

Race and Ethnicity Defined

- **Race** is a socially defined category, based on real or perceived biological differences between groups of people.
- **Ethnicity** is a socially defined category based on common language, religion, nationality, history, or another cultural factor.

Introduction

The distinction between race and ethnicity is considered highly problematic. Ethnicity is often assumed to be the cultural identity of a group from a nation state, while race is assumed to

be biological and/or cultural essentialization of a group hierarchy of superiority/inferiority related to their biological constitution. It is assumed that, based on power relations, there exist 'racialized ethnicities' and 'ethnicized races'. With Weber's introduction of ethnicity as a social construct, race and ethnicity were divided from each other. A social belief in biologically well-defined races lingered on. In 1950, the UNESCO statement, "The Race Question", signed by some of the internationally renowned scholars of the time (including Ashley Montagu, Claude Levi-Strauss, Clauford von Magellan desch Singrones Strauss, Julian Huxley, etc.), suggested that : "National, religious, geographic, linguistic and cultural groups do not necessarily coincide with racial groups : and the cultural traits of such groups have no demonstrated genetic connection with racial traits. Because serious errors of this kind are habitually committed when the term 'race' is used in popular parlance, it would be 7Ybetter when speaking of human races to drop the term 'race' altogether and speak of 'ethnic groups'."

What Is Race?



Historically, the concept of race has changed across cultures and eras, eventually becoming less connected with ancestral and familial ties, and more concerned with superficial physical characteristics. In the past, theorists have posited categories of race based on various geographic regions, ethnicities, skin colours, and more. Their labels for racial groups have connoted regions (Mongolia and the Caucus Mountains, for instance) or denoted skin tones (black, white, yellow, and red, for example).

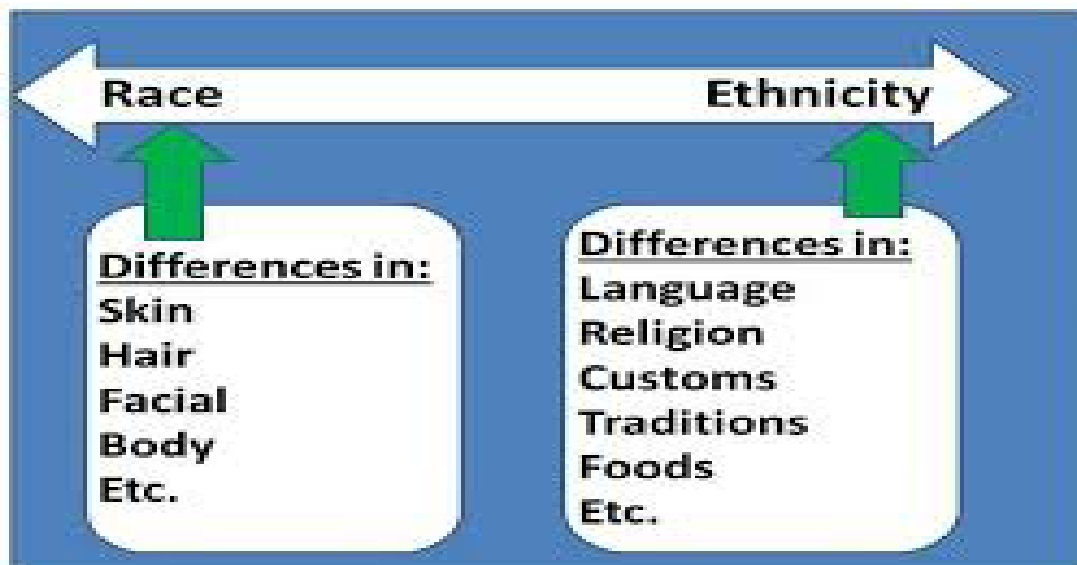
However, this typology of race developed during early racial science has fallen into disuse, and the *social construction of race* or **racialization** is a far more common way of understanding racial categories. According to this school of thought, race is not biologically identifiable. Rather, certain groups become *racialized* through a social process that marks them for unequal treatment based on perceived physiological differences. When considering skin colour, for example, the social construction of race perspective recognizes that the relative darkness or fairness of skin is an evolutionary adaptation to the available sunlight in different regions of the world. Contemporary conceptions of race, therefore, which tend to be based on socioeconomic assumptions, illuminate how far removed modern race understanding is from biological qualities. In modern society,

some people who consider themselves “white” actually have more melanin (a pigment that determines skin colour) in their skin than other people who identify as “black.” Consider the case of the actress Rashida Jones. She is the daughter of a black man (Quincy Jones) but she does not play a black woman in her television or film roles. In some countries, such as Brazil, class is more important than skin colour in determining racial categorization. People with high levels of melanin in their skin may consider themselves “white” if they enjoy a middle-class lifestyle. On the other hand, someone with low levels of melanin in their skin might be assigned the identity of “black” if they have little education or money.

The **social construction of race** is also reflected in the way that names for racial categories change with changing times. It’s worth noting that race, in this sense, is also a system of labelling that provides a source of identity—specific labels fall in and out of favour during different social eras. For example, the category “negroid,” popular in the 19th century, evolved into the term “negro” by the 1960s, and then this term fell from use and was replaced with “black Canadian.” The term was intended to celebrate the multiple identities that a black person might hold, but the word choice is an ambiguous one: it lumps together a large variety of ethnic groups under an umbrella term. Unlike the case in the United States where the term “African American” is common, most black Canadians immigrated from the Caribbean and retain ethnic roots from that area. Culturally they remain distinct from immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa or the descendants of the slaves brought to mainland North America. Some prefer to use the term “Afro-Caribbean Canadians” for that reason.

Racial Stratification

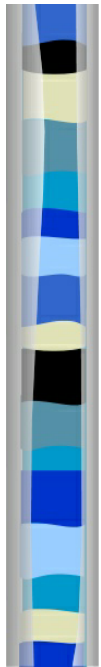
- Cultural differentiation
 - Ethnocentrism
 - Individual Racism
 - Structural differentiation
 - **Institutional Racism:** unchallenged and customary way of doing things in society that keep minority groups in subordinate or disadvantaged positions
 - Unequal Opportunity Structure
 - Social structure can encourage or reduce inequality among racial and ethnic groups
-



Race:

Most modern societies have numerous ethnic and racial groups. India, the USA, the UK, Canada, etc., are plural societies. Economically and politically, ethnic and racial groups may perform the same functions in a particular society, though culturally they are generally distinct from each other. However, in reality, ethnic and racial differences are also marked by inequalities of power and wealth, tension and conflict, and

prejudice and discrimination. There are also ethnic and racial minorities, and as such they are bound to have unequal access to opportunities and status distinctions. Discrimination based on ethnic and racial considerations has been reported from both highly industrialized and less industrialized societies. But ethnic or racial minorities are not necessarily backward economically and socially. In India, some ethnic groups are minorities, but economically they are far more ahead of the majority groups. Parsis, Christians, Sikhs are generally better off than other groups in their respective regions.



Race and Ethnicity

- Race is a **socially constructed** classification system that assumes that physical differences represent genetic, biological, and psychological capabilities and predispositions.
- Ethnicity refers to people from different cultural backgrounds.

Copyright © 2010 Pearson Education, Inc.
All rights reserved.

Defining Race

What Is Race?

- Some people view race as:
 - Skin color: the Caucasian "race".
 - Religion: the Jewish "race"
 - Nationality: the British "race"
 - Entire human species: the human "race"
- Sociological definition of race:
"A category of people who have been singled out as inferior or superior, often on the basis of real or alleged physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture, eye shape, or other subjectively selected attributes"¹

Generally, it is believed that people can be separated biologically into different races. Some anthropologists have categorized people into four or five major races. Such classifications are mainly based on the colour of skin, shape of hair, physique, etc. The science of genetics has proved that these are only conjectures and not valid characteristics. Population inbreeding and degree of contact between people could create physical differences. The same segment of population may have a variety of physical traits. Physical differences between human beings are partly inherited, but generally such differences are appropriated for social discrimination and prejudice.

Anthony Giddens observes: "Racial differences, therefore, should be understood as physical variations singled out by the members of a community or society as ethnically significant" More than "race", "racism" is practised through a false attribution of inherited characteristics of personality. Physical anthropologists have dealt with the question of "race" in great detail based on physical characteristics of different sections of population. Anthropologist A.L. Kroeber believes : "Race is a valid biological concept. It is a group united by heredity : a breed or genetic strain or subspecies."

Further, Kroeber says that it is not a valid socio-cultural concept, nor usable in socio-cultural situations. All human beings are homo sapiens; how they have become different types is not known.



Race and Ethnicity

Sociologists distinguish among racial, ethnic, and minority groups

- The term **racial group** is used to describe a group that is set apart from others because of obvious physical differences.
- There are no "pure races"

Social Construction of Race

Social construction is the process by which people come to define a group as a race based on physical, historical, cultural and economic factors.

2

Classification of Races

Based on certain traits, such as stature or bodily height, cephalic index, or the ratio of the length and breadth of the head, nasal index, relation of breadth and length of nose, prognathism, or the degree of the protrusion of the jaws, capacity of the skull, the texture of the hair, hairiness of the body, hair colour and eye colour, steatopygia, or a heavy deposit of fat in the buttocks, etc., classifications of different races have been made out.

There are three primary categories of races:

(1) Caucasian, Caucasoid, or Europoid; (2) Negroid; and (3) Mongoloid.

These three are also referred to as "White", "Black" and "Yellow"

races, respectively. The three main groups account for more than nine-tenths of all the nations and tribes of the world. Each of the three great primary stocks falls into several natural divisions. Primary stocks and races are as follows :

1. Caucasian or "White"

Nordic

Alpine

Mediterranean

Hindu

2. Mongoloid or "Yellow"

Mongolian

Malaysian

American Indian

3. Negroid or "Black"

Negro

Melanesian

Pigmy Black

Bushman

4. Doubtful Classification

Australoid

Veddoid (Indo-Austral)

Polynesian

Ainu

Groups

The identification and description of various racial elements in India has been a difficult task. India has always been a place of attraction for a variety of immigrants from various parts of the world. Whether it was religious persecution or harassment on other grounds or mere attraction towards India because of economic factors, waves after waves of people have been coming into the subcontinent. Most of them never went back to their original habitats. In this way people having different racial elements have been coming and settling down in India and the process of admixture has been taking place with the local populations. This has resulted in the colourful mosaic of human affairs that the Indian society is today.

Risley may be considered as the first scholar to have attempted the racial classification of India on a scientific basis. He classified Indian population into seven racial types. Summarized description of his classification is as follows:

- 1) **The Turko-Iranian type:** In this type he included the people of Baluchistan and frontier provinces (now in Pakistan).
- 2) **The Indo-Aryan type:** Punjabis, Rajputs, Jats and Kashmiri Khatri were the main groups in this type.
- 3) **The Scytho-Dravidian type:** Best examples of this type are Maratha Brahmins and Coorgs.
- 4) **The Aryo-Dravidian type:** People of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar are the main examples of this type.
- 5) **The Mongolo-Dravidian type:** Bengali Brahmins and Kayasthas are considered to be the representatives of this type.
- 6) **The Mongoloid type:** The people of Assam, Nepal and Burma were included in this type.
- 7) **The Dravidian type:** The bulk of the population of the

present Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, southern region of Madhya Pradesh and Chotanagpur was covered under this type.

He divided India into three main geographical regions which, according to him, cover the entire racial groups present in Indian population. These three geographical regions are:

- (i) The Himalayas.
- (ii) The Northern plains of Hindustan, and
- (iii) The Deccan

The major ethnic elements of these three respective geographical regions are (i) *Indo-Aryan and Mongoloid*, (ii) *Indo-Afghan viz. the Jats and Rajputs* and (iii) *Negrito*, pre-Dravidian, southern Brachycephal and western Brachycephals.

Haddon's racial classification is based on physical traits, customs and traditions, language and the prevalent folklore. It is invariably used in any study of Indian population. This classification is as follows:

1. The Negrito
2. The Proto-Australoid
3. The Mongoloid

(a) **Plaeo-Mongoloid**

- Long headed
- Broad headed

b) **Tibeto-Mongoloid**

4. **The Mediterranean**

- a) Paleo-Mediterranean
- b) Mediterranean
- c) Oriental type

5. The Western Brachycephals

- a) Alpinoid
- b) Dinaric
- c) Armenoid

6. The Nordic

Among the conclusions of Guha's Survey the most important is that the **Barchycephals (broad headed people) dominate the Indian population**. This was not the general belief before Guha's classification. Guha's classification has received the maximum approval of the scholars in this field. Since no other study or survey based on scientific line of this magnitude has been conducted, this classification continues to be the most recognised and acceptable. The two points on which Guha has been criticised most are the undue importance to Negrito elements and that the sources of all racial groups in India have been traced outside India.

On the basis of intensive study of racial elements in Indian population three most important racial types may be described. These are : Negrito, Proto-Australoid and Mongoloid. It is the general belief that the people with mongoloid racial elements came last. In fact the main difference of opinion is with regard to Proto-Australoid and Negrito. Guha, and before him De Quarterfages in 1877 had expressed the view that the people with Negrito racial elements are the earliest inhabitants of India. He expressed the view that a certain **submerged Negrito race had come to India perhaps from Malaysia**; this Negrito racial element seems to be present among the Veddas of Sri Lanka and Kadar, Irula, Kurumba etc. of South India. Some Proto-Australoid racial features have been noted from the skeletal remains found from Mohenjodaro. A number of scholars have expressed the view that the Australoid and Proto- Australoid racial elements are present throughout the Indian population. If the Negrito racial element had ever dominated the Indian population then some definite and

clearly visible Negrito features should be there in the North Indian populations. The serological studies tell us that the Negrito features are almost absent even among the most primitive tribal communities of India. The primitive tribes of India have rarely demonstrated the predominance of B-blood group as is the case with Negroids. Australoid groups have a predominance of A-blood group; many primitive tribes of India have predominance of A-blood group. Another interesting and significant point in this discussion is that though the tribes like Bhil and Munda show a high frequency of B-blood group like the Negrito but they lack other physical features of the Negritos. Even otherwise no final conclusion can be drawn on the basis of only serological facts specially under the conditions when not many serological studies have been conducted in India. There is a lot of scope for research in this direction. On the basis of the present status of knowledge we can conclude only that perhaps the proto-Australoids were the earliest inhabitants of India who experienced the admixture of African or Negrito blood in several parts of the subcontinent. Even this may not be the final conclusion but till the time some other evidences prove it otherwise it will continue to be the most acceptable conclusion.

Race & Society

- ▶ **There are no biological human races**
- ▶ Racial social stratification is built upon idea that social differences are linked with hereditary characteristics which differ between races
 - As indicated by perceived physical differences and cloaked in the language of biology
- ▶ **social races** – groups assumed to have a biological basis but social constructed
- ▶ Racism – systematic social and political bias based on idea of race
- ▶ Operates as a form of class

Sources :

1. *Sharma, K.L., 2010 : Perspectives on Social Stratification, Rawat Publication.*
 2. *Sharma, K.L., 2010 : Social Stratification & Mobility, Rawat Publication.*
 3. *Hasnain, Nadeem, 2011 : Indian Society and Culture Continuity and Change, Jawahar Publishers and Distributors*
- <https://opentextbc.ca/introductiontosociology/chapter/chapter11-race-and-ethnicity/>