Chapter I

Defining the Ethnic and the Ethnic Literature

The twentieth century was marked by grave issues like genocide, mass migration, displacements etc which were the direct outcome of such conflicts whose origins lay in ethnicity and nationalism. In addition to the two World Wars which had a strong ethnic dimension to them, the whole century was a witness to large scale conflicts in the countries like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in South Asia, Balkan region in Northern Asia, almost the whole African continent, Bosnia-Herzegovina in Eastern Europe, Vietnam in South East-Asia etc.

In the first half of the twentieth century, most of Asia and Africa was under the grip of the European colonialism which had severely crushed the indigenous populations of these countries and had cartographically divided these areas as per their own strategic convenience. Most of these colonial divisions were at odds with the actual ethno-geographic realities in these continents. The result was the bloodshed that followed the long-drawn process of decolonization.

The process of decolonization started with World War I. The war saw the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman
empires, the transfer of power from Czarist Russia to Lenin’s Bolshevik republic, and the emergence of the United States and Japan as military and industrial powers of global significance. Russia, too, turned into the erstwhile Soviet Empire after the annexation of its neighbouring regions in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. New states like Yugoslavia were created to stabilize the ethnic fragmentation in the Balkans. By the middle of the century, there were large-scale killings and displacement in Europe due to Holocaust. The political and social distress caused by what is referred to as the Great Depression and the subsequent economic recession, massive unemployment, large scale migrations and the disturbing ethnic formations cumulatively led to the rise of the Fascist regimes in Europe which finally led to World War II.

In 1945, World War II came to an end, resulting in consequences which fundamentally reshaped the ethnic formations globally. The subsequent era of Cold War rivalry between the USA and the erstwhile USSR offered its own set of problems of ethnic tensions. Such locations of intense ethnic conflicts as Palestine, Cambodia, Rwanda, Burundi, Bosnia, Kashmir etc emerged which have had far reaching ramifications on the world politics. Even now, most of the conflicts in the world have overarching ethnic
dimensions which make them intractably difficult for any semblance of resolution.

In view of the complexity of these issues and the multi-structured meaning and understanding of various terms that are used in the context of these problems, it is necessary that we discuss the terms like identity, ethnicity, race etc separately and arrive at some conclusions about how and why ethnicity became a focal point during this century. The concept of ethnicity and its complex relation with social/power structures like those of race, religion, ideology, language and community need to be studied one by one to demystify the whole web of issues surrounding them and arrive at a clearer understanding of these terms. It is also imperative to analyse the contemporary factors that added to the intensity of the idea of the ethnicity which has historically always been a source of violence, warfare and bloodshed. An attempt will be made to locate the ethnicity in the larger framework of Postcolonial Studies and Ethnic Studies. As ethnicity falls under the larger rubric of the idea of identity, therefore, we begin with identity.
Identity

The idea of identity defines the contemporary world. It has become a site of intense debate both at popular level and in academic and political discourses. Its controversial and fluid nature has given rise to some of the raging conflicts in the world. Despite the term being in vogue across the board, there is a lot of disagreement on what actually constitutes identity and whether identities are essential or existential, innate or constructed, singular or multiple.

Despite being a Western creation in its contemporary sense, the idea of identity has acquired a sort of universal acceptance. In fact, it has become a normative straitjacket and everyone is expected to have an identity or to create one. It is assumed that identity constitutes an indispensable element without which no human being can be imagined of.

Brubaker and Cooper (2000:6-8) have identified five dominant ways in which the concept of identity is currently used in social sciences and the humanities:

a) identities as non–instrumental forms of social action;

b) identities as a collective phenomenon of group sameness;

c) identities as deep and foundational forms of selfhood;
d) identities as interactive, processual, contingent products of social action; and

e) identities as fluctuating, instable and fragmented modes of the self.

They argue that the first two conceptions operate with the common sense meaning, while the remaining three are more academic-oriented and used in the subjects like Cultural Studies, Anthropology and Sociology.

It was at the end of the twentieth century that ‘identity’ became a dominant concept. The concept emerged in the decade of the 1960’s, and through the 80’s and 90’s to the beginning of the twenty-first century, it acquired a sweeping position at all levels. There are many sociological and historical reasons why such an ambiguous concept acquired such a dominant position. Primarily, ‘identity’ has filled the role of race, nation and social consciousness (Malesevic 2006:31). Therefore, identity has a very intricate relation with ethnicity, nation and race.

In contemporary world, the word ‘identity’ has mostly become associated with cultural i.e., group-centric, differences. Among many group-centric discourses of identity currently in
vogue, ethnic and national identities subsume the rest in terms of their huge influence and magnitude.

The concepts of ethnicity and nation are associated with more or less cultural differences and, in their contemporary parlance are Western creations too. However, there are many nations like the United States of America and India which claim to contain different cultures within a single nation.

There are scores of often mutually exclusive definitions of ‘identity’, ‘ethnicity’ and ‘nation’. They range from objective to subjective, and cultural to political understandings, depending a lot on geographical locations, social contexts, historical contingencies etc. However, at a larger level, it can be said that most of the ethnic struggles dotting the former geographical colonies are actually attempts on their part to undo their colonial past and re-imagine their past and consequently redesign their future.

**Ethnicity**

Ethnicity is an exclusive term, despite being a highly problematic idea. Even ethnicists and anthropologists themselves are not sure what they mean when they talk about ethnicity. However, in contemporary history, the term has become a calling cry for reorganization of the world’s structure - political, economic,
cultural and lingual. We see most of the current conflicts based on ethnic affiliations.

Given the highly controversial nature of the term and the sensitivities involved, it is very important to make an attempt to understand what ethnicity is, and, equally, what it is not. Etymologically speaking, the word ‘ethnic’ is derived from the Greek work ‘ethnikos’ which meant ‘gentile’ and ‘heathen’. The word was mostly used to refer to ‘others’. In English, the term was used to refer to non-Christians. In the mid nineteenth century, there emerged a contemporary meaning of ‘ethnic’ as ‘peculiar to a race or nation’. However, the English language has retained the pagan memory of ‘ethnic’ often used to refer to ‘other’, ‘non-standard’, or, in American context, as not fully American.

Ethnicity, as an academic term, came into widespread use in the 1960s. The increasing use of the term signaled a radical shift from ‘race’ to ‘culture’ to ‘ethnicity’ (Wolf 1994). Lately, the process has undergone further change reflecting a growing concern with the nation, including the elements of the ethnic and the tribal. While ethnicity and nation have come much closer, race has become more problematic.
Modern notions of ethnicity are mostly based on the ideas developed in the nineteenth century - a sense of a common history, language, traditions, and sometimes religion (Young 2008:45). Ethnicity is centrally a matter of shared meanings -- culture -- the culture of differentiation based on variation of languages, religions, cosmology, symbolism, morality, ideology etc. “Ethnic identity may be imagined, but it is emphatically not imaginary; locally that imagining may be very powerful” (Jenkins 2008: 80).

Typical definitions of ethnicity and ethnic identity list a set of required attributes that a social group has to possess in order to be deemed as an ethnic group. Max Weber, in his *Economy and Society*, defines an ethnic group as a human collectivity based on assumption of common origin, real or imaginary (1978: 385-98). Most of the anthropologists, by and large agreed with this definition. Almost the same definition is refined by Bulmer (2001:69-70) who defines an ethnic group as follows:

[A] collectivity, rather larger society, which has real or imagined common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus upon one or more common elements which distinguish the members of the group from other members of society … (and these) include: area of origin, language, religion,
nationality, kinship patterns, physical appearance such as skin color.

Ethnic groups range in various usages, from small, relatively isolated, nearly primordial kin and culture groups to large categories of people comparable on the basis of one or two shared characterizations. Generally speaking, an ethnic group is a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients. While talking about the ethnic collectivity, Francis says:

[It]represents an attempt on the part of men to keep alive, in their pilgrimage from peasant village to industrial metropolis, some of the diffuse, descriptive, pluralistic modes of behavior that were common in the past. The ethnic group was created only when the peasant commune broke up, and was essentially an attempt to keep some of the value, some of the informality, some of the support, some of the intimacy of the communal life in the midst of an impersonal, formalistic, rationalised, urban, industrial society.

(cited in Greeley 1970: 40)

Frederick Barth sees “the essence of ethnicity in such (mental, cultural, social, moral, aesthetic, and not necessarily
terритори) boundary-constructing processes which function as cultural markers between groups.” (Barth 1969: 15) According to Barth, shared culture is generated in, and by, processes of ethnic boundary maintenance, rather than the other way round. He also identified four theoretical features of the culturally distinct ethnic group.

1. Such a group was biologically self-perpetuating.
2. Member of the group shared basic cultural values, manifest in overt cultural forms.
3. The group was a bonded social pyramid of communication and interaction.
4. Its members identified themselves, and were identified by others as belonging to that group (Jenkins 2008: 18).

Barth shifted the focus from tribal to ethnic identity as a basic anthropological unit of social analysis. While the earlier notions of ethnic groups implied that they were isolated, primitive, or non-Western, Barth effected radical shift in that perception, from a Western interest in the uncivilized peoples of the colonies and ex-colonies to a more equitable concern with the routine heterogeneity of all societies.
In the light of the above, a broad-based and comprehensive definition of an ethnic group, by and large, is required to have at least three ingredients:

1. The group is perceived by others in the society to be different in some combination of the following traits: language, religion, race, and ancestral homeland with its related culture.
2. The members also perceive themselves as different; and
3. They participate in shared activities built around their (real or mythical) common origin and culture.

While defining ethnicity in contemporary times, it is assumed that everyone belongs to an ethnic group. In those rare instances where there is a minimal ethnic variation, societies are stated to be ethnically homogenous. Kashmir can be illustrated as a case of such a homogenous ethnic formation as the inhabitants agree on three broad ethnic parameters: common ancestry, common history and common homeland. According to Smith, “the ‘core’ of ethnicity resides in the myths, memories, values, symbols and the characteristic styles of particular historic configurations” (1986, 203). Further, Smith sees ethnic unity as a necessary condition for the national survival and unity. He traced this
necessary ethnic unity to the existence of coherent mythology, and a symbolism of history and culture in an ethnic community. He argued that it is difficult for an ethnic community to become a nation-state without these ethno-symbolic factors. That is why, according to him, the ethnic groups in Communist Yugoslavia, while speaking a common language, did not develop a Yugoslav national identity (qtd in Isiksal, 2002).

We may conclude that there are two types of the meaning of the word ‘ethnic’: one is universalist and inclusive which refers to everyone as ethnic in one way or the other. The other use of the word excludes dominant groups. That way being ethnic means being a minority as in the case of ethnic minorities of the USA. In fact, such a usage defines ethnicity as otherness. The contrastive uses depend on the one who uses them.

**Ethnicity and the Indigeneity**

The ethnic is not to be confused with the local. There is a lot of difference between the two. Shared locality does not entail the same kind of mutual interpersonal recognition that is ideally presupposed in communality. Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims, despite sharing same locality, do not share same political aspirations. So despite being ethnically the same, their political
affiliations are at variance with each other which has spawned a tension of sorts between them based on ideology. Similarly, in the context of Ireland, the Catholics and the Protestants, despite sharing same locale and cultural lifestyle, have had antagonistic political stances which finally led to the bifurcation of Ireland into two halves.

The present age is the age of globalization where all countries are governed by a global economic system. Technology has facilitated a more interactive and communicative world. Cultural homogenization and diversity and pluralism are happening simultaneously. Travel is a trend now and not just a necessity. All these aspects of globalization have serious consequences for ethnic formation of the world. Globalization and localization are happening simultaneously. The world is becoming smaller and larger at the same time. Localism and ethnicity are asserting themselves either as a reaction to, or a result of, the globalisation. Despite heightened globalization, nations, regions and ethnic groups have not diminished in importance. Therefore, new nationalisms and ethnic identities are emerging alongside the already existing ones. Questions about roots and origin are being asked by disparate people across national and international boundaries. Ethnic pasts are being recreated by way of exploring
ethnic symbols and myths. Repressed pasts are being rediscovered. Out of the available traditions and myths, fictions and histories are being created afresh, telling stories of new identities. All these attempts are actually a part of the struggle to re-imagine the indigenous past and thereby the present and the future as well.

**Ethnicity and Nation**

There is a stark difference between ethnicity, on one hand, and nationalism and racism, on the other. While the latter are isms, i.e., ideologies, the former is not. The word nation has a variety of meanings close to country, society, or state, in some instances, and close to or synonymous with ethnic group in others. Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmir Pandits hold on to these two different definitions, respectively. While for Kashmiri Muslims being Kashmiri means belonging to a nation, for Kashmiri Pandits it simply means belonging to a specific ethnic community. The dictionary tells us that a nation is “a country”; or it is “the body of inhabitants of a country united under a single independent government; a state” (Yinger, 1997:10). That is probably the commonly understood meaning throughout the world. However, there are some troubles spotted in this definition like the double meaning of the word “state”. The dictionary also defines nation as
“a people connected by supposed ties of blood generally manifested by community of language, religion, and custom, and by some common interest and interrelation” (Yinger, 1997:10). Such a definition is more in vogue in Europe, where almost all nation-states consist of distinct ethnic units. Then, there is the term “nation state” which is a redundancy as per the first definition and a contradiction as per the second definition. The expression is important as it distinguishes such a state from an American or Indian state, which refers to mere administrative units within these countries.

Nations are mostly seen as a variety of ethnic group defined by a history or a mythology of statehood, or by powerful aspirations for statehood (Yinger, 12). Such a definition is true about such European countries as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Georgia and Slovenia. Nation and nationality are often used as synonyms for a state. In Central and Eastern Europe, these terms imply symbolic or real link with ethnic ancestry. Thus, what makes one British or French is the possession of British or French passport and a degree of loyalty to their respective states, whereas the German or the Croat also requires at least German or Croat mother/father. Due to a different historical heritage, the Europeans
use ethnicity as synonym of nationhood for presumed commonality in shared territory or descent. Thus, what makes one Albanian is not determined by the place of one’s birth but by his/her ethnic origin. Similarly, living as Welsh or Scot in England does not make one necessarily an ethnic minority. The North Americans often use the word ‘ethnicity’ to refer to a cultural minority with no salient physical difference. While Italian or Polish Americans are defined as ethnic groups, African Americans or Asian Americans are denoted as ‘racial’ groups.

Thus, there is a lot of overlapping in the meaning and the usage of ‘nation’ and ‘ethnic group’. It can safely be said that there are no objective criteria sufficient to determine whether an ethnic group is a nation or not. The essence of nation is a psychological bond that joins people and differentiates them from non members. Again, it is usually a strong ethno-psychological sense of shared blood that infuses the nation. Anthony Smith has put it well: “It seems to me that any useful definition of the nation must do justice to both ethnic and territorial conception” (quoted in Yinger, 14).

It is actually the same tension created by such overlapping in meaning of the word ‘nation’ that is getting reflected in the problems experienced by new states, and in the conflicts that
disrupt the efforts to create new states. As empires broke up, people in former colonies and territories found an opportunity for themselves to end their subjugation and gain power for creating their own states. At the same time, however, their identification as individuals was still largely defined not by the new political realities but by language, race, locality, religion and tradition. The result was a severe and chronic tension between these contending nations and the allied movements.

The myth of nationhood contains some or all of several kinds of archetypal stories comprising the gradual evolution of a community through different phases of a progression. They include the stories of origin, migration and liberation. In other words, such stories describe the legendary perseverance to have successfully overcome its historical phases comprising its descent, heroic age, decline, conquest and exile and finally the rebirth. Such accounts of historical myths become a rallying cry for ethnic movements seeking independence.

Different factors have been identified as the sources leading to nationalistic, independence-seeking ethnic movements. Underlying most of them is the “myth of common descent” (in Max Weber’s words), or a “vivid sense of sameness” reinforced
by, but not wholly dependent upon the notion of having a distinctive language, race, or religion (Yinger, 13). A second factor is what has been called ‘post-industrial value’: a strong aspiration to have an equal opportunity and share in the economic resources.

Nations, ethnicities and boundaries have become a tricky business to meddle with because of colonial and imperial interventions which created a lot of geographical and nationalistic confusion. The boundaries of states in Africa, in most cases, were drawn by European powers at the Berlin Conference in 1884, more to try to secure a balance of power than to correspond with any ethnic order based on cultural and lingual variation. Several civil wars broke out in these states after independence as diverse groups within these states sought sovereignty and cultural identity.

State borders in the Middle East are similarly an artificial and imperial construction. They are the result of an imperial arrangement between Britain and France after the end of World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, the creation of Israel in itself is an imperial decision. Similarly, in South Asia, the India-Pakistan divide and subsequently the creation of Bangladesh is mostly the imperial effect. The dispute of Kashmir, in the final analysis, can also be traced to the colonial past of the
sub-continent. The creation of such boundaries meant shifts in identity.

After World War I, boundaries were redrawn and forced population transfers were effected, especially in Eastern and Central Europe, to spawn culturally homogenous settings. After World War II too, new states were formed in Europe, some state boundaries were changed, both for geopolitical and for ethnic reasons. Innumerable people got displaced and some states were taken over militarily by the Soviet Union. The state-nation tension as a major political fact has, thus, persisted. A majority of the states in the world were formed after the collapse of the Ottoman, Russian, British, French, Dutch, Belgian, Spanish, Portuguese and German empires. In fact, most of the members of the United Nations Organization have been created since the end of World War II.

Even today, more than twenty years after the break-up of the Soviet Union, ethnic relations within several of the now independent republics remain harshly conflictive. Elsewhere, hundreds of thousands of people have been killed in the struggles for independence, and in the ethnic turmoil within the new and uniformly multi-ethnic states.
There is, thus, no equation of nationalism with ethnicity because first, not all things ethnic are ideological, and second, nationalism differs from ethnic ideologies and is defined by the specific historical conditions of its emergence. Hobsbawm argues that nationalism and ethnicity are ‘different, and indeed non-comparable’ (quoted in Jenkins, 4). In this view, nationalism is a recent and pragmatic political philosophy, while ethnicity expresses authentic or primordial group identity, rooted in the distinction between insider and outsider.

Nationalism marks a distinctively modern break with a traditional past characterized by ethnic fragmentation. In other words, nationalism followed ethnicity which preceded nationalism. Though, nationalism is a ‘modern phenomenon’ (Smith, 18), ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ had become popular by the late nineteenth century. However, ideologies and politics that are recognizable nationalist, and identities which can be described as national, predate the rise of ‘classical’ nationalism from the late eighteenth century onwards (Smith, 1994). The dichotomy can be resolved by way of recognizing the historical interplay of ethnicity and nations which can claim a genealogy extending back to ancient Greece in the evolution of ideologies of identification. The
boundary between ‘ethnicism’ and ‘nationalism’ thus becomes indeterminate, a sort of continuum along the blurred lines of gradual change and constantly evolving historical traditions.

**Ethnicity and Race**

Ethnicity and race are fundamentally and structurally different. Anthropologically speaking, ethnicity is relatively a recent phenomenon. Prior to the Second World War, there was negligible mention of it in social sciences. Before World War II, ‘tribe’ was the term of choice for ‘pre-modern’ societies and ‘race’ for modern societies (Jenkins, 2001). Due to the association of the term ‘race’ with Nazi ideology, the term ‘ethnicity’ gradually replaced ‘race’. Harold Abramson argues that although “race is the most salient ethnic factor, it is still only one of the dimensions of the larger cultural and historical phenomenon of ethnicity” (1973:175). On the other hand, Smith considers race a special objective category that cannot be meaningfully discussed under the heading ethnicity (1982:10).

Ethnicity is a wider social classificatory principle than race. If ethnicity is concerned with ‘us’, race is related to ‘them’. Ethnicity is more general social phenomenon than race. Racism may be understood as a historically specific facet of the more
general social phenomenon of ethnicity. Ethnic becomes racist when it tries to dominate. Ethnicity is voluntarily embraced while racial identification is imposed on others. Membership in an ethnic group is usually voluntary; membership in a racial group is not. Ethnicity is, thus, about inclusion (us) while race is about exclusion (them) (Jenkins, 84). Ethnicity certainly is primary, if not primordial, social identity compared to race. ‘Racial’ categories are second-order cultural creations or notions, having emerged out of historical circumstances like imperial or colonial domination.

Race and ethnicity are used in contexts that indicate them as overlapping concepts. Some scholars argue that we should entirely dispense with the term race as it has too many meanings or is loaded with too prejudicial connotations to the use of any scientific value (Yinger 16).

Use of a racial criterion in defining ethnicity varies widely in time and place. In the beginning of the twentieth century, there were contrasting streaks of thought about race. While E A Ross in the United States and Gustav Lebon in France, for example, emphasized the biological aspect of race, W E B Dy Bois emphasized history, traditions and joint endeavours, what one might call an ethnic group with a symbolic social element. To him,
race was, “a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less timidly conceived ideals of life” (quoted in Yinger 17).

Such an understanding blurs the distinction between ethnicity and race. In some contexts, racial terms invoke supposed descent from such substandard population so as to deny their putative descendants access to higher segments of society. From this perspective, race as a strictly biological concept is of no value in a theory of ethnicity. Certain specific races being clearly distinct and nearly immutable is a myth. Race is a social reality and there are certain premises which are to be taken note of while examining the racial aspect of ethnicity:

1. Racial differences are minor biological variations in an essentially homogenous species.

2. New races are continually being formed and old ones modified slowly by evolutionary process and more rapidly by intermixtures. In many societies, persons of mixed social ancestry, even if not so regarded, make up a significant proportion of the populations.
3. Socially visible ‘racial’ lives based on beliefs about race and on administrative and political classifications, not on genetic differences per se, are the critical ones for social analysis. These lines vary from society to society and from time to time. For example, one person with one-quarter Native American ancestry may clearly be an Indian (an enrolled and participating member of a tribe), while another with the same ancestry may be seen and responded to as white.

4. Race is important in social interaction primarily because of present and past correlation of racial differences with cultural and status differences (Yinger 20).

   Seen from the perspective of these four premises, ethnicity and race overlap a lot. In many cases, race as well as language, religion and ancestral homeland help to mark the boundaries of an ethnic group. The extent of racial homogeneity within an ethnic group can range from nearly complete to slight. But, the race factor helps to define an ethnic boundary only if it is correlated with ancestral culture or with lingual or religious differences. Such is the case, for example, among Asian Americans, Native Americans, African Americans and even among the Irish and the Kashmiris.
Ethnicity and Minority Group

The term ethnic group and minority too overlap to a large degree. As per the definition of the United Nations Sub-commission on Prevention and Protection of Minorities, “minorities are those non-dominant groups in a population which possess and wish to preserve stable ethnic, religious or linguistic traditions or characteristics markedly different from those of the rest of the population” (Quoted in Yinger, 21). It is important to make explicit what is implied by “non-dominant”. It implies five defining characteristics of minorities:

1. They are subordinate segments of complex state societies;

2. they have special physical or cultural traits that are held in low-esteem by the dominant segments of the society;

3. they are self-conscious units, bound together by the special traits that their members share and by the special disabilities which these bring;

4. membership in a minority is transmitted by a rule of descent; and

5. Minority peoples, by choice or necessity tend to marry within their group (Yinger 21).
Thus, we may say that a minority group is a group of population that lives under subjugation of whatsoever nature, real or perceived. Louis Wirth defines a minority as “a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who, therefore, regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination” (quoted in Yinger, 21).

From this angle, we see a lot of convergence between ethnicity and minority as ethnicity too, to a large extent, focuses on discrimination, ranging from the absence of full cultural freedom to massive disprivileged. Conversely, discrimination against minorities often happens due to one’s ethnic status. Although the definition of ‘minority’ includes ethnic elements, it cannot be substituted with ethnic group. But, a minority may mobilize or invent its ethnicity to oppose discrimination. Thus, minority status can lead to the assertion of the ethnicity as well as the other way round.

**Ethnicity and Religion**

Ethnicity and religion are intricately intertwined. Ethnicity has strong religious overtones. Mostly, boundaries of geography, nationality and religion tend to coincide. Some stark examples are
North and South of Ireland, Kashmir, India, Pakistan, Middle East etc. In all these cases, the boundaries between religion, ethnicity and nationality are blurred, giving rise to multi-layered conflicts. Religious differences are profoundly important precisely because they define ‘us’ against ‘them’ on the basis of worldview. Contrarily, there can be divergences in spite of sharing same geography and ethnicity. Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandits are ethnically same but it is their religion which defines their political aspirations. Sometimes, religion and ethnicity get intermingled. In Victorian England, the words Irish and Catholic were inseparable (Cheng 1995:16).

Nowhere, can an ethnic order be described and analyzed without reference to a religious factor. Most ethnic groups have a strong religious dimension. In fact, they are anchored in religion, but still subtle gaps exist between religion and ethnicity that make it possible to look at them separately. “Intermarriage, changes in social class, family tensions, generational life style changes, language shifts, secular acculturation and interaction, changes or lack of changes in the religions available -- all can influence the religion–ethnicity connection” (Yinger, 270).
There are many ethnic groups defined not only by religious identities but also by the variety of their cultural placement and geographical location. In other words, understanding of religion varies from culture to culture. Hinduism in Indonesia is strongly shaped by the indigenous and Buddhist religious traditions there. Similarly, almost all Muslim countries from Indonesia to the states of Mediterranean Africa contain non-Muslim ethnic groups and several Muslim groups that are ethnically distinct due to lingual, doctrinal and other cultural differences and different histories. Conversely, there are strong proportions of Muslim population in almost all countries across the globe, especially in India, the United States, Germany, France, Britain, Holland and other Western European countries. These factors indicate that ethnic orders of most of these societies in the world have a strong religious element. In fact, “religion is not a mere phenomenon, [but] a symbolic representation of a “true” and “basic causes” of ethnic conflicts for the earth’s soil or for control over territory (Yinger, 273). That is why, some of the raging conflicts in the world like those of Palestine, Kashmir, Ireland, Sri Lanka etc. draw their inspiration from their religious values in the pursuit of their political dreams. “Particularly for those whose lives are most
difficult, religious values and structures are involved in defining the terms of the struggle” (Yinger 273).

At another level, almost all Muslim countries are beset with internal conflicts -- be it the tension between Muslims and Christians in Lebanon after 1975, the Israeli offensive to protect what it call Jewish homeland, to Palestinian struggle to find a Palestinian homeland, or fighting among Sunnis and Shias in Iran–Iraq region. Even Afghanistan is beset with same problems. Pakistan has been witnessing a stark sharpening of various religio-ethnic identities for over two decades now. There is a lot of ethnic tension along the Baluch, Sindhi and non-Sindhi lines and there is equally a strong resentment against what is perceived to be the Punjabi domination.

There is a fundamental problem with most of the conflicts currently raging in the world and that is a dominating involvement of religion. Religion primordially unites people but, of late, it has become a major source of confrontation. Much of this confrontation is actually rooted in political factors. Identification with concerned religion is used to cover economic or geopolitical struggles to make the conflicts look intractable and uncompromising, the qualities which a secular conflict would lack.
Even normally, nationalisms identify with religion. If Pakistan, being constitutionally an Islamic state, has got identified with Islam, India, despite constitutionally being a secular state, has got identified with upper caste Hindu religion. The result is the articulation of the subaltern groups like Muslims, lower caste Hindus, Moost tribals and other disgruntled ethnic identities like Kashmiris.

For some people, religion is more important than ethnicity as a means of identifying themselves in relation to others. However, religion and ethnicity are complicatedly intertwined across the globe including in such socially and technologically advanced societies as the USA. In fact, sorting out this complicated relationship is one of the major challenges facing the contemporary world.

Ethnicity and Language

Another important dimension of ethnicity is its relation to language. The linguistic structure of a society determines, to a large extent, the relation of ethnicity, religion and conflict. Whether society is monolingual or multi-lingual determines the layers and the intensity of an ethnic conflict. Ethnic order and language structure are intricately intertwined. It is possible that
there is a monolingual society that has distinctive ethnic groups based on different ancestries, religions or races. Kashmir is a typical example of such a structure which is linguistically monolingual but diverse in terms of ancestries (native Kashmiris and the Kashmiris of Middle-Eastern and Central Asian origin), religion (Muslims, Pandits,) and races (Syed and non-Syeds, Afghans, Hanjis etc).

Language often accompanies ethnic differences. In fact, it is mostly language through which contending ethnic groups see each other only in distorted images. In times of conflict, counter languages are developed that are not used to communicate or converse but to attack and offend which too is communication in its own right. Halliday describes the “petty speech” of the counter culture of vagabonds in Elizabethan England, the argot of Calcutta underworld, and what he calls the anti-language used in Polish prisons, to note how efforts are made to develop a language of opposition, reversal, subversion and in fact, resistance (cited in Yinger, 310).

Conflictual ethnic relations are characterized by the persistent appearance and development of a counter-language which reveals the power structure in a society and is used by the
oppressed to construct a new reality. Some of the characteristics of a counter language have been limned as follows:

1. Counter-language is not a pejorative term. If the reality to which it is opposed is repugnant, one assesses the value of the counter language by seeking to discover the degree to which it is successful in changing that reality on protecting members of the anti-society from its injustices.

2. Counter-language is not a synonym for non language. It is probably no longer necessary to emphasize that non-standard modes of speech are full and complex language.

3. Empirically, counter languages are often mixed with sub-cultural dialects, and the protest elements are difficult to separate from the traditional elements. Sub-cultural dialect is ‘somebody’s’ mother tongue. An anti-language, however, is nobody’s mother tongue; it exists solely in the context of resocialization, and the reality it creates is inherently an alternative reality … a counter-reality, set up in opposition to some established norms” (Yinger 310).

It follows that if a counter-language is deemed abhorrent, it is of little value simply to try to teach a ‘nice’ language. The efforts
should be directed toward changing the abhorrent reality of which the counter-language is one manifestation.

Again, the ethnic language is not restricted to a particular script, medium or a way of communication. It also means symbols, motifs, myths, mythical lore, folklore and the allied modes which communicate through their own way. Even ethnic symbols carry a lot of meaning and signification and become a source of an effective and successful communication. Language of a particular ethnic context also means sensibility which may be different and distinct in its way and communicate to a particular audience which may be belonging to that particular ethnic identity. All these may be placed under the larger domain of an ethnicity-specific language which by all standards is more than a script.

**Functions of Ethnicity**

Ethnicity is not always bad. Nor are ethnic affiliations in any way sub-human which can solely be held responsible for the bloodbath that history is witness to. Ethnicity functions as a positive force too in the society in more than one way. Ethnic attachments are not necessarily malign. They become so in abnormal circumstances and proportions. Ethnicity provides diversity in the larger society and also creates sub-structures within that society that meet many
social functions. Ethnicity enriches culture and reinforces the social structure. Patterns of ethnic relationships constitute an important part of the fabric of the larger community. It also provides a greater degree of stability in personal and professional relationship. Processes of distinctive cultural traits keep cultural traditions alive, help organize social structure and offer opportunities for mobility. It enables people to identify themselves in the face of chaos of a large and impersonal society. Therefore, we may say that ethnicity can be turned into a creative force too in society (Greelay 1976: 45).

**Ethnicity and Postcoloniality**

By the end of the twentieth century, virtually all formerly colonized territories had become independent nations, but the effects of colonial rule continue at multiple levels. Life, in these ex-colonies, continues to be governed by identities -- racial, national, economic, literary etc invented under colonial yoke. Most of the ethnic struggles raging in these erstwhile colonies of the former empires and elsewhere are actually attempts to undo their imperial past and re-imagine and redesign their future.

Both coloniality and ethnicity, in tandem, render untenable the idea of English literature as originating in medieval England. It
renders suspect, in the words of Simon Gikandi, the common periodisation of English studies in epochs such as Medieval, Renaissance, Augustan or Victorian (Gikandi 2001: 648).

Postcolonial and ethnic/race studies have radically reconfigured the traditional discipline of English literature. The two terms pervade all aspects of literary study now. The developments have facilitated the inclusion of new geographical locations and suppressed narratives into the field of literary inquiry. In fact, they have redefined the traditional discipline by challenging its ethnocentric foundations. English literature is no more restricted to medieval classical texts now. The subject of English Literature is being rigorously questioned for its colonial and racist origins.

The English literature, too, is being investigated for its assumption of the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race. It was on account of the idea of an “Anglo-Saxon race” that the origins of the English literature were identified (Appiah 1992:48). Anglo-Saxon, thus, placed a major role in the establishment of the canon of literary works that are studied in both British and American colleges (Appiah 1992: 51-52).

We can easily find the idea of the race at the core of the modern idea of English literature. According to Appollo Amoko,
there are two dimensions to postcoloniality: historical and contemporary (Malpas and Wake ed. 2008). The historical critique proposes a re-reading of the canonical texts and paradigms of the so-called traditional English or Western literature from the standpoint of race and colonialism. Edward Said’s books *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) have proved foundational for this mode of postcolonial critique. A number of historical studies have recently emerged challenging the ethnocentric foundation of the English literature. These studies have sought to establish the origins of English literature elsewhere than early modern England. One of these studies is Gauri Vishwanathan’s *Masks of Conquest* (1989) whose contention is that, as an academic discipline, English literature traces its origins not to imperial England, but rather to colonial India.

The contemporary dimension of postcoloniality seeks reading global culture in the wake of colonialism. Perhaps, the earliest attempt to codify postcoloniality into a coherent theory in the context of English literature is found in *The Empire Writes Back*, a ground-breaking book by three Australian scholars, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, published in 1989. The three writers attempt to provide the rules for all the objects, operations, concepts and theoretical options for a field of study
they named ‘english literature’, the postcolonial writing from former British colonies, in contradiction to ‘English Literature’ the literature of Imperial England (Ashcroft et al 1989: 1-13). Such a general theory of ‘english literature’ would include the entirety of the English-speaking postcolonial world across vast historical, geographical and cultural contexts - African countries, Australia, Indian sub-continent, Sri Lanka, Canada, Caribbean countries, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Singapore and South Pacific countries. What holds together the diverse national contexts of educated literary consumption discussed by the three authors is the fact of British colonialism as well as the particular conception of national culture that is a product of that colonialism.

The central argument in *The Empire Writes Back* is the claim that formerly colonized people across the globe are writing new national cultures and writing back to the imperial centre in gestures of literary self-affirmation at once nationalist (in their specific expressions) and global (in their cumulative scope). In *The Empire Writes Back*, postcoloniality is not another name for the so-called third world but includes such developed and world-dominant countries as the United States, Canada and Australia. Nor is postcoloniality determined by race. ‘White’ settler communities are
conceived to be postcolonial in the same breath as ‘black’ and ‘brown’ ex-colonies in Africa and Asia.

Similarly, as against classical colonialism, ‘internal colonialism’ is still intact. Indigenous people, around the world, continue to remain victims of internal colonialism. Therefore, one of the issues concerning postcolonial discourse for indigenous people is its geographic and linguistic limitations. Postcolonial discourse says little about indigenous liberation struggles in Africa, Palestine, Central America, and many other places. Nor does it say much about Native Americans in the United States, or Aboriginies in Australia. Therefore, we can say that postcolonial theories deal with the Third World but say nothing about the Fourth World. ‘Third World’ as a collective term for developing non-European countries was first employed by Alfred Savvy in an article in 1952. The appellation ‘Fourth World’ was coined in Canada in 1970 to distinguish indigenous peoples around the planet from the Third World in whose countries they may be residing.

In the late nineteenth century, two disciplines, sociology and anthropology, emerged: the former studying the colonizing societies and the latter, the other. As the people of the ‘other’, the two thirds of the world, asserted their subjectivity, postmodernism, again a Western phenomenon, declared the end of the subjectivity.
Therefore, it has been said that by finding its theoretical roots in Western intellectual discourse, postcolonialism perpetuates the philosophical hegemony of the West, though inadvertently.

Indigenous cultures were differently shaped by their contact with dominant/European cultures. Colonialism and international movements of peoples have created new identities, such as pan-Indianism in the United States or ‘indigenism’ or ‘Fourth World’ identification, worldwide. Postcolonial critique is a useful tool analyzing native/ethnic literatures for deconstructing imposed identities.

**Ethnic Literature**

Ashcroft et al have identified four major models to account for the special character of the post-colonial texts:

1. national or regional models, which emphasize the distinctive features of the particular national or regional culture;

2. race-based models which identify certain shared characteristics across various national literatures, such as the common racial inheritance in literatures of the African diaspora addressed by the ‘Black writing’ ‘model;

3. comparative models of varying complexity which seek to account for particular linguistic, historical and cultural features across two or more post-colonial literatures; and
4. more comprehensive comparative models which argue for features such as hybridity and syncreticity as constitutive elements of all post-colonial literatures. (Ashcroft et al, 15)

The first two need to be elaborated as they are more relevant in the context of the present study.

The emergence of the American literature as independent from British literature, raised new awareness about the relationship between a locale and the literary sensibility and literary forms, specific to that locale and its people. The development of the distinct American literature, inspired, in a way, all following post-colonial writing. It also underscored the point that the post-colonial geography’s many linguistic and cultural traits depend upon its relationship with the colonizing power. This, subsequently brought to the fore the literary diversity even in the English writing, giving rise to the ‘newer’ literatures from countries such as Nigeria, Australia, and India. These literatures are not extensions of their source which is British literature but are assertions of their national aspirations and national identity. These developments displaced the centre from its dominating position, spawning the beginning of what Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka has characterized as the “process of self-apprehension” (Soyinka 1976: xi). Recent theories of a general post-colonial discourse question essentialist
formulations which may lead to nationalist and racist orthodoxies, but they do not deny the great importance to maintain each literature’s sense of specific difference. It is this sense of difference which constitutes each national literature’s mode of self-apprehension and its claim to be a self-constituting entity.

Ethnic literature will continue to have intellectual relevance as long as ethnicity remains an operative political and cultural category. The very fact that the term ethnic literature exists is a reflection of the importance of the ethnicity in our society.

Ethnic literature’s definition and perception changes with the political, social, and cultural change. Ethnic Literature actually refers to the body of written works by people from a distinctive culture, language, or religion. Afro-Caribbean and African writers like Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Chinua Achebe etc made significant early contributions to the theory and practice of ethnic criticism that explores the traditions of ethnic literary activity while critiquing the representations of ethnic identity as found within the majority culture. More recently, scholars and writers such as Henry Louis Gates, Toni Morrison, and Kwame Anthony Appiah have discussed the variations between the Euro-centric models and minority works of literature. They also offered new interpretive
strategies for understanding the ethnic traditions that have been historically marginalized by dominant cultures.

What constitutes the ethnic literature depends on multiple factors such as the writer's ethnic identity, the language of writing and the literary expression of ethnic themes. The relationship between ethnic literature and mainstream writing is very much in flux. The latter is increasingly defined in the light of ethnic diversity. This can be seen in re-evaluations of the separate Irish, Scottish and Welsh traditions in mainstream English writing; the increasing thematic significance of ethnicity in the works of contemporary writers; and the growing number of authors of ethnic descent who are making their mark in canonical English literature.

Ethnic literature is not meant for a particular ethnic group, though it may be ‘about’ the experiences particular to a certain marginalized group. Similarly, ethnic writers are no different from other writers in terms of why and how they write. The only difference is that their thematic focus is more on the experiences of segments of a society or nation that have been underrepresented in mainstream literature. Such a literature, mostly originating from trans-cultural and transnational categories, in the context of nationally defined categories, offers a challenging set of problems unique to them: they revolve around three fault-lines: ethnic,
political and linguistic (Hargreaves, retrieved). These strands overlap one another. In the cases of race and colour, the ethnic dimension is dominant. The political dimension is more visible in categories such as the “resistance literature” (Harlow 1987) and “subaltern studies” (Spivak 1988), while in other instances like that of “Francophone” literature, linguistic criteria are more prominent, though an ethnic dimension is present below the surface in all these categories.

Within the larger paradigm of so-called national literatures, “regional” literatures, i.e. those in languages relegated to the margins due to lack of recognition at national levels, were generally considered to be destined to die. Within Europe, sub-national/regional literatures were assumed to have little to contribute. During the European colonial domination, all other cultures were rejected as inherently inferior to the civilization of Europe. The colonized people were, by definition, excluded from the table of ‘world literature’.

African authors writing in the European languages were rejected for being entrenched in the African context and, thereby, lacking the universal relevance that the Western works were supposedly possessing. Even the civilizations in Asia with ancient literary traditions were rejected as being uncivilised. In fact, the
British parliamentarian Thomas Babington Macaulay once remarked that, “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia” (Macaulay 1957: 721).

Colonial conquests gave rise to what became generally known as colonial literature. Works in French or English by African or Asian writers were initially subsumed within the overall category of colonial literature or local variants such as “Anglo-Indian” or “Algérianiste” writing, but after the second World War, as anti-colonialism gained momentum, the ethnic origins of writers from colonized peoples were recognized in new categories such as “Negro” and “Negro-African” literature. Such categories drew on the concept of “Négritude”, first enunciated in the 1930s by the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire.

Decolonization was followed by the categories based on the political geography of the newly independent states which replaced the colonial system. Literature came to be defined by the origin of the geographical boundaries of a nation. Of late, the population mobility, transcending the national geographies, increasingly challenges the established boundaries and national literatures and realigns to create space for disempowered ethnic groups.
It is actually such a realignment, which in the early 1980s became known as “multiculturalism” and had been pressing for Blacks to be accorded greater recognition and equality within the United States. The descendants of forced migrants, they remained heavily marginalized within the U.S. and first united as “Black” and/or “Afro-Americans” but finally settled for the term “African American”.

With the assertion of the African Americans, American literature too had to expand to include works by African Americans as well as works by Latino and other minority ethnic writers. Later developments signified a more radical and trans-national shift in which African, Asian and other non-European cultures were taken far more seriously than in the past. Developments of this kind are part of a trend which is increasingly referred to as the “globalizing” of literary studies.

Postcolonialism played a key transitional role in this shift from the traditional Eurocentric approach towards a more global view of literature. In his “Introduction” to a special issue of PMLA on “The Globalizing of Literary Studies”, the guest editor, Giles Gunn, noted that “the language of literary study has changed – witness the new governance of such terms as hybridity, diaspora, transculturation, subaltern, hegemony, deterritorialization, rhizome,
mestizo, Eurocentrism, and “othering” (Gunn 2001: 18). Most of these terms cut across nationally defined categories, emphasizing processes of cultural mixing which open up new ethnic categories or which defy categorization altogether.

Looking in retrospect at the emergence of the ethnic literature as a vital branch of literature, its roots can be traced to the Native American tradition. Native American literature is unique in the sense that it “has voiced a different experience of American history” (Porter et al, 39). It conceptualises the past at the level of Native cultures which informs the literary consciousness of Native writers.

American Indian Literature revolves around certain cultural tropes specific to Native American population: imaginings, dislocation from their land after their encounter with colonial powers from across the Atlantic Ocean and the subsequent oppression they had to face, and flash back to their past and its oral narrative. American Indian tradition is the foundation for its literature which articulates Indian understanding of the fundamental truths and their relationship to the universe. It narrates not just a linear history of the past but a consciousness of a history that is perpetually recurring even in the present.
Traditional Indian lifeways “included a sense of the interconnectedness and relationship between all things, between animals, land, people and their language, and a requirement to seek individual, communal, and environmental balance (Porter et al 2005: 43). This lifestyle was actually a pursuit for balance in all spheres of life. It stood for an ecological living that respected the nature and the natural resources and emphasized their ecologically balanced use. It also had its own epistemological relation to the universe at large:

. . . . Indian literature informed by oral tradition operates within a different epistemology or way of knowing. Native American literature because it stimulates epistemological reconsideration and power of imaginative engagement with the processes of textual creation.

(Porter et al, 44)

But the colonial intervention from across the Atlantic ocean disrupted the whole fabric of the Indian society and eventually, led to its cultural death. The colonial powers were so dismissive of the native cultures that Columbus deemed them to have no conceptual language at all. He told the Spanish monarchs who were his employers that he would bring six Arawak natives to them so that they might learn to speak (Porter et al, 44). In fact, he renamed all the islands that he came across and all the indigenous people of the
Americas with one single collective descriptor, Indian, mistakenly believing that he had landed among islands off Asia, and at that time, India was a synonym for all of Asia, east of the river Indus (Porter et al, 44).

The colonizing powers of Spain, France and England which had occupied the native homelands believed that the European culture was superior to the Indian culture. They considered Indians culturally stagnant and, thus, embarked on the mission to maximize wealth and to spread the Christian faith among the natives. These steps eroded the traditional lifestyle of the natives. The European powers claimed the native land because it was not inhabited by Christians. Encroachment of Indian lands was legitimised for the sake of Christianity and civilisation. Dispossession of Indians from their land led to many acts conducted against Indians ostensibly “for their own good” to bring Indians closer to a “civilized” world.

As always, this dispossession spawned a radical literature that questioned the ways of whites towards the dispossessed and stood for the restoration of the old order which served as an inspiration for this fresh literary aesthetics among the natives. The first Indian autobiography appeared in 1829, giving a chilling account of the abuse the Pequot writer, William Apess, had endured at the hands of his alcoholic grandparents. Apess made it
clear in *A Son of the Forest* (1829) that he held the whites responsible for the blight alcoholism brought upon Indian life. Non-Indian trappers were also believed to have brought epidemic diseases to which native peoples had no resistance.

The colonial exploits of Spain, France, England, together with those of Holland and Russia, caused massive demographic, economic and ecological devastation within Indian homelands followed by the American Revolution which was an especially dark time for Indians. Most tribes fought for the British with the hope of protecting their freedom but the British eventually betrayed their Indian allies when they made peace with the thirteen colonies. Victorious Americans seized the opportunity to grab the land from the defeated Indians. Settlers created a mythology that consigned Indians to a “savage” past and total absence from their present through death or the complete assimilation. It was a wholly contradictory vision of “freedom,” since, as the Pequot writer William Apess put it, “the Revolution which enshrined republican principles in the American commonwealth, also excluded African Americans and Native Americans from their reach” (Porter et al 2005: 50). By 1847, George Copway (Ojibwe) had published one of the earliest Indian autobiographies, and by 1850, *The Traditional History and Characteristic Sketches of the Ojibway*
Nation, showing the central importance of place and oral tradition of the Ojibwe was published.

The US completed its continental spread through treaties with Britain in 1846, Mexico in 1848, and with the Gadsden Purchase of 1853. The oppression and cruelty experienced by Indians during this time was deeply encoded in the Cherokee writer John Rollin Ridge's 1854 western adventure, *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta, the Celebrated California Bandit*. The land acquisition was followed by a brutal educational programme, attacking the Indian values and annihilating their culture. As non-Indian Indian reformer, Helen Hunt Jackson, pointed out in 1881, the way in which Indians had been treated made the nineteenth century America's Century of Dishonour (Porter et al, 54).

In modern times, as the American life seemed increasingly hollow, ethnic cultures were seen having greater integrity. Reformers such as John Collier idealized Indian culture, especially the agricultural communities in New Mexico and Arizona, for the very qualities non-Indians had once debased Indians for. Community values, the centrality of religion, and a shared sense of past were now admired as positive.
There has been a lot of debate over the position of Native American Literature vis-a-vis other national and transnational literatures. However, some critics suggest that Native Americans live in a sort of paracolonialism, and, therefore, it is more appropriate to think of Indian literature as a part of the resistance literature, with attributes in common with the literatures of places like Palestine (Weaver 2001: 59).

A related question is that of the medium. It is often asked by writers and critics alike whether the English language is a suitable vehicle for Indian literature. In view of the fact that virtually all Native American literature having been written in English, some writers like John E. Smelcer suggest that, “it’s time for a canon in our grandmothers’ tongues” (Porter et al, 60). However, Leslie Marmon Silko has pointed out that Pueblo people at least “are more concerned with story and communication and less concerned with a particular language,” (Porter et al, 60). While the contributors to a recent volume of Native Women's writing are comfortable that English serves their purposes, since they argue they are reinventing the enemy's language (Porter et al, 60).

**African Context**

African context has greatly enriched the genre of the Ethnic Literature, adding to its cultural and ethnic content. It is very
difficult to define “African literature” in view of linguistic, ethnic and racial diversity that inhabits the African continent. Some of the issues confronting such an expression have been identified by Chinua Achebe in his defining essay “The African Writer and the English Language” as:

Was it literature produced in Africa or about Africa? Could African literature be on any subject, or must it have an African theme? Should it embrace the whole continent or south of the Sahara, or just black Africa? And then the question of language. Should it be in indigenous African languages or should it include Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Afrikaans, and so on?

(Quoted in Heinemann 1976: 56)

Achebe, in the same essay, discusses a conference which managed to give a tentative definition of the African literature as “Creative writing in which an African setting is authentically handled or to which experiences originating in Africa are integral” (cited in Heinemann 58). Therefore, “Conrad's Heart of Darkness qualifies as African literature while Graham Greene's Heart of the Matter fails because it could have been set anywhere outside Africa” (cited in Heinemann 58).
African literature means several things to several people. To some, it is a tool for the African’s articulation of his cultural heritage. To others, African literature means ‘a new literature of the world’ with its authentic and original genre, themes and message. To a few, it is simply a political document of protest against the assumptions of colonialism and imperialism as they relate to the world of the black man. To yet other people, African literature in all its ramifications represents a mere appendage to British or French literature since most of the African writers write chiefly in English or French. Western academics have divided African literature into traditional meaning, oral, and modern, meaning writing (Jones 1971: 1).

In Africa, Portuguese remains the national language of many nations including Angola, Ginea Bassau and Mozambique. Similarly, French remains a strong influence as it differentiates the French-speaking population from the English–speaking population and the literatures thereof. However, it was the English African literature which took on colonialism vitally. Imperial legacy, thus, complicates the analysis of the African literatures even after the colonialism is gone. Diverse literatures which are now clubbed together under the single larger rubric of the African literature are said to share specific characteristics: firstly, that Africa belongs to
one continent whose peoples share similarity of cultures and secondly, that the African peoples have undergone similar historical experiences of colonialism.

Since African cultures share an impressive degree of similarity due to the colonial experiences, some experts suggest that African literature must be seen as one literature, shaped by similar historical and cultural circumstances, despite the fact that there exists a lot of diversity – cultural, linguistic and ethnic within it.

Janheinz John has identified three national literatures in the African continent -- the Afro-Arab, written in the areas where the Islamic-Arabic culture dominates; the near-African, which is heir to traditional African literature, and the Western literature which reveals no African stylistic features or patterns of expression even if written by an African (retrieved). No matter what the definition of African literature might be, it needs a different set of critical criteria from that which the world has been using in relation to the criticism of European literatures. Every writer writes within the context of a literary tradition and his creative work can only be best assessed in the context of that tradition within which the writer operates. One is reminded of T.S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the
Individual Talent” (1919) which has the European literary tradition as its contextual reference.

Thus, we find that ethnicity implies languages indigenous to the ethnic groups. Ethnic literature would mean the literature of a cultural group which is identified with, among other things, one language. Spanish-American literature, Scandinavian-American literature and German-American literature are all ethnic literatures in the United States of America. They arose out of differing circumstances and the factor most common to them was the desire to use the medium of language to ensure continuity between these American groups and their ancestors in Europe.

It does not mean that an ethnic literature qualifies to be called that name simply because it is written in a language indigenous to an ethnic group. Though the language factor is important for determining the ethnic literature, ethnicity has to take into cognizance a number of other factors that are not entirely linguistics. R.P. Armstrong has argued that “any work executed by individuals informed by the unique values, perceptions, esthetics and whole system of social, political and economic structure of an ethnic group -- black or white, Muslim or Christian, educated or nearly illiterate -- contributes to and defines the literature of that group” (retrieved).
Ethnic literature has a strong connection to resistance in today’s context and it involves questions about subjectivity, identity and the practice of counter-hegemonic discourse. Such issues involve romanticizing the past and history in the name of fashioning the future. Edward Glissant urges that “… it is the function of contemporary counter-poetics to engender … tormented chronology: For history is not only absence for us. It is vertigo. The time that was never ours we must now possess. We do not see it stretch into our past and calmly take us into tomorrow, but it explodes in us as a compact mass, pushing through a dimension of emptiness where we must with difficulty and pain put it all back together” (Glissant 1989: 161-162).

The following chapter will delineate the evolution and growth of the genre of the short story with strong ethnic dimension to it as discussed above. The genre will be thoroughly analysed especially with reference to certain compact ethnic communities including Scotland which have been witness to ethnic resurgence of sorts.