CHAPTER II

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL REALISM AND ETHNIC IDENTITY

In the introduction of the thesis, the aims and objectives of the present study are clearly stated. One of the objectives of the present study is to discuss the terms Social Realism and Ethnic Identity and set the parameters in order to analyze the select short stories. The present chapter attempts to prepare a theoretical background of social realism and ethnic identity in the light of contemporary theories from the disciplines like political science, sociology, history and anthropology. The present chapter is divided in two main parts. The first part deals with the significant background necessary for the understanding of theoretical framework of social realism. This part consist of ‘concept of social realism’, ‘origin and development of social realism’, ‘a brief survey of social realism’, ‘definitions of social realism’, ‘some social realist’ and ‘the thematic aspect of social realism’ are discussed. The review of all these aspects will help to prepare a perceptive frame to understand the term and its use in the literature. In this chapter the term ‘social realism’ is discussed with the definitions of various literary critics and by illustrating it with the appropriate literary examples.

The second part deals with the analysis of the background essential for the understanding of the term ethnic identity. This part includes ‘the origin and development of ethnic identity’, ‘concept of ethnic identity’, ‘a brief survey of ethnic identity from origin to present day’, ‘some necessary definitions related to the terms and major contributors’ and ‘ the thematic element of ethnic identity’ are
studied. It discusses various aspects of the ethnic literature and draws certain thematic concerns of these authors. The analysis of the term ethnic identity requires the cross references of the discourses from the psychology and sociology. This analysis is helpful to understand the origins of Malamud’s literary motifs.

These two terms are necessary to specify how social realism and ethnic identity are conceptualized in this regard. These terms are associated with each other and ethnic identity can be considered under the title of Social realism but in the case of Malamud, it is necessary to define it separately. Both the concepts are now become a cliché which is overused in the literary criticism of the contemporary period and used to describe vast phenomena. Therefore, it becomes impossible to put forth the definitions of these terms which are accepted by all. These two areas are linked with each other as the literary practices are integrally connected with the dynamics of literary identity.

The chapter examines some of the fundamental assumptions of the traditional understanding of the links between society, ethnicity and literature. The investigations in the area of ethnic identity and the social realism provide us a valid ground of references which will help us to build the valid statement on Malamud’s method of social realism and thematic feature of ethnic identity. This study consists of a close reading of the select short stories of Malamud from the perspective of social realism and ethnic identity.

This theoretical frame is again necessary to investigate the problem of defining these terms and calculating their influence in the American literature. The arguments made in the discussion of social
realism and ethnic identity can be correlated with the discussion carried out regarding the Jewish literary tradition in the first chapter of the thesis. As Malamud is a Jewish writer, the Jews and Jewish history along with the culture, religion and politics gets prime importance in the analysis of his short stories. The theory of Ethnic identity which is intended to prepare in the present chapter is not just related with the Jews but it is a theory in general about the ethnic identity and its correlation with the literature. The Psychological theories of identities will be reviewed in order to perceive the tern and its various dimensions.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL REALISM:

The industrial revolution and the rise of middle class society in the beginning of 19th century, sting the interest in the depiction of the social reality in literature. The literature has shifted its focus from the elite life to the everyday working-class life. The novels written in this period depict the life of the protagonist which can be identified with the common man of the contemporary period. The thematic issues of this literature were not the romantic or adventurous one or the setting was not the utopian landscapes but on the contrary it was ordinary scene from the neighbourhood. The characters are neither belong to the aristocratic society nor they confront with any heroic, unbelievable deeds but they were simply common men of the society, who suppressed by the over burden of the power politics, economic crises and dynamics of culture. Before the rise of realism, literature was judgmental in approach as the authors of this tradition attempts to criticize the social scene and points out that what is wrong and what is write. This approach restricts them from the selection of the kaleidoscopic thematic aspects or the exploration of social scenes in
their full colours. Therefore their literary motifs were limited to the creation of utopian landscapes and demonstration of the ideals. This departure from an ostentatious and judgmental approach created new literary movement of realism.

The realism is not just a literary movement but it is a philosophical school which believes that man is a social animal and the social influences cannot be neglected in his life. This philosophy has its root in the modern method of thoughts. One can notice a drastic change in the every discipline of the world after the inception of Darwin’s theory of evolution in his book On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection (1859). This book shatters the religious beliefs of the man and makes him just a ‘higher biological unit’ without ‘spirit’. After the eradication of the abstract ideas like ‘spirit’ and ‘god’ what remains with man is a physical substance which he can evaluate on the ground of rationality. It brings a tremendous change in the fields of Art and Science. This is the beginning of the age of reason and the end of faith. These thoughts were further sustained by Sigmund Freud in his book The Interpretation of Dreams published in 1899. In his book Freud discards all the traditional divine ideas concerning to the dreams as he defines dreams as a manifestation of biological needs.

Therefore the conceptual framework of this term is connected with the discourses from biology, psychology and changing scenario of society and culture. This frame can be illustrated with the examples of literary works of the authors who are the significant advocates of the philosophy of realism. It attempts to acknowledge the relation of the literature, society and philosophy. The literature of realism is potential to explore the common experiences of the society and
therefore appeals universally. The life reflected in this fiction is a representative life of the world. The fiction of realism especially the novels reflect the life of slum areas, the personalities who are oppressed due to the harsher political situations and hostile economic conditions. Likewise the element of the subject matter these authors also focus the dispossessed and disenchanted underclass protagonists, who are heavily affected by the distorting cultural values and disappearing social morals. This is the reason that these literary enterprises gain world wide acclaim and critical recognition.

The term ‘Social realism’ was the combination of the two different terms—one is ‘social’ and second is ‘realism’. This combination signifies an artistic movement which focuses on the social injustice, racial discrimination and economic backwardness and draws unvarnished pictures of the life struggle of working class protagonists. These artists generally motivated to demonstrate the social and political protest with the sharp edge of satire.

Henry James, an American author and one of the key figures of 19th-century literary realism, in his essay ‘The Art of Fiction’ (1884) writes that:

I am far from intending by this to minimise the importance of exactness-of truth of detail. One can speak best from one’s own taste, and I may therefore venture to say that the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel—the merit on which all its other merits (including that conscious moral purpose of which Mr. Besant speaks) helplessly and submissively depend. If it be not there, they are all as
nothing, and if these be there, they owe their effect to the success with which the author has produced the illusion of life.

The statement can be seen as a temper of the American literary scene at the turn of the century. Henry James, points out the importance of truth in the creation of a fiction. He says that the literature can be worthwhile only with the air of reality. He further extends his opinion, in his literary creations and therefore named as one of the significant American Realists. Similar to the opinion of James, many other contemporary American authors adopts the aesthetics of realism and reflect the psychological and material realities of American life. Instead of passing on the judgments or evaluating the world view with the idealistic values, they attempts to make their art simulated with the real world.

In the initial phase of the movement it was recognized as the reaction against the romanticism. In this period which can be called as the Realistic Period of American literary History, the creative writers shift their focus from the romantic idealism to the realities of the Civil War, and effects of industrial inventions, and extensive westward expansion. They are now more interested into the assertion of the tensions and complex events of the time. Their narratives depict ‘a slice of life’ as it really is. The place, time and action seem real as they create the realistic space and readers get an experience of reading the history of a man of a particular period. The objectivity of the narration was maintained at any cost. The conflict between evil and good in the literary history of America good always triumph over evil but it may not happen in every case of the world and therefore, the realistic literature many times it was observed that evil wins in the
conflict. These authors believe that Nature is a powerful force beyond man’s control. Thus, the worlds reflected in these novels were not the goody-goody kind of affair but it is the harsher facts of modern man’s life.

Further, the term realism becomes more specific and well categorized according to its subject matter. In this contemporary period few authors were writing solely on the problems of economic inequality and the life of slum urban areas was known as the ‘social realists’. They treat their literature as a medium of the social awareness and social reform. They focus on the harsher realities of the world and criticizing the modern systems which are established on the name of development. The rise of the new disciplines like Psychology and the concept of unconscious are influential on the literature. Few authors of this period were concerned with the complex motivations and unconscious desires which are in fact beneath the surface of social life. These authors attempt to explore the multiple layers of the human psyche and use the knowledge of psychology. For example, Henry James in his novel *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) uses the sex imagery which is explored by Freud in his *The Interpretations of Dream*. These authors were categorized under the title of ‘Psychological Realism’. These authors were committed to document the social realities like inequality, shattered religious values, immorality and sex; on the other hand they were depicting the psychological realities like suppression, motivation and secrete desires.

Besides these academic changes the social changes were also very significant in the rise of realism in the literature. Before the Civil war America was a county of agricultural farms and the people live
life in the villages. But the industrial revolution took place after the Civil war changes the scene of American Society. The people turns towards the industrialization and instead of living a life of a farmer lives as a worker in the companies.

This industrialization opens the opportunities for the millions immigrants from Europe and Asia which settled in the urban centres at New York and San Francisco. With this immigration the cities were multiplied to provide the residence to the wealthy industrialists and the poor immigrant workers. The huge buildings at one side of the city and on the other hand the dirty slum areas. The diverse social, ethnic and cultural background creates the dynamic urban space in which the economic inequalities create the tensions between the classes which leads society towards the discrimination on the ground of economic status. The conscious authors of the period take the responsibility to document these changes in their creative enterprises. They depict how the rich industrialists were oppressing the poor, immigrant workers. The pathetic conditions of the slum areas were depicted with photographic narrative technique. In this period the dreamy, idealistic social landscapes were shattered and replaced with the dirty, poor social scene of the slums. This shift demands a new and valid narrative method. This need gave the birth to the technique of realism. It is not just a narrative method but it is a group of shared literary characteristics. These authors raise the social issues like oppression of women, prejudice against immigrants, and discrimination against racial minorities, unsafe housing conditions, and exploitation of labours.
A BRIEF SURVEY OF SOCIAL REALISM:

This brief survey of the tradition of American Realism will enable us to draw the features of the Realism in the American context. The authors of this period are interested in the depiction of the social reality which is kaleidoscopic in nature as it was constituted by the various social groups, economic classes, and ethnic societies and while doing so they are deploying the method of realism. The authors of this tradition are – Henry James, Booker T. Washington, Abraham Cahan, Edith Wharton, Edith Maud Eaton, W. E. B. Du Bois, Theodore Dreiser, and Anzia Yezierska. It cannot be claimed that the realism was a monopoly of a specific country or it is restricted in a particular century. Realism as literary movement begins in France with the writings of Gustave Flaubert (1821–1880) and Honoré de Balzac (1799–1850) which were sustained in England through the novels of George Eliot (1819–1880), and which was introduced in United States of America by the writings of William Dean Howells (1837–1920). All these authors, wherever they belong to, despite of their different cultural background they are interested in the depiction of the influence of the social class and ethnicity on urban life America. In their literature they use the commonplaces as their setting and the everyday event as their action. The dramatic twists were created with the help of the social problems faced by their characters.

Henry James (1843–1916) is a well known author of American literature for his contribution to the literature of realism. He writes not only the realistic novels but also prepares a critical background for the realism by his non-fictional writings. His fictional works create a realistic social scene and authenticated it with the description of the human psyche. Booker T. Washington (1856–1915) was an
African-American author, his autobiographies and critical essays focus the life of black immigrants in the America. The oppression of black slaves and their social status was the major subject matter of his writing and speeches. He is a social activist and a significant reformer in the American social history. Abraham Cahan (1860–1951) contributes to the literature of realism in America with his debuted novel *Yekl: A Tale of the New York Ghetto* (1896). It is a story of the graphic representation of cultural integration of Russo-Jewish immigrant. Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945) an American author who was generally considered as a member of naturalism school. His novels depict the socio-economic life of America. Edith Wharton (1862 –1937), with her elite heritage, wrote several novels and short stories while depicting ‘realistic, psycho-logically nuanced portraits of people’ representing the urban high society. She uses the dramatic irony to emphasis the reality of her contemporary period. Her novels *The House of Mirth* (1905) and *The Age of Innocence* (1920) are significant contribution to the American literature in which she criticizes several aspects of his society. In fact this period can be seen as the transition period in the literary history of America as many authors still linger into the romantic period of literature. Anzia Yezierska (1880-1970), another influential woman author of America, depicts the immigrant life of Jewish community at Manhattan. The issues depicted in her works are primarily the issues of the contemporary woman. The social, economic and political status of women is the major subject of her writing. Her works reflect her real life experiences and therefore counted under the title of realism. These two examples are sufficient to point out that how these authors, as they belong to different ethnic origin, depict the various problems of the society. The real picture of the elite high class society can be
observed in the writings of Wharton whereas the real picture of the immigrants can be seen in the short stories of Yezierska.

Thus, these authors were using the narrative style of Realism and depicting the thematic issues of the literary movement of realism. Their novels are written in such manner that they gave the impression of recording or reflecting faithfully an actual way of life.

**WHAT IS SOCIAL REALISM:**

A close reading of the literature available on the term ‘realism’, it becomes apparent that the term was confusingly used for two meanings. Few refer it as a narrative technique which denies the idealization, escapism and the extravert qualities of romantic literature and substituted it for the exploration of the actual problems of the society. It can be seen as a superficial signification of the term realism. The term has a social, cultural, poetical, historical and philosophical significance. Many modern critics insist that the realism is not just creating a simple life like situation in the novel but on the contrary it is an ideology which has affiliation with important philosophical movement humanism. In particular ‘Social Realism’ is an artistic movement especially in literature and visual art like painting. In this literary tradition authors attempt to deal with social, racial and economic injustice.

Many of the critics define it as a stylistic tool used to describe the black side of urban centres of development. They create the social and cultural portrait which unloving as it shows the social institutions like religion and marriage under the process of decline. The term Social Realism has its roots in the Russian beliefs that literature can
be used as a medium of social reform and the social revolution. These intellectuals believe on the power of ‘word’ and know the potentiality of the power of writer who can exhibit the reality of the social structure. Thus, the movement of Social realism not only in the context of America but in the context of world is influenced by the Russian revolution, Soviet communism and international Marxism. The authors of social realism in fact support these social movements by denouncing the repression of the poor workers and exploring the frustration of personal and collective aspirations in their works. As these social movements are concentrating on the welfare of the society and fights for an individual’s rights, they become very popular in all over the world. Thus, the Realism in literature was widely accepted as it is according to the need of the contemporary period.

In this art the major aim is to describe the social reality accurately. The influence of the social atmosphere over the individual’s life and the understanding of the emotional and intellectual responses of an individual to the outer world require the knowledge of the social, political and cultural scene of the period in which the action of the novel took place and the psychological motivations which are suppressed in the unconscious psyche of the man. Therefore, these authors can create the life with reality, omitting nothing that is ugly or painful, and idealizing nothing. The question of subjectivity and objectivity was also discussed and well debated in the context of the term reality in the literature of realism. The author of this tradition attempts to be an objective observer of the society who does not involve his ideals in his literary creations and therefore the method of realistic writer is photographic without any wonder, magic or mystery. Thus it is a manner of representing real life
literature and a literary movement with the specific thematic concerns and well-defined literary motifs. In short, realism is a tendency of expressing real life with all its facets.

**DEFINITION OF SOCIAL REALISM:**

In the discussion of the term ‘Realism’ and its use in the literature, it is necessary to discuss certain significant definitions of the term which will allow us to point out the characteristic features of realism. In such kind of literature, author represents real life accurately without idealization of everyday life. Encyclopaedia Britannica defines the term ‘social realism’ as:

Social realism is a trend in American art originating in about 1930 and referring in its narrowest sense of paintings dealing with social-protest themes. In a broader sense, the term may be taken to include the more general renderings of American life, usually categorized as American scene painting and regionalism, which may or may not manifest subtle critical comment. (82)

Khwaja Ahmad Aabhas, a fierce advocate of social realism, defines it,

Social realism, then, is the acute awareness of the social forces that surround the individual, their power to influence the lives of men and women— for better or for worse and the over-all interaction of the individual and the society. (98)

The definition focuses on the relation of individual and society. According to it literary realism means depicting the individual life in
the social context. The literature shows the influence of the society on an individual.

In *Dictionary of Literary Terms* Coles, has illustrated the term more elaborately with the significant literary examples, according to him:

Realism, in literature, is a manner and method of picturing life as it really is, untouched by idealism or romanticism. As a manner of writing, realism relies on the use of specific details to interpret life faithfully and objectively. In contrast to romance, this concerned with the bizarre and psychological in its approach to character, presenting the individual rather than the type. Often, fate plays a major role in the action. Realism became prominent in the English novel with such writers as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, Laurence Sterne, Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Anthony Trollope and William Makepeace Thackeray. (78)

Definition points out the significance of the ‘objectiveness’ of the text. In the traditional prose narratives, author’s always try to create an idealistic world in which every social evil and the voices of the characters are replaced by the idealistic social space and attribute their characters the heroic qualities. In the literary realism, the focus always lies on the objective description of the society as it is without asserting any idealistic feature. So the authors deal with what is there instead of what should be there.
In this connection it will be worthwhile to understand the opinions of Raymond Williams which he has discussed in his famous essay, ‘Realism and the Contemporary Novel’. He defines the term realism as:

To put it in more general terms, I mean this. There is a kind of novel which in fact creates and judges the quality of a whole way of living in terms of the qualities of persons. . . . The distinction of this tradition is that it offers a valuing creation of a whole way of life, a society, that is larger than any of the individuals composing it, and at the same time valuing creations of individual human beings, who while belonging to and affected by and helping to define this way of life, are also, in their own terms, absolute ends in themselves. Neither element, neither the society nor the individual, is there as a priority. The society is not a background against which the personal relationships are studied, nor are the individuals merely illustrations of aspects of the way of life. I call this the realistic tradition because it seems to me to represent a particular kind of mature realism in experience. This, I am saying, is how life is, how I see it when I am trying to see it whole. Every aspect of personal life is radically affected by the quality of the general life, and yet the general life is seen at its most important in completely personal terms. We have to attend with our whole senses to every aspect of the general life, yet the centre of value is always in the individual human person—not any one isolated person, but the many
persons who are the reality of the general life. Tolstoy and George Eliot, in particular, often said, in much these terms, that it was this view of life they were trying to realize. (22)

Williams focuses how the society plays a significant role in the life of an individual and therefore suggests that in a realistic narration the priority is neither society nor an individual. Further he sustains the argument that realism means not just “detailed stocking descriptions of shops or back-parlor or station waiting-rooms.”(22) The realistic novels can use it as setting of their action but the realistic description of these settings means not the essence of realism. Further in the essay he made a distinction between the social novel and personal novel. According to him in the social novel the focus of an author is on the accurate observation and description of the general life whereas in the personal novel the author accurately observes and describes persons. This comparison clearly points out that “each lacks a dimension, for the way of life is neither aggregation nor unit, but a whole invisible process” (22).

Further he proposes a valid set of characteristic features of a ‘realist work’. Williams argues that there are four criteria under which a realist narrative can be evaluated and they are common to all the forms of realism. According to him the first characteristic feature of a realist text is that it should be secular. It means that man should not be judged with the established superstitions and mysticism which surrounds him in the context of society and culture. This separation of man from the superstitions he propelled towards reason and logic. Therefore, according to him realist writing prefers to illustrate the ‘human truth’ instead of ‘divine truths’. The second criterion of
realistic novel according to him is that such novels should be grounded in the contemporary scenes in the terms of characters, setting and social issues. In third criterion he suggests that realist narrative should be the social extension. According to this criteria realist text tend to extend the range of characters and topics to include marginal or suppressed groups of the society. The forth criteria of the realist text is the ‘intention of the author’. These criteria are useful to understand the development realism from nineteenth century to the twentieth century.

THEMATIC ASPECT OF SOCIAL REALISM:

A brief review undertaken in the first chapter and the review of definitions taken into this chapter enables us to draw certain common thematic concerns of the tradition of American literature. The thematic issues like immigration, racism, cultural, class, humanism, economic condition, political ideology, unemployment, self identity and exclusion are used in these literary enterprises.

America has great tradition of depicting the life of immigrate personalities in literature. One should keep in mind that America was established by the explorers from various nations and therefore has a diversification in the culture and society. In the sixteenth century the land of America was explored by the various European countries like Spanish, Dutch, English, French, Swedish, Russian and Portuguese. These explorers establish their colonies and rule the land for the professional motifs. But soon with the declaration of independence in 1776 United States of America began as an independent Nation. The material prosperity, industrial development and the economic opportunities attract the millions of immigrants from all over the
world towards America. This immigration expands the cities and creates the slum areas that will provide the cheap accommodation. The life of an immigrant is a life of struggle for new opportunities and the challenge to integrate into the new culture. The creative and conscious minds of America attracted towards the life and issues of these migrated communities. The novels of social realism always depict the problems they have been facing in the interaction with the host society and integration in the host culture. Along with immigration all other sub-themes like dislocation, nostalgia, clash of culture, social discrimination, and political suppression accompanied in the American literature of Realism.

Another important theme of the realist literary tradition of America is ‘racism’. The history of America suggests that the issue of Racism has been a major issue since the colonial and the slave period and heavily entrenched across the land in the modern period. The inhuman treatment given to the Blacks and Jews, their pathetic, tragic conditions and the injustice they have to face have been in the centre of the tradition of Realism in American literature. The segregation of Black in America is a major issue for the authors like Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. The realistic presentation of their economic conditions and the accurate depiction of the social truth in literature are seen as a medium of protest against the injustice. The hostility and oppression of whites against the blacks was great and its effects are felt in barely all aspects of their life. This is the period in which everything conspired against personal freedom. This social truth appears as a major thematic issue of the contemporary American literature. With the major theme of racism all other themes related to it also gets the literary space. The themes like discrimination,
injustice, suppression, marginalization and the protest have got the significance as the major themes of the literature.

Besides these social issues another important aspect which gains much margin in American literature of realism is a ‘cultural’. The cultural issues always discussed in the American academics, always remains the centre of the sociological discourses and the major propaganda in American politics. The literature of realism cannot be separated itself from the issue of culture as it is part and parcel of the dynamics of culture. The integration of different races, ethnic origin, verity of cultural orientation and the hybridization are the major issues discussed in the realistic literature. The characters of these novels depict the effects of culture on the human life. The ‘cultural crises between the hosts and immigrants’ is a significant theme in the American literature.

The industrial revolution and vast migration from all over the world creates a class structure in America, which generates the class struggle in the society. The poor immigrant labours were exploited economically, socially and culturally. The metropolitan cities like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington, D. C., Toronto and Mexico City were expanded for these immigrants. Therefore these cities were divided into two parts, one with huge buildings exhibiting the material prosperity of America and second part is created with the tenements of immigrants showing their utter poverty. The rich industrialist becoming richer and richer day by day and the poor workers remain at the bottom of the social strata. This social situation is potential to create the literature. In the history of American literature further it is noticed that the class struggle appears as a major
thematic concern of the significant authors of the contemporary period.

In fact the literature of realism was emerged out of the philosophy of humanism. This is the period in which philosophy witnessed the rise of new school of humanism. The cultural diversity, different ethnic groups, fading national spirit and the discrimination and suppression of minorities requires a something which integrates all these things and can prove an effective remedy on the deceased social scenario. The humanistic approach emerged in this period paves a new path of integration by appealing that ‘we are humans’. This school of philosophy emphasizes the value of human beings and gives the importance to the rational thoughts instead of adherence to the religious principles. The philosophy believes on the welfare of man and attempts to eradicate the superstations from the society. The social realist authors use the principals of this movement as the major thematic concerns for their writing.

The depiction of economic condition is one of the favourite themes reflected in the realistic literature of America. The economic development and its effects on an individual’s or social life are subjects of their novel. The post-civil war novels of America draw their characters either from the highly rich society of industrialists or from the poor societies from slum areas. The struggle between the worker and the master becomes a common social scene reflected in this literature. The rise of Marxist philosophy can be seen as one of the important reason of the exploration of this struggle in the literature. The novelists are not interested with the romantic love stories but they are now very practical in the depiction of economic of the nation.
This practical approach of the novelists also makes them enable to depict the Political ideology of the contemporary period. Most of the times the characters of these novels were the caricature of the political personalities and the subjects of these novels are the political propagandas and the literary motif of them is the criticism of the political ideology. The new knowledge of the world and the new awareness due to the education make the society aware with the politics they are now keen with the policies were adopted by the politicians. This changing world view of the contemporary politics is reflected in the literature of realism. The sub themes like corruption, discrimination and the crises of the classes are generally observed in this kind of literature.

The vast migration also creates another burning problem in the society that is ‘unemployment’ which also emerges as one of the important theme in the literature of realism. The unemployed characters living in the slum areas and attempting to enter into the crime world is the famous equation generally found in the popular novels of the tradition. The sub-themes like poverty and crime world also gets the classic expressions in these novels.

The ‘identity crises’ is another significant thematic issue of the literature of realism in America. The characters of these novels always face the problem with the formulation of their identity. Most of the population of America is migrated from different countries of the world and therefore experiences two spaces coexisted in their mind. Their emotional attachment with their homeland and the practical relations with the host country create the problem in their identity formulation. The displacement of geographical location and estrangement with the culture are few of the significant sub-themes of
this main theme. Thus the thematic concern of the literature of realism is essentially a social as it explores the social issues and burning problems as their themes.
A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: ETHNIC IDENTITY:

‘Ethnicity’, ‘Ethnic Identity’ and ‘Racial conflict’ are the significant thematic issues reflected in the late 20th century when the light of enlightenment reaches at the homes of minority society. Ethnic identity remains a centre of attraction for the social scientists, psychologists and creative writers as it plays a significant role in the social, political, economic and more significantly cultural space of the contemporary period. The issue of ethnic identity was handled by both the ethnic groups who are in majority and excise the power of their social status on the minor ethnic groups who live their lives in the ditch of social injustice and illiteracy. Thus, as it becomes an important theme in the literature it emerges as a central issue of discussion in the literary criticism.

The issue of identity becomes so important even in the international politics that the social scientists have developed the theories of identities. In the history of American Literature, one can observe the categorization of the literature according to the author’s ethnic origin and his concern with the depiction of the problems and prospects of his ethnic group. Many of them are interested in creating their identity distinct from other ethnic groups and some of them use literature as a medium to attract the attention of the world towards the injustice they have been facing due to their ethnic origin. Among these categorizations, American Jewish literature has emerged as one of the most significant sub-category of the main-stream American Literature.

A brief overview of the ethnic literary traditions, it becomes clear that the imaginations of these authors are governed by the social
status they get due to their origin and the cultural difference they experiences in their lives.

The present study deals with the basic issue related to ethnic identities in the short stories of Bernard Malamud. As the focus of the study lies on a Jewish author Bernard Malamud, it is necessary here to discuss the theoretical frame of ethnic identity in the premises of the Jewish identity and its reflection into the American literature.

The anthropological studies in this regard suggest that the Jewish Ethnic group has maintained its ethnic and cultural identity even in the multicultural scenario of the contemporary period as they live together in the Jewish neighbourhoods of Brooklyn and have attempted to sustain the cultural codes and religious conducts. In the Jewish literary tradition explores the conflict between the Jews and non-Jews regarding the religion, culture and nationality emerge as a significant social issue. This argument can be illustrated through the analysis of Malamud’s short stories and novels as his works reveal the Jewish milieu and use a Jew character as a metaphor which stands for the pathetic social situation of the minority in general and the tragedy of the Jewish race in particular.

The Jewish literary tradition reveals the Jewish attitudes like their acceptance of suffering and leading the life with unshaken faith. In this literary tradition the exploration of the human sufferings become a central thematic issue which make us aware with the fact that the ‘suffering’ is one of the most fundamental facts of human life. In this sense the race of Jew represents the entire humanity and reflects the suffering as an essential condition of human existence. This representation of the Jewish understanding of the social structure
and the power relations between two races make this fiction complex in the thematic concerns and its realistic evocation of the characters and the naturalistic picturization of the Jewish society with all its cultural distinctness make it a significant document on the class struggle. Most of the writers from this tradition focus the problems of displacement faced by Jewish society and the social injustice they have to face in the world. Their characters are always the sensitive Jewish personalities who lack a stable sense of personal and cultural identity. Their displacement in different distinct cultures makes them to register their cultural identity and the problems of hybridization. As result of their displacement these characters victimized on the ground of race and national identities. Therefore panoramic thematic concerns like racism, identity, unemployment, poverty, the problems of metropolis, faith, culture, religion, sexism, class struggle and other forms of social oppression in their fictional world.

Even today, in a new age of high technology, race and ethnicity continue to influence social relations in a significant way. This is particularly true as far as some of the non-white racial or ethnic minorities are concerned, because irrespective of economic states, they are still subjected to some new and more subtle forms of social discrimination.

In the light of the theory of ‘melting pot’, the discussion of ethnic identity may seems invalid as the close reading of the theory suggests that the displaced societies adopt the cultural values of the host society and attempts to integrate into the host culture. Further in the history of critical discourses regarding the theories of cultural transmission, Milton Gordon once speaks about the model of acculturation which suggests that their interpersonal or inter-racial
relations remain in the frame of their original ethnic culture and therefore sustain their cultural identity. Besides this theory of acculturation, another important fact which denies the notion of melting pot is the historical documentation on the persecution of minorities. The history of the combat between the Christian and Jews reveals the discrimination of the Jewish minority on the ground of ethnic origin. The history of this combat reaches at its peak when millions of Jews were killed by Nazi’s during world war-II by using the inhuman method of concentration camps. The ideology of Hitler believes that Jews were inferior to their Aryan ethnic origin which is resulted in the killing of millions of innocent Jews.

Besides the biological traits, certain social and cultural practices also make the cultural groups distinct from each other. These practices are generally related with the religious rituals and the social festivals. These different social, religious and cultural ideologies create a unique ethnic identity with specific characteristics. Another factors like languages, history or ancestry, real or imagined religion, and styles of dress or adornment are also contribute to create an ethnic identity. The comparative study of Christian and Jew ethnic groups reveals that they are distinct in the cultural practices, religious rituals and social conducts. The modern notion of ‘nation’ constituted with the group of different ethnic origin. To illustrate this point one can use the examples of the United States and the former Soviet Union, as both these nations have large number of different ethnic groups. In the comparison with Britain, they contain vast variety of ethnic groups. The data available with the disciplines like Sociology and Anthropology reveals that more than hundred different ethnic
groups in the erstwhile USSR, twenty three of which have populations of a million or more.

Another important terminology, Plural societies, generally used in the Sociology and the Political science, is essential here to discuss in order to understand the modern notion of ‘ethnic group’. In the age of globalization, as we have already discussed in the initial part of this discussion, the world is emerging as a global village in which despite of industrialization and non-industrialization, the societies become plural societies. The definition of this term is that a society which is constituted with the large ethnic grouping coexisted in the same political and economic order. Though they are coexisted in a single frame of social and political order they maintain the distinction from one another. The examples of these societies can be seen as the countries of British Commonwealth in which the political unification imposed on the variety of pre-existing cultures. In these days as the globalization has played a significant role, every modern society becomes a ‘plural society’.

The sociological notion of ‘ethnic minority’ is used in order to describe the uneven population ratio of different ethnic groups. The reason of this minority can be seen as a migration of ethnic groups from one place to another and many times the reasons of these migrations are the war, entrepreneurship and several other natural disasters. These issues of migration and ethnic identity crises become more popular in the 20th century discourses written in the field of Sociology, Political Science and Economics. For instance, Leo Paul Dana in the forward of his book *Handbook of Research on Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship: A Co-Evolutionary View on Resource Management* (2007), writes:
What has changed markedly since the middle of the twentieth century is the scale of exchanges of peoples between countries, as travel has become easier and more affordable, and national economies more open and integrated. Thus many different ethnic minorities now exist in many different countries and their entrepreneurship can therefore have a significant influence on national economies. So it is important that we can understand what factors make for success. It would also be important to try to understand what factors make for success. It would also be important to try to understand what factors can minimize the negative political consequences that members of successfully entrepreneurial minorities might face. (xii)

The socio-economic changes and the increase of the significance in the national and regional politics, makes many researchers to probe into the matter. Besides this social changes, in the history of the discourses written in this direction points out another important issue of ‘Discrimination’. This matter of discrimination is a product of the power politics and the issue of host and guest culture. It is observed that the majority groups always suppress the minority by prohibiting them by the area of open opportunity and the basic rights to coexist in the host culture. This can be seen as one side of coin another side of this coin reveals that minority groups also attempt to maintain their distinctness and often tend to see themselves as ‘a people apart from the majority. A brief review of the minority reveals the prejudices of the majority as well as minority. Therefore the biological features, cultural differentness
and religious orientation make these ethnic groups to maintain the solidarity among them and be united against the majority forces.

All these facts regarding the ethnic groups can be generalized in the cases of different nations but in the case of America, it is somewhat different. As the America has a modern nation and as the American society was constituted with the ethnic groups, they have developed the identical habits which make them essentially an ‘American’. But in the mid-20th when the fact that the different cultures were submerged the authors of these groups become nostalgic about their culture and attempt to conserve it in their creative enterprise.

A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF ETHNIC IDENTITY:

Nelson in his book, The Greenwood Encyclopaedia of Multiethnic American Literature (2005), defines ethnic identity as:

. . . a general term, which is related to a series of markers that identify that person in terms of race, class, culture, gender, religion, ethnicity, and /or nationality. Ones identity is an important aspect of self, but its varied representation in all forms of literature, in different genres as well as different time periods ranging from ancient to contemporary settings, delineate how identity reflects and marks up ones culture. The theme of identity or identity-in-the-being is thus a predominant one in literature. Countless examples of thematic exploration of identity can be found in ancient, medieval, modern and postmodern literature. In the contemporary context of multiculturalism and transnational globalization, identity
assumes even more significant relevance in cultural and sociological as well as economic terms. (1042)

This discussion on the ethnic identity suggests that it has multidimensional layers which are rooted in the ethnic origin, nationality, religion, class and culture. The similar traits shared by group make them distinct from others and helps to constitute the unique identity and a common philosophical ground. In the history of ethnic minority, it can be observed that the social power is always confronted to the White ethnic group according to the Euro-western norms. But in the era of industrialization, radical hybridization and the globalization put the questions on the validity of these norms and attempt to establish new set of social structure. This new perspective to the age old term of ethnicity requires comprehension and the illustration which is attempted in this present research work as in the theory the discourses form the sociology, economics, international politics and cultural studies have been referred and the facts are illustrated with the examples from literature.


. . . ethnic identity is an important part of the human experience, but interestingly, it is a relatively new area of study for researchers. Ethnicity refers to an individual’s membership in a social group sharing a common ancestral heritage. This ancestral heritage is multidimensional in nature and involves the biological, cultural, social and psychological domains of life. The psychological
dimension of ethnicity is perhaps the most important because regardless of variations in the biological, cultural, and social domains, if a person self-identifies as a member of a particular ethnic group, then he or she is willing to be perceived and treated as a member of that group. Thus, self-ascribed and other-ascribed ethnic labels are the overt manifestations of individual’s identification with a particular ethnicity. (11)

While illustrating the previous definition of Nelson the term ‘Euro-centric norms’ is referred which points towards the traditional European mentality. As the Europe remain always in the centre of physical prosperity and the political power they create the norms of social hierarchy according to their social interest. As we have seen that these norms are now updates and it requires new illustration the discussion made by Joshua A. Fishman and Ofelia Garcia are worthwhile to discuss.

This discussion can be seen as a new light to the traditional notion of ethnic group and ethnic identity. In the thesis in the research filed of American literary criticism it is necessary to have a discussion on the specific social scene of America. In the contemporary multicultural scenario of United States ethnic identity has posited different ways of perceiving ethnicity according to different perceptions about American identity itself. A predominant question about identity in ethnic American literature is whether it is changeable or fixed. In this connection various critical questions were posed regarding the American identity in the light of the ethnic origin and the political orientation. What are the features which make a man an American are discussed in the sociological and political
discourses. The question of identity here not only remains related to the ethnic origin but it is related to the politics, economics and culture. The question of acceptance, critical and social recognition gets prime importance in the cases of the American author who attempts foster the non-American ideology or non-American socio-cultural conducts. In many cases it is observed that these authors in the nostalgic mood attempt to reflect their roots which are different from the assimilated identical habits of American society. A history of colonization, enslavement, racial discrimination, and immigration in the united states reveals the characterized by the conglomeration of diverse cultures and ethnicities amidst a rich mixture of language, norms, religions, and values and offers the world a ‘crossroad culture’, so to speak.

Thus, the traditional notion of Ethnic identity which tends to change is a sense of sharing an ethnic heritage comprising common ancestry, shared beliefs, and lifestyles. In the contemporary America which is generally defined the land of immigrants, becoming an American is not just leaving the native culture but a person should become a part of newly developed American culture. Thus important questions arise regarding to how much of one’s ethnic background should be abandoned in order to accept or to become truly American. Therefore it is observed in American Literature that it becomes equally important to create an identity that is both ethnic and American simultaneously.

In order to sustaining the ethnic identity and conserve the ethnic culture, these American authors are using the historical references and focusing the difference of the contemporary culture and the native codes. Literary representations of ethnic identity are thus manifested
through historical and sociological factors of the contemporary periods and only limited to the influences of it on the contemporary culture. This fact is not only related with the America and American literature but it can be observed in Asia and other African American nations. The issues of culture and identity were always reflected on the background of the oppression and the political passion. In African American literature it was always reflected in relation to society oppressive systems, such as slavery, and racial as well as gender discrimination. In the writings of Meena Alexander, Margaret Dilloway, Richard E. Kim, Amy Tan and Toshio Mori the ethnic identity is drawn upon the experience of discrimination faced through exclusionary, prohibitive immigration laws, as well as racial and gender discrimination.

David Levinson, Karen Christensen and David Levinson, in his book, *Encyclopaedia of Community: From the Village to the Virtual World* (2003), writes that:

. . . any discussion seeking to illuminate our understanding of the between ethnicity and community is a risky undertaking. It is a discussion fraught with both hazards and possibilities. The core issue is that both ethnicity and community are soft and fluid concepts ideas and realities that are typically easy to recognize when one sees or experiences them in the real world but that are far more difficult to define and measure in the abstract. In addition, ethnicity and community, as concepts for study, are not the “intellectual property” of any single discipline a reality that has left us with a wide range of definition, perspectives, research methods, study populations, and
research conclusion. . . . By contrast, many sociologists and political scientists, who have traditionally faced on ethnicity in the united state, are more comfortable with a rational choice perspective in which ethnic identity is viewed as a strategy for achieving political and economic goals in a multiethnic society. Still other experts see at least some ethnic identities as “invented tradition”, reflecting a longing for a romanticized past that has tenuous relation to the realities of the present. (465)

This brief overview of the literature available on the ethnic identity enables us to define the term. In this connection it will worthwhile to have few definitions of ‘ethnic identity’ from the discipline of cultural studies.

**WHAT IS ETHNIC IDENTITY**

According to *Encyclopaedia of Identity, volume 1* by Ronald I. Jackson in his book he writes concerning ethnic identity that ethnicity and identity are closely associated in popular and academic discussions. According to him ethnicity is a way to identify how individuals are grouped or group themselves according to some shared national or regional heritage, religion, class, language, or culture. The definitions of ethnic identity suggests that the term refers a group of people who share the common ethnic origin, certain biological features, specific religious ideology and certain cultural conducts. It is in fact a way to differentiate one group from another for political, cultural, social, class, or racial reason.

Many of the discourses the term ethnicity is confused and used as synonym for the notion of race. Therefore a misunderstanding in
this area can be observed that the ethnicity can be thought to refer to his or her race. The argument can be illustrated with the example of United States where the common assumption regarding the Black race is that a black colour automatically means that one is to be identified as being African American ethnicity. However, as being Black Caribbean Americans of African descent identify themselves with a difference in national origins Jamaican, Guyanese, Trinidadian, Barbadians, history, or someone might be referred to as while but identifies himself or herself as Italian American, Polish American, or Russian American but not African American. Therefore the ethnic group cannot be delimited with the geographical borders, nationality, ethnic origin and nor even the political ideology. The result of it is that the issue of grouping and its criteria remain the subject debate for several centuries. This debate becomes more sever when it was placed in the context of migration, immigration, diversity, and multiculturalism, racial and post racial identity, and citizenship. In the recent years these issues have catch the attention of media and registered a need of separate discipline.


The study of ethnicity occupies a prominent place on research agendas written the disciplines of history and the social science, including archaeology. Ethnicity refers to aspect of ‘relationships between groups which consider themselves and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive’. Ethnic identity can be experienced inter alia in language, material culture, oral tradition and ritual
acts. European archaeology has a long tradition of using ethnic concepts to explain regional patterns and changes in material culture. For a long time, however, this practice was based on false assumptions. In keeping with a normative concept of culture, ethnic groups were depicted as homogeneous, static units, whose specific identity was reflected in material culture. This view of ethnicity, which has its origins in the 19th century, has been heavily criticized by archaeologists, who use insights from the fields of anthropology sociology. (1)

The present definition can be seen as a solution to the problem of defining the ethnic identity on the ground of certain criterions which are discarded in the previous one. The regional pattern and the notion of a communal past are held important in the establishment of ethnic identity. Therefore, in the light of this definition the misunderstanding that Black means South African can be eradicated and more clear and practically valid notion of the ethnic identity can be developed. An idiom of kinship is often used to emphasize the social cohesion of a group. A further key aspect of establishing an ethnic identity is their potential to define and legitimize territorial claims. The history of these migrated groups always focuses on how ancestries had acquired a particular territory in the past and had subsequently passed on their rights to the present inhabitants. Thus, now it become clear that Ethnic categorization and the notion of identity cannot be studied in the isolation as it requires the reference of related facts of their interaction with the society and their integration with the culture. In the premises of social structure and under the light of minority and majority relations, the term ethnic identity becomes a complex
phenomena which is not only related to the ethnic origin or biological similarities but on the broader perspective it is related with the social and cultural ideology of the group.

Therefore, defining an Ethnic identity becomes a subjective affair as the considering factors vary from person to person and an individual belongs to number of overlapping identity groups and exhibiting the socio-cultural traits. Thus the argument clearly suggests that as the identity is a matter of constituting different categories into the unique identity it remains ‘situational construct’. Besides these facts the notion of Ethnic identity is a dynamic phenomenon as it changes over the time and according to the generation. Thus, above definition reveals that the ethnic origin and the material identity go in hand in hand in the creation of identity.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF ETHNIC IDENTITY:

In the *Encyclopaedia of Applied Developmental Science* (2004) Celia B. Fisher and Richard M. Lerner discuss the etymological origin of the term as:

The construct ethnic identity can be best understood through an examination of its etymological origins. The term ethnic has Latin and Greek origins, *ethnicus* and *ethnikas*, both meaning “nation”. It can and has been used historically to refer to people as heathens. Ethos, in Greek, means “custom”, “disposition”, or “trait”. Ethnikas and ethos taken together therefore can mean a band of people nation living together who share and acknowledge common customs. The second part of construct, identity, has Latin origins and is derived from
the word identities; the word is formed from idem, meaning “same”. (417)

Thus, this etymological origin suggests that the notion of ethnic means a kind of sameness or likeliness. It means the term suggests a group of people who shares common biological, social, cultural and religious traits. Thus the combination of the term ‘identity’ and ‘ethnic’ signifies, “the sameness of a band or nation of people who share common customs, tradition, historical experiences, and in some instances geographical residences.” (417)


The concept of ethnicity is narrower than the concept of culture, and although they are related, it is not a one-to-one relationship. Ethnic identity formation and development is influenced by membership in an ethnic group identified as a distinctive social group living under the shaping influence of a common culture. Therefore, knowledge of culture is critical to the study of ethnic identity. Research and scholarship, void of critical cultural dimensions, such as the sociopolitical and psychological context in which cultural groups operate, the behavioral patterns that help individuals maintain their ethnic identity as well as survive in hostile environments, and the attention to distinctive, particular worldviews found in various cultural groups is problematic. (1984)
In the light of the opposition of the nature and culture, one can say that the ethnic is a term which is delimited with the traits of biology and can be explored in the premises of the natural theory of evolution, on the other hand the culture is essential a human term which is a creation of the human brain. But the theories developed in the field of anthropology and the cultural studies suggest that though these terms are not related with each other directly they are influential in the perception of this term. The theorist who are relying on the past theories of evolution, misunderstood the term as a static entity as it is now proved in the light of the modern theories that the notion is a lifelong process.

Herbert Gans’s discussion of the term suggest that the identity in the social and cultural context is no longer a useful term as it used as a popular cliché in order to indicate the vague notions from the terminologies used in the cultural and sociological studies. This discussion suggests that the notion is an ever-changing construct and difficult catch in the exact words.

**DEFINITION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY:**

In the discussion of the term it will be worthwhile to discuss the significant definitions of the term. Ethnic identity was defined in many ways in the research reviewed. The fact that there is no widely agreed on definition of ethnic identity is indicative of confusion about the topic. A surprising number of the articles reviewed provided no explicit definition of the construct. The definitions that were given reflected quite different understandings or emphases regarding what is meant by ethnic identity.
Tajfel (1981) in his article defines ethnic identity as a part of social identity, he writes: “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group or groups together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (67) Another significant definition of Ethnicity is of M. Blumer, who defines ethnic identity as:

a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared past and cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements which define the group’s identity, such as kinship, religion, language, shared territory, nationality or physical appearance”. Ethnic identity is fundamental and composed of primordial affinities and attachments. On this account, it should be noted that any society which becomes dominant ceases to be “ethnic” and becomes the “norm”. (78)

This definition points out the difference between the ethnicity and race. Former one is related with the common traits of biology on the other hand the later one has broader scope as it compiles the cultural and social impulses. Therefore ethnic identity means not just a group with common traits but it is a feeling shared by the group. The membership of this group is not just related to the ethnic origin but it is related to one’s thinking, perceptions, feelings, and behaviour. The ethnic group always claims a shared heritage and a common history. In this sense an ethnic identity means not an identity of an individual but it is an identity of the group which influences each other reciprocally. This difference between the race and ethnicity is clearly illustrated in Rosa Hernandez Sheets, Rosa

A collectively within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one of more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood. Examples of such symbolic element are: kinship patterns, physical contiguity as in localism or sectionalism, religions affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotype features, or any combination of these. A necessary accompaniment is some consciousness of kind among members of the group. (93)

Jones, S. in his book *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present* (1997) defines the terms like ethnic identity, ethnic group and ethnicity as:

Ethnic identity: that aspect of a person’s self-conceptualization which results from identification with a broader group in opposition to others on the basis of perceived cultural differentiation and/or common descent.

Ethnic group: any group of people who set themselves apart and/or are set apart by others with whom they interact or co-exist on the basis of their perceptions of cultural differentiation and/or common descent.
Ethnicity: all those social and psychological phenomena associated with a culturally constructed group identity as defined above. The concept of ethnicity focuses on the ways in which social and cultural processes intersect with one another in the identification of, and interaction between, ethnic groups. (1)

These definitions make our understanding crystal clear. It becomes clear that an ethnic identity was formulated when an individual identifies and affiliates with a particular ethnic group. Further in the book it is cleared that this personal and group identification has emotional, behavioral, and cognitive impulses which emerge as a whole which on the contrary can be categorized.

Celia B. Fisher, Richard M. Lerner in his book, *Encyclopaedia of Applied Developmental Science*, gives modern definitions of ethnic identity as it considers the modern theories of it. According to this definition ‘ethnic identity varies according to the underlying theory embraced by researchers and scholars intent on resolving its conceptual meaning’. This argument is valid as there are several definitions available of a single term and there is void of a widely accepted definition.

Ethnic identity and its reflection in the literature are always under the influence of politics of race. The nostalgia about home and the emotional attachment to the ancestral socio-cultural conducts are always in the centre of the thematic concerns of these authors. As they are thinking about their past and as contemplating on the present they have also a secrete motif of the conservation of ethnic roots. The characters, families and the social issues are the issues of this
minority groups. Therefore a literature is a minority literature not just because it is written by an author belongs to the minority community but it is named as so due to its certain characteristic features.

Yuet Cheung (1993) define ethnic identification as “the psychological attachment to an ethnic group or heritage” (1216) and thus centres the construct in the domain of self-perception. The Netherlands-based sociologist Sawitri Saharso (1989) extends the definition to include social processes that involve ones choice of friends, selection of a future partner, and perception of one’s life chances, and the reactions of others in ones social environment. Both definitions involve boundaries whereby one makes a distinction between self and other, Saharso’s definition extents the others boundary to include an attribution component.

An individual may strongly identify psychologically with an ethnic group; however, the strength and authenticity of the identity is contingent on the acceptance and acknowledgment of in-group and out group members. Saharso’s definition is consistent with the writings of the sociologist Fredrik Barth (1969), who argued that ethnic identity is a means to create boundaries that enable groups to distance themselves from one another. Barth was quite forceful about his position, as he strongly maintained that the cultural stuff that encloses it.

THEMATIC ASPECTS OF ETHNIC IDENTITY:

A brief review of the minority literature reveals that there are many thematic aspects which are directly related with the ethnic identity. As these themes are related to the culture, religion or a geographical location in which these ethnic groups are settled. For
instance the authors taking Israel as a setting and explores feelings of Diaspora experienced by the minority immigrants. These authors make their literature essentially ethnic writing as they use issues relevant for Jewish people, use of religious symbols, and Hebrew and Yiddish languages in their writing. The Jewish identity is inseparable from the Jewish culture, which is in turn inseparable from religion and therefore the literature of this community cannot exclude the religious and cultural impulses. Judaism is a religion connected to their past memories and the present identity. In the modern political scenario, it is their religion which bind them as a group and confront them the political power.

In the connection of the thematic aspects of the Jewish ethnic literature it is necessary to understand certain key terms such as Diasporas, exile, and immigrant. It is helpful in understanding the dynamic of the way a particular ethnic identity is represented in ethnic American literature. The dictionary and encyclopaedia meaning of the word Diaspora is a term originally used to refer to the dispersion of Jews outside of Israel when they were exiled to Babylonia. On a broader level the feeling of rootlessness and nostalgia of homeland can be termed as a diasporic. The experience of Diaspora thus entails a condition of living in two spaces at the same time, one is the space in which they now exist and the second which exist in their memories. The space existed in their memories strongly influences the present real space in which they have their real identity.

All over the world these expatriate communities share common Diaspora feelings and collective memory or vision of their ancestral homeland. This differentness in their culture and the different social
ideology based under their social interaction make them feel a sense of alienation and prejudice caused by their view that they will never be fully accepted by the host country where they now live. As this sense of aloofness their emotional bonds are more with the original homeland as they hope that they will return there eventually. This belief and hope make their bond strong and make them believe in collective commitment to maintenance and prosperity of the original homeland.

The feeling of exile is one of the significant thematic concerns of the Diasporic literature as the feeling of exile becomes more painful and traumatic emotional one. This painful feeling make them create a simulated space of homeland in the memories and let them reflect in their literature. This simulated space makes them enable to cope with the present life in the foreign land and at the same time becomes an obstacle in their total integration into the host culture. In this sense they make an effort to maintain a home outside home in order to cope with the situation of painful sense of homelessness.

In the literature of Jewish ethnicity the themes of geographical displacement and cultural dislocation emerge as a significant feature of their fiction. The emigrant point of view generates these two feelings which again create a problem with their integration. The image of home as their ancestral home land and its culture always occupies a significant place in their creative enterprises. Even the exploration of the host land is also put into the comparison of their home land and always shown as emotionally detached and hostile land of dangers.
The above discussion suggests that the ethnic identity in the contemporary social scene is constituted by various psychological, biological, political and even geographical entities. Due to the immigration they have to face various problems which become an important feature of the ethnic literature. For instance, their literature explores their struggle against invasion, colonialism, and political oppression. In this age of globalization the immigrants conceptualize and express their identities in terms of individuality and choice rather than those of sociology as in the case of exile or Diaspora. Thus the age-old problem of the Diaspora communities now gets the solution of global village which they accept as their homeland. Thus the immigrants learn to see and interact with the world and interpret it rather than relinquish it for the sake of their original homeland.

Speaking in the term of thematic concerns of the Jewish American Literature especially is thus represented as an experience of Diaspora, exile, or migration. Thus, Ethnic American literature deals with issues of identity as movement in relation to an American mainstream. Thus the characters of this literature are seen desperate in acquiring the meaning as a minority and the action of their fiction is always the struggle with their circumstance of cultural displacement and their effort to learn to maintain a balance between an ethnic heritage of the past and their identities adapting to the mainstream culture in their dislocated geography.