s Table.

Emile de Saram, a distant cousin of Michael, took her school education in India. Now she had made her plans in England. It means Saram crosses the border of the country for the purpose of education. She is migrated to England to complete her last two years of education.

Gross thinks that there should be need of transnational thinking because people cross the borders as they please. Ondaatje speaks about migrants who lost their connection from their home country and who do not belong to any new country. All the characters from different cultural backgrounds occupy important place in the mind of Michael. Michael points out this:

   It seemed to us that nearly all at our table, from the silent tailor, Mr Guneseakra, who owned a shop in Kandy, to the entertaining Mr. Mazappa, to Miss Lasqueti, might have an interesting reason for their journey, even if it was unspoken or, so far, undiscovered. In spite of this, our table’s status on the Oronsay continued to be minimal, while those at the Captain’s Table were constantly toasting one another’s significance. That was a small lesson I learned on the journey. What is interesting and important happens mostly in secret, in places where there is no power. Nothing much of lasting importance ever happens at the head table, held together by a familiar rhetoric. Those who already have power continue to glide along the familiar rut they have made for themselves. (81)

Here, on the Oronsay, the identity is free from the constraints of any culture and it is called transnational. Identity moves from the victimhood to the important position. Michael says he goes to the cabin in the afternoon only because he is alone at that time. He thinks of his bygone days which remind him of his culture. Michael wanders on the ship here and there. He understands the secret of his life. His childhood journey is described as a rite of passage. He gets new experiences of transition from childhood to adulthood. Ondaatje says:
There is a story, always ahead of you. Barely existing. Only gradually do you attach yourself to it and feed it. You discover the carapace that will contain and test your character. You find in this way the path of your life.(196)

Michael nicknamed Mynah travel adventurously everyday in England. This shows that he is not a citizen of one country but of all countries.

At last they entered into the new land and now they were in the unknown world. Ondaatje describes, “Then we were in a place full of names: Southend, Chapman sands, Blyth Sands, Lower Hope, Shornmead.” (364). Everything looks different to them in England. And all are separated from each other in a few seconds.

In the 1970’s, Michael was working in the North America for a short period. It was his thirteenth birthday; he received a call from his distant cousin. So he immediately took a flight to London. The ship is docked on the outer harbour of the Steamer Point. All three and Mr. Daniel, who is eager to study the vegetation in the old oasis entered into the Aden. In the Aden they were surrounded by the new language. It was an experience of landfall. They try to communicate with the people. Michael says:

    We were surrounded instantly by a new language. Mr. Daniel was busy negotiating a fee with a hackney to transport us to where the great palms were. His authority seemed diminished by the crowd, so we left him there arguing and slipped away. A carpet salesman gestured to us offered us tea, and we sat with him for a while, laughing whenever he laughed, nodding when he nodded. (141)

Here they faced the problem of language in the western country. They were unable to communicate with the people there. They had entered into new culture. Mr. Fonseka was travelling to England in search of Job as a teacher. Michael writes the condition of Mr. Fonseka in England:

    I think about Mr. Fonseka at those English schools wearing his buttoned sweater to protect himself from English Weather, and wonder how long he stayed there, and if he did really stay forever. Or whether in the end he could no longer survive it, even though for him it was the center of culture and instead returned home on an Air Lanka flight that took only two thirds
of a day, to begin again, teaching in a place like Nugegoda. London returned. (81-82)

All the characters from the eastern country will face such types of problems in western country. Everything in the foreign countries is strange for them and it is difficult to survive in foreign country. They saw that everything was different in the foreign country from the eastern country. These migrants are recognized as men with dual nationality. They keep social, political and economic relations with host and home country.

6.3.3 The theme of Memory:
Memory means to remember past in the present situation. All the characters are in touch with the past days with the help of their imagination. Memory also play important role in the novel. It can be viewed as a transnational. Michael’s minds shifts between past and present time. Maria Ascanio says, “Memory is a form of fiction and, in the text, memories are the basic documents the writer has to work with.” (Ascanio, 25)

Vijay Lakshmi writes in her article Of Immigrant Writing about memory. She writes:

Memory, invented or real, helps the writer escape the confines of conformity and creates new literature i.e. hybrid literature which does not conform to any one tradition or culture, but creates a new world.

(Laxmi, 93)

Michael remembers funeral of Ramadhin and his marriage with Massi, Ramadhin’s sister. He recalls about the every immigrant family which is not belong to any country:

Every immigrant family, it seems, has someone who does not belong in the new country they have comet to. It feels like permanent exile to that one brother or wife who cannot stand a silent fate in Boston or London or Melbourne. (192)

He meets many people who are haunted by their homeland. So it is true that Ramadhin’s life is happy in Colombo. On the ship Oronsay Ramadhin feels to be nostalgic about his home country and also feels to have been alienated from his home country. Ramadhin linked with his childhood memories in many ways.

Sunil Bhatia in his article Imagining Homes: Identity in Transnational Diaspora remarks about the migrant people:
For many migrant groups, the global movement of capital, labor, goods, people, ideas and culture has enabled the creation of transnational spaces and diasporic communities. (221).

All these things are reflected in Ondaatje’s characters. All the characters live in the group of people who came from different cultures, race and places. Miss. Lasqueti was travelling with twenty to thirty caged pigeons. She is a mysterious woman who wears a special coat which has multiple pockets. Ramadhin is unable to adjust himself in a new land. He always feels displaced and alienated. Ondaatje describes Ramdhin’s death:

He had been found with his heart stopped, a knife beside him. That was all. He had gone into the darkness of one of the communal gardens in the city, near the girl’s flat. Massi told me he was supposedly obsessed with her, someone he had been tutoring.(150)

Ramadhin is more satisfied with a career and home in Colombo. He is not able to adjust himself in the new land and always feels displaced. He is an immigrant who cannot escape the liminality of voyage on the ship Oronsay. Massi says that nobody is belong to the country they arrived. The people who migrated cannot stand in a silent fate in Boston or London or Melbourne. The people who are staying in foreign country are haunted by the reminiscences of earlier place.

Michael’s distant cousin Emily de Saram is also on the Oronsay. She is travelling to England to complete her last two years of school. She makes friendship with Asuntha and she is attracted to The Hyderabad Mind, Sunil. She is adventurous and polite. Michael discovers that they don’t know who they are. He says:

We had each changed places. She was no longer the focus of obsessed swains. I was no longer at the Cat’s Table. But for me Emily was still the unreachable face. (276)

Emily tells Michael that she is not belonging to any country and says that she is like Michael. It means that the condition of the migrants who don’t belong to any country. It means migrants are not belonging to any one country. She is continuously struggling with the identity. He finds his own identities with the new world.

Michael keeps good relationships with the people on the Oronsay. His identity is influenced by the people he came in contact on the Oronsay. He learns variety of things
from the people on the Oronsay. He learns difference between safe plants and poisonous plants from Mr. Daniel who spent his life studying forest and plant culture in Sumatra and Borneo. From Mr. Nevil, he learns about the structure and inner workings of ships. Mr. Nevil tells him that the profession of dismantling the ship is dangerous. He travels all over the world due to this profession. He worked all over the world from Bangkok to Barking. He is sitting with Michael and remembers the harbour once he had inhabited. Michael learns the lesson of authority from Cassius. He recalls:

I never saw him side with anyone in power. He drew you into his perspective of things and you saw the layers of authority on the ship through his eyes. He relished, for instance, being one of the insignificant at the Cat’s Table. (51)

He remembers that he met strangers long ago. Michael is able to identify and adjust with the new land because of his friends on the Oronsay. Michael recollects his memory:

While I was working for a brief period in North America, I received a cable from a distant relative. I remember it was my thirtieth birthday. Leaving what I was doing. I managed to get on a red-eye flight to London, where I checked into a hotel and slept for a few hours. (183)

Michael remembers his days in the 1970’s when he was working in North America. So he migrated to America for the purpose of job. His migration to America and England shows his transnational identity.

6.3.4 The theme of Identity Crisis:

Michael’s journey to England is a way to find a new identity. The new identity brings new culture, language, people and it makes one not to forget the old ways of life. Emily once tells to Michael that her uncle is a judge. He was a guardian of Emily in Colombo and eventhough he was Ceylonese and not English.

Emily establishes relationship with Perara who is from Ceylon. Perara was a common name. she meets Lucius Perera, the CID Perera on the ship Oronsay. Emily is not interested with Mr. Perara. She kills him and his body was lying there:

A body is lying there, I could see the man’s hands clutching his neck as if at a slash of blood. It must have been Mr. Perera.” People know that,
“Perera was intricately involved with high level crime; the gang members have revealed his own criminal connections. (267)

The problem of identity is also faced by the Perara. The passengers on the ship do not know from where Perara arrived and who he is. Miss. Lasqueti is one of the members on the cats table. She is like a whimsical character and she is regarded as a spinster on the Oronsay. She is as white as pigeon. She is a table ghost and she reveals to all that she is walks in sleep which is a very dangerous habit on a ship. Michael says. ‘Miss. Lasqueti had, I remember, ‘gunpowder tea’, which she mixed with a cup of hot water at our table’. She carries with her twenty or thirty pigeons to England. Flavia Prins, an unknown stranger in First Class, said that Miss Lasqueti is often seen in the corridors of Whitehall. When all observed first time Miss. Lasquetti, she is appeared Spinsterish and cautious. She tells Emily that, ‘my first name is Perinetta. I believe it is a type of apple, found in the Netherlands.’

She suggested Michael to learn to alter his life. She has a sense of authority and she persuades Baron to leave the ship at Portsaid. Mr. Giggs, a only person on the ship who annoyed her because she found him boastful. In the eyes of Michael, she is not beautiful but attractive because of the various aspects existed in her. She told the story of hikers on the cats table. This story had silenced all on the table. She sends a letter to Michael. In the letter, she advises him to keep away from the Jankla Troupe. In her teen age, she has migrated to Italy to learn the language. Here she tells her life story in the second letter enclosed to Michael. She writes, that she went to Italy at the age of twenty for the language. She was fluid with languages and she loved Italy. In Italy, she got a job in the office. Horace Johnson loves her very much. He is the man who achieves everything because of money and power. Her identity is crushed in Italy and she warns Emily to be away from the dangerous situation in your life.

Cassius and Ramadhin are also facing the problem of identity. Cassius is the name given to the child in Sri Lanka. Michael says Sri Lanka always merges classical first names with Sinhalese last names- Soloman and Seneka. It is not common but it exists. The hybridity of transnationalism can be seen in the Sri Lankan for preference of merging of classical first names with Sinhalese last names. The name Cassius is gentle and whispering. He is an iconoclast on the voyage. He is the only authoritative man and it can
be seen through his eyes. When their ship reached to England from that day Michael has
not met him. He says:

I came across an announcement in a London newspaper. There was a
photograph of him. I would not have recognized the face except that it had
his name beside it. Older, darker, as different as I probably was from the
boy I had been on board that ship in the 1950s. (179)

Cassius is now a famous painter in England. Michael sees his paintings on the Cork
Street gallery in London. He sees the paintings of Cassius himself in Waddington
Gallery. After that he went to the visitors’ book. All the visitors have written very good
comments on Cassius painting. It shows that Cassius has established his identity in
England as a painter.

5.3.5 The theme of Nostalgia:

Nostalgia is also one of the elements of transnationalism. Transnationalism means keeping
an attachement with the host and home land through different ways. All the characters
keep their touch with their home country. Ramadhin has not adjusted himself in the new
land but his sister Massi has adopted it very quickly. Ramadhin feels to be homesick and
constantly thinks about his social relations in his home country.

Massi tells about Ramadhin. “she did not believe her brother’s existence in England had
been happy; she felt he would have been more content with a career and a home in
Canada” (192). It means that migrants are not happy in other country, they continuously
feel that they are happy in their home country. Svetlana Boym in The Future of
Nostalgia writes,

Nostalgia is not always past; it can be retrospective and prospective.
Fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct
impact on realities of the future. Consideration of the future makes us take
responsibility for our nostalgic tales.( Unnumbered)

Mr. Fonseka wrote a consoling letter to the family of Ramadhin. In that letter he
describes about his days on Ship Oronsay. He writes, “how two of them had discussed
the histories of the various countries we had travelled past, and all the natural as opposed
to the artificial harbours. Aden had been one of the thirteen great Islamic cities; how there
was an ancestry of famous Muslim geographers who had lived there before the age of the
gunpowder empires.” (198) He feels sorry about his close friend whom he has lost. The feeling of the past day is also one of the features of nostalgia. All these memories about Ramadhin make us think beyond the horizon.

Michael also remembers his childhood days with Narayan and Gunepal who are constant companions. He tells:

> Whenever we were in Galle, Narayan and Gunepal and I would climb down the ramparts to the sea and swim out so they could fish on the reef for dinner.(75)

All these characters are in touch with their country through memory and imagination. This type of nostalgic feelings brings transnational identity of Michael and the other characters.

### 6.3.6 The theme of Alienation:

All the characters in the novel migrate to England and they feel to be alienated in foreign country. Michael and his two friends Ramadhin and Cassius are assigned the cats table. They try to overcome this loneliness through number of ways. Antigone Samellas writes in her book:

> The modern concept of alienation evokes a cluster of focal meanings with primarily negative significations which to a certain extent appear to be interrelated: estrangement, separation from one’s true nature, appropriation by another one’s possession or labour, disempowerment, false and unhappy consciousness.( Samellas, 4)

Massi also feels alone when Michael was away from her for the purpose of education. She says, “you stayed away too long, Michael. You stay away all the time.” (185) To overcome this loneliness in the foreign land, both fell in love. They communicate with each other whenever they feel alone.

He remembers one of the past events when they feel alienated. Michael says, “she had been the sidekick to her brother and me during school holidays, when the three of us lounged in a city that was not quite ours- it was a strange contained universe we moved around in, taking the bus to a swimming pool in Bromley or to the Croydon public library, or to Earls Court to see the Boat Show, or Dog Show, or Motor Show.” (189)
They feel alienated in the strange land. So to overcome the alienation they visited many places in the strange land. Michael and other characters feel that it is their permanent exile and they never remain silent in any country. They are always haunted by the home country. Emily a distant cousin of Michael also feel alienated on the ship Oronsay. Massi feels alienated after the death of her brother Ramadhin. This is the tragedy which makes her alienated from her life. So she is attracted towards Michael. Alienation means isolation from himself or herself. She writes her sadness:

“Did I feel guilty that I had not loved him enough? That was partly it. But it was not any thought that broke down the wall, allowing him to come into me. I must have begun remembering, replaying all the little fragments of him that revealed the concerned he had for me. (195)

In these lines, she writes about her guilt and consoles herself from the alienated life. She hopes that Michael is for her only and she allows him to come towards her. This is the life of the migrants who stay in foreign land and feel lonely. All the characters on the ship gather at one place to overcome their loneliness. Michael and his two friends always visit to the artificial garden whenever they feel to be lonely.

**6.3.7 The theme of Language Barrier:**

Language is an important tool in a foreign country. Their ship arrived at Aden. All are in hurry of letter writing. It was a tradition that if the mail stamped in Aden, it will be sent back to Australia and Ceylon or onward to England. Ondaatje describes the harbour Aden:

Aden had been a great harbor as early as the seventh century B.C. and was mentioned in the Old Testament. It was where Cain and Abel were buried, Mr. Fonseka said, preparing us for the city e himself had never seen. It had cisterns built out of Volcanic rock, a falcon market, an oasis quarter, an aquarium, a section of town given over to sail makers and stores that contained merchandise from every corner of the globe.(139)

Mynah, Ramadhin and Cassius have felt alienated with the culture of Aden. They were surrounded by the new language. They could not understand the language. They have to communicate with a gesture to the salesmen and they could laugh when he laughs and would nods when he nods.
Language creates a barrier in alien land. The immigrants use only non-verbal communication such as gesture, posture, waiving the hands, nodding, laughing when others laugh and nodding when others nod. Mynah thinks that the world of Colombo is like the world of Aden. The worlds of Aden and Colombo are quite different. He shows the bad picture of the Aden. He writes:

Here was a sterner world, with fewer luxuries. There was no overripe fruit in the gutters. There were in facto no gutters. It was dusty landscape, as if water had not been invented. The only liquid was the cup of dark tea offered to us by the carpet Salesman, along with a delicious, permanently remembered almond sweet. (142)

Both Mynah and Emily are close relatives and they have same childhood experiences. The family of Emily is always under the threat of her father’s rage. Her grandmother keeps in boarding school of Southern India to keep her away from her father. She was seventeen years old when she arrived in England to complete her last two years of schooling. But in foreign culture she is living on one of the Gulf Islands on the West coast of Canada as a kind of expatriate. Her marriage is a failure and she has stepped out of marriage. She talks about her marriage:

She said the marriage had been a cautious one, and she had stepped out of it, recognizing it was too cold a building to live in for the rest of her life. (341)

She cannot adjust with the culture of her husband Desmond. So she left him and came to England. After her expulsion from the college, she takes interest in a person belongs to other culture. Here two cultures are brought together. But their traditional culture rejects to accept new culture in the form of husband. She moved to England to become a boarder at Cheltenham Ladies College. She is still the part of the Sri Lankan community in London and some boyfriend wandering beside her.

Emily expresses her trauma of cultural clashes and its impact on entire life. She has come in contact with different cultures. She also feels rootless due to cultural clash. She always feels alienated in both the cultures. Here Ondaatje wishes to express the ‘in-between’ situation of an immigrants: She had believed, every foothold for years, had
been a lie. ‘I have thought all along I was the one who killed him,’ she said quietly. ‘May be I did.’ (351)

Miss Lasquetti is also from multicultural root. Her first name is ‘Perinita’ which suggests her European background. She is fond of the Italian language. She further says:

I went to Italy in my twenties, for the language. I was fluid with languages and I loved Italian best. Someone suggested I apply to the Villa Ortensia a job. A wealthy American couple Horace and Rose Johnson, had bought it and were turning it into a great archive of art. (298)

Michael’s marriage with Massi in teenage age plays very important role in attaching himself with native culture. Massi is adjusted quickly in foreign culture in comparison with Ramadhin. After many days, Michael looks Massi at Mill Hill house in London and He marries Massi in order to remain attached with his own childhood native community

6.3.8 Transnational Identity of Michael:

Michael also faces the problem of identity on the ship. Ramadhin called him Mynah which is the nickname of Michael on the sea. He tells that nobody called him Mynah but the two friends on the Oronsay. He was known only by his surname in school. Here he is recognized by two names, one is Mynah and other is Michael.

Michael himself in this novel is a writer. Both Michael and Ondaatje are from Sri Lanka. Both are immigrated to England and now settled in Canada. The first name is similar to the other. He talks of his worries about his mother whom he has not seen since last many years. The mention of other country means the writer is uprooting from his own country and has gone elsewhere. Here Michael’s voyage for twenty one days focuses Michael’s transition from boyhood to adulthood. His terrifying experience shapes and alters his life. Michael meets various characters in his voyage from Colombo to England. Some provides him positive education and some undesirable experience. He gets always a good education from Mr. Mazappa. When Mazappa leaves from the life of Michael, he says that it was a painful to realize that nothing was permanent.

During his journey, he remembers his childhood days in Sri Lanka. He remembers his college days, his love for swimming and also remembers his childhood companion Narayan and Gunepal. He spent most of his time with Narayan and Gunepal. Gunepal is a short tempered and he whistled variety of birdcalls. He reminds:
Narayan and Gunepal are my essential and affectionate guides during that unformed stage of my life,.... they opened doors for me into another world. (75)

The memory of the Michael can be viewed as a transnational. All the times he thinks of his mother. He says that now he was going to England where his mother had been staying for three four years.

Michael came in close contact with Massi, Ramadhin’s sister on the ship Oronsay. He says that some events take a whole life to understand their harm and influence. He marries Massi to keep close connection with the community of his homeland. His marriage with Massi shows that he wants to keep his connection with his community and country. After the death of the Ramadhin, Michael has to behave like a sibling. He thinks that their world is only London.

All these are the places such as Battersea Power station, the Pelican Stair, Thames, the Croydon library, Streatham Common etc. they have visited as teenagers and have come out as adults. Michael is in British Columbia for few days. He receives a phone call from Emily. He is thinking that she should be in some European city. But she is only few miles away, on one of the Gulf islands. He has not met her for the last fifteen years. She called him to meet.

On the Tilbury, he heard the voice Michael. This is the voice of his mother. He says that a woman kept her hand on his shoulder and said, ‘Michael’. She fingered my cotton shirt and said, ‘you must be cold, Michael.”( 365) Michael feels that he has his connection with his native land.

6.3.9 Transnational Identity of Minor Characters:

Michael Ondaatje portrays minor characters in his novels. These characters migrate from their country and live in a transnational world. Mr. Fonseka is another migrant who is a quiet, gentle looking man `and teacher. He is surrounded by many books and recites the passages from all kinds of books. He travels to England for becoming a teacher. Michael says:

He had lived in Colombo all his life, and his manner and accent were a product of the island, but at the same time he had this wide-ranging
knowledge of books. He’d sing a song from the Azores or recite lines from
an Irish play. (79)

He is not a rich man. He now gets mixed up with the foreign culture. He works as a
school teacher in Sri Lanka. His life is a combination of certainty and serenity. Fonseka
adjusted himself in England in his difficulties of migration. He was insulted in the foreign
country. He was not frightened about this insult. He faced all the difficulties in his
international migration. Ramadhin was in touch with Mr. Fonseka and they carried their
relationship. The relationship of the migrants and their identity crisis is resolved only
after their retrieval of roots or after their death.

Mr. Max Mazeppa another person on their table who is also displaced. He is a pianist
and he shares life’s wisdom to others. He warns Michael about the risk from women. He
says, women speak sweet and show their big eye. Ondaatje’s writes about Mr. Mazeppa
as follows:

   He was half Sicilian, half something else, he told us in his un-track-down-able
   accent. He had worked in Europe, travelled briefly into the Americas and gone
   beyond them until he found himself in the tropics, living above a harbour bar. He
   taught us the chorus to ‘Hong Kong Blues. (39)

Mr. Mazeppa has crossed many boundaries of the country and taught the people piano.
He married many times in his life. Miss. Lasquetti inserted quietly that when he dies
there will be several simultaneous widows. His first marriage is ended in betrayal. Once
he finds his wife with the musician. He confessed to Lasquetti that if he had had gun, he
would have shot him in the pump.

Larry Daniel is also on the ship Oronsay. He is one of the members of the Cat’s Table.
He is described as, “born to a burgher family in Kandy, he had become a botanist and
spent much of his adult life studying forest and plant cultures in Sumatra and Borneo.
This was to be his first journey to Europe.” (58) Michael and his two friends always
spend their time with him. He was an intelligent and curious man. He was very curious
about Emily and asks about her at Michael. He shows unusual qualities of a plant. He
transports a colourful garden to Europe. Michael tells about her to Daniel. Emily likes the
ice-cream at Elephant House. She wishes to go into the theatre and want to be an actress.
Sunil, thy Hyderabad Mind, who was a part of Jankla troupe was on the ship Oronsay. This Jankla troupe is often seen with Emily. Three members of Jankla Troupe, are the entertainers on their way to Europe. All these passengers were going to Europe to be with a relative who was ill. Hyderabad Mind, Sunil’s face was streaked with purple and eyes are rimmed with white paint.

All the less important characters occupy a very important place in the novel. At last the ship docks at Tilbury. The ship reached at the foot of the gangplank. Immediately he lost the sight of Cassius and Ramadhin. Within a few seconds, they separated from each other and lost from each other.

The novel describes the theme of transnationalism in which all the characters leaves their hometown Colombo, Sri Lanka and undertake voyage to England. Michael meets various characters on the ship Oronsay. During their journey, they face a variety of problems.