

- Race & ethnicity are used in sociological discourse to understand various social structures of power, inequality, stratification, etc.
- Though, the concepts like race & ethnicity are considered as biological but such concepts have deeper meanings & social constructions.
- Moreover, they are not just social constructions; rather they lead to creation of various identities and marginalization of different social groups.

DEFINING RACE

- In a common parlance race is understood as the external physical features of various human beings whose categorization depends upon such features like the skin colour, facial features, height, etc.
- Race is thus a category of human beings due to some of the physical features including skin colour and other facial features.
- Most of the people of Europe are largely having fair skin whereas people of Africa are often having black skin.
- Apart from the skin colour, some people have curly hair, some have straight hair, some people are short and some are relatively taller.
- Similarly, there are differences in shape & size of nose, lips, etc.
- Depending upon these differences people are clubbed in various groups popularly known as race, such as, Caucasian, Mongoloid, Negroid, etc.
- These categories are considered as biological i.e. they are inherited, hence widely race is regarded as a biological category.
- Thus, a racial group is described as a group having similar physical traits.
- It is a condition where a group sees similar characteristics between themselves & sees others as different.
- Such kinds of divisions were made basically by the physical anthropologists during 18th century & considered as scientific classifications of human beings.
- The idea of race emerged during 18th & 19th century when European countries started colonising the rest of the world.
- Such categorization helped to establish the whites Men supremacy over other populations, domination and conquest.
- The ethnocentrism of the whites prevented them to look humans as species rather than categorizing them in terms of physical appearances.
- Along with the physical features most of the times behavioral characteristics were also added to various races.

- Frederick Farrar in 1866 lectured on the “Aptitude of Races” where he divided people into 3 groups based on civilization.
 - Savage : All Africans, indigenous people, people of color (with the exception of the Chinese).
 - Semi savage : Chinese who were once savage type but now well civilized.
 - Civilized : European, Aryan and Semitic peoples (Afro-Asiatic language family that includes Hebrew, Aramaic, Arabic & Amharic).
- He also said that Americans are ill-tempered, subduable, Europeans are serious and strong, Asians are melancholy and greedy, and the African are listless and lazy.
- Though, race is considered to be biological but in sociological understanding, race is considered as a social construction rather than biological.
- Many authors consider race as a category of social stratification
- Smedley (1998) argues that till 17th century there was no historical record that the idea of race existed.
- He further argues that race is “premier source of human identity” (Smedley, 1998, p. 690).
- It was a mere classificatory term like kind, type, or even breed, or stock, & it had no clear meaning until the eighteenth century.
- The English began to have wider experiences with varied populations and gradually developed attitudes and beliefs that had not appeared before in Western history.
- This reflected a new kind of understanding & interpretation of human difference.”
- The Europeans colonized parts of Africa, Asia and other countries & justified their claim of superiority over others.
- They legitimized the slavery of the blacks, supremacy and various other rights of the whites.
- Such beliefs of racial superiority of the whites they believed gave them the rights to colonise other populations.
- The racial distinctions and the physical features normalized the idea that whites are superior and others are lesser form of human beings.

RACE : A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

- It was presumed that race is biological, historical and scientific but nowadays it is considered as a myth.
- There are no special genetic markers to differentiate people in the name of race

- The diversity of people many a times are influenced by the geographical locations. So, there is no biological basis of classifying people.
- There is a social basis of their classification. It has its own history and politics of classifying people.
- The creation of racial identities is a process of creation of hierarchies between people, thereby, some groups enjoy power and privileges.

RACISM

- The humans originated in Africa & migrated to different geographical locations in various phases of history.
- People adopted the geographical differences and adopted the favorable traits suitable in these particular environments.
- Moreover, there is so much of intermixing between people that biological category has already been lost.
- During the 18th and 19th century the colonial powers in different places of the world used racism to establish their supremacy.
- They took the help of religion and science to establish their racial supremacy and differences.
- Darwin's theory of "survival of the fittest" was used by the colonial powers to justify their genocide and racism.
- They considered themselves stronger than others and hence, they legitimized their supremacy of power and race.
- The colonized also legitimized slavery & subordination of the Blacks and other colonized people.
- Race is a process of creation of 'othering', i.e. the process by which you separate yourself from other people in terms of superiority and inferiority.
- It also creates various kinds of stereotypes in our society.
- Thus, the idea of race was not scientific rather a process of racialization of groups.
- The race was a social construction where cultural meaning is attached or imposed on it.
- Even the very idea of race has changed over time.
- For example, in Brazil and other countries, the class position is more important than the colour.
- Even the inter-racial marriages are taking place within the white dominated countries.

ETHNICITY

- The word ethnic is derived from the Greek word ethnos meaning nation which is not depicted as a political entity but as a unit of persons with common blood or descent.
- Its adjectival form ethnikos used in Latin as ethnicus referred to heathens, the 'others' who did not share the faith.
- In English, the term referred for a long time to some one who was neither Christian nor Jew, i.e., a pagan or heathen.

- By the twentieth century its meaning changed again with reassertion of its Greek roots indicating the end of the 'them vs us' idea.
- Now it is used as a particular way to define not only others but also ourselves (Cornell and Hartmann, 1998).
- Oommen (1990) using the French version of ethnics, namely, ethnies defines them as a people characterised by a common history, tradition, language and lifestyle.
- For him, ethnicity emerges when people are uprooted from their homeland due to conquest, colonization or immigration and diverse groups come into contact.
- If such displaced people are away from their homeland and yet continue to follow their 'native' lifestyle, they are ethnies
- The literature reveals three popular conceptions, of ethnicity: biological, cultural and psychological.
- The biological conception is based on a common genetic descent.
- In this sense, ethnicity has been treated as synonymous with race.
- In many earlier works (MacCrone, 1937; Dollard, 1937; Furnivall, 1972; Smith, 1965) biological factors have been considered to be the elements constituting ethnicity and emphasis was laid on the origins of race and racism in relation to colonialism.
- In this approach the cultural aspect of ethnicity was totally ignored.
- The second conception, treated race as a cultural phenomenon (Burgess, 1978) – mere sharing of physical traits was not seen as a sufficient condition for defining an ethnic group – Rather the symbolic differences among groups became the bases of ethnicity– with values, customs, historical background, life style, territory, language & religion being the prominent symbols of ethnicity.
- The third conception of ethnicity defines it in terms of the consciousness of a common identity.
- The awareness among the members of a group regarding their similarity to each other and differences from other groups – gave them an ethnic identity
- The sharing of physical, attitudinal, behavioural and cultural features was not considered sufficient to foster ethnic feelings.
- The group must also perceive themselves as distinct from others.

ETHNIC GROUPS

- Paul Brass (1991) discusses three ways of defining ethnic groups; a) in terms of objective attributes, b) by reference to subjective feelings and c) in relation to behaviour.
- The first definition implies that there are some distinguishing objective cultural features that separate one group from the other-language, territory, religion, dress etc.

- All these are called ethnic markers through which distinctions between one ethnic group & another are maintained
- The ethnic groups may interact with one another for different purposes but the objective ethnic markers ensure the continuity of separate group identity.
- The second aspect, i.e., presence of subjective feelings implies the existence of an ethnic self-consciousness.
- At the base of ethnic affinity lies real or assumed common identity.
- The fact of common descent is not as important as the belief in it
- The ethnicity is a subjective construct, it is how we see ourselves.
- The third dimension, namely, the behavioural one, points to the existence of concrete, specific ways in which ethnic groups do or do not behave in relation to, or in interaction with other groups
- The normative behaviour of an ethnic group may include practices related to kinship, marriage, friendship, rituals etc
- Thus, an ethnic group is perceived by others in society as being different in terms of language, religion, race, ancestral home, culture etc
- The members participate in shared activities built around their actual or mythical common origin and culture.
- It is a collectivity within a larger society characterised by elements like real or imaginary common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements such as kinship patterns, religious affiliations, language or dialect forms, etc

ELEMENTS OF ETHNICITY

- Two major elements of ethnicity – the presence of objective external markers and subjective awareness, the latter – “consciousness” - is considered more significant
- Kuper and Smith (1969) and Gastil (1978) hold that when different ethnic groups come into contact with each other and interact with each other ethnic consciousness or awareness arises.

THE POLITICAL & ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ETHNICITY

- The anthropological/cultural approach to ethnicity refers to a belief in shared cultural values and practices — ethnic group is identified in terms of cultural phenomena such as common customs, institutions, rituals, language etc
- This conception of ethnicity is based on the functionalist view that people need a sense of belonging — gives them strength to sustain themselves in times of pressures and this is provided by the ethnic identity.
- It is held that with the emergence of urbanization, economic progress, technological advancement,

mass education, mass media etc., the individual faces a loss of tradition and primordial identities.

- Gellner (1983) said that rise of nationalistic (political) tendencies unified the societies which ultimately resulted in the disappearance of cultural and ethnic differences.
- Eisenstadt (1973), Murphree (1986) and Wallerstein (1986) point out that they see no visible signs of de-ethnicization in the modern world. Rather, one can witness a resurgence of particularistic tendencies.
- Sharma (1990) illustrates that, despite technological, institutional, valuational and behavioural signs of modernization ethnicity reigns supreme.
- For instance, in terms of food, dress and interior decoration of one's home, being 'ethnic' is considered chic (fashionable).
- A “modern” institution like electoral democracy has led to the reawakening of the primordial consciousness of religion, caste etc.
- The political perspective on ethnicity refers to the political awareness and mobilization of a group on ethnic basis – exaggerating their ethnic characteristics to achieve the end of political autonomy or sovereignty
- The literature on ethnicity focuses on discrimination and highlights how the perception of unequal distribution of resources by the disadvantaged groups results in the rise of ethnic awareness among them.
- In such a case, minority groups may mobilize or even invent an ethnic identity in an effort to oppose discrimination.
- The ethnicity is interest based and ethnic groups are interest groups

ETHNIC STRATIFICATION

- Stratification is a system whereby people are unequally ranked and rewarded on the basis of wealth, power & prestige.
- It may take various forms like class, gender, race & ethnicity.
- Ethnic stratification shares a lot of things with the other forms of stratification, such as, ranking, inequality, discrimination, exploitation etc.
- Membership of an ethnic group tends to determine a person's status in society.
- Social rewards like money, prestige & power may often be allocated along ethnic lines.
- In most societies one or more ethnic groups dominate others in economic, political & cultural matters

ETHNIC NATIONALISM

- Ethnic politics can, therefore, take the appearance of ethnic stratification resulting in the emergence of ethnic nationalism
- The ethnic identity may sometimes be related to political necessities and demands

- This happens when minority groups try to play the ethnic card in order to acquire a better deal for themselves in a plural society.
 - The concepts of nation, nation-state, nationality, national minority etc. arose with the rise of capitalism in Western Europe and spread to the rest of the world.
 - Nation is derived from the Latin word nasci meaning to be born and Latin noun nationem, i.e.. breed or race.
 - An ethnic group becomes a nation only when it identifies itself with a territory.
 - Contrarily, a nation becomes an ethnic community when the members are separated from their homeland
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