Unit 22

Conceptualising Ethnicity

Contents

Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you will be able to,

- describe class and ethnicity
- indicate the construction of ethnicity
- outline the primordialist, instrumentalist and constructivist models of ethnicity
- explain the relationship between race and ethnicity

22.1 Introduction

Being different is a construct that we have all somehow somewhere internalised. We learn to be different as we are constantly told in the initial stages of our primary socialisation that it is natural to be segregated. Constant reckoning that boys are boys and girls are girls instill an element of gender segregation and awareness of 'self' in terms of notions of 'us' versus 'them'. As one moves through various life cycle processes –construction of categories of 'us' in contrast to 'them' acquires different contours. Cultural contents are added to these reconstructions of 'us' versus 'them'. These reconstructions also often acquire prejudices and voluntary affirmation of stereotypes. It is recognition of these repetitive behavioral patterns and emergent consequences that is instrumental in sociological conceptualisation of notions of 'ethnicity'.

Ethnicity is derived from the ancient Greek word *ethnos,* which refers to 'a range of situations where there is a sense of collectivity of humans that live and act together' (Cf. Ostergard, 1992). The notion is often translated today as 'people' or 'nation' (Jenkins, 1997:9). Its use in contemporary sociology and in popular conception is relatively recent. The term was popularised in common American usage with the publication of *Yankee city series* published in 1941. *The Social Life of a Modern City* (1941) and *The Status System of a Modern Community* (1942), two important books written by W.Lloyd Warner and Paul S. Lunt that brought into focus various paradoxes and ambiguities inherent in the concept. Warner was looking for a noun 'to parallel the categories of age, sex, religion and class' (Sollors, 1981), when he came

across the Greek noun *ethnos* used to refer to nation, people and 'others'. Warner used the term ethnicity as a 'trait' that separates the individuals from some classes and identifies him with others' (ibid, 1981). Located in the context of America and numerous studies that followed search of American Identity in the post world war–II America, ethnicity became a search for American Identity versus 'minority identities' or 'immigrant identities'. Demonstrating this trend Philip Gleason wrote in his essay entitled 'Americans All: Ethnicity, Ideology, and American Identity in the Era of World War II' in the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (1980):

As a part of the broader American studies movement that grew up in the postwar years — **ethnic was conceptualised as a** *prototypically American figure, not because of any distinctiveness of cultural heritage, but for exactly the opposite reason, because ethnic exhibited in an extreme degree the "character structure" produced by the American experience of change, mobility and loss of contact with the past'* — a statement that was beautiful chronicled years before Gleason's analysis came to the fore, by Oscar Handlin (1951) in the introduction to his fascinating work *The uprooted*, whereby he wrote that 'once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* American history'.

Whatever may be the limitations of innumerous studies on 'ethnicity', one common denominator that stands out is that ethnicity studies are conducted in relation to 'others' and focus on the external, (involuntary, objective) and internal (voluntary, subjective). Ethnicity in sociological literature is often construed in relation to concepts like 'class' and 'modernity'.

22.2 Class and Ethnicty

The concept of class rooted in Marxian dictum of hierarchies and precepts of social stratification also encompasses within its scope notions of 'class consciousness'— an idea that talks about building in-group solidarity. Ethnicity as a social construct has also evolved on perceptions of 'bonding' and 'collectivity'. Class theorists use 'exploitation' by the 'others' as an instrument for strengthening 'class solidarity'. In a similar vein those subscribing to constructs of ethnicity focus upon 'common experiences' to develop a sense of 'ethnic consciousness'. Irrespective of these common features many in sociological and social sciences would argue that *ethnicity is not class.* However, at the same time none of them would deny the crucial relationship that ethnicity has with class. Daniel Bell (1975) in his acclaimed essay on 'Ethnicity and Social change' argues:

The reduction of class sentiment is one of the factors one associates with the rise of ethnic identification. He further submits that ethnicity *has become more salient because it can combine interest with an effective tie. Ethnicity provides a tangible set of common identifications—in language, food, music, names—when other social roles become more abstract and impersonal.*

Glazer and Moynihan authors of one of the most popular writings on the subject titled *Beyond the Melting pot* express similar sentiments. They write in their 1975 publication of *Ethnicity: Theory and experience:*

As against class-based forms of social identification and conflict-which of course continue to exist—we have been surprised by the persistence and salience of ethnic based forms of social identification and conflict. *In a*

*perceptive statement elsewhere (*Atlantic Monthly*, August 1968) they argue* our contemporary preoccupation with 'issues such as capitalism, socialism, and communism' keeps us from seeing' that the turbulence of these times here and abroad has had far more to do with ethnic, racial, and religious affiliation than with these other issues.

The term 'ethnicity' acquired enormous political implications in particular after the disintegration of erstwhile nation-states like former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and events that followed the bombing of world Trade center in New York on 9/11. The term came in frequent use in anthropological and sociological writings only in early 70s. It is interesting to note that prior to 1970s textbooks in anthropology and sociology hardly ever defined 'ethnicity' (Cohen, 1978:380). There are some references to 'ethnic groups' in the literature pertaining to early decades of the twentieth century.

Box 22.1: Rethinking Ethnicity

Richard Jenkins in his critically acclaimed work titled *Rethinking Ethnicity:* **Arguments and Explorations** notes:

Since the early decades of this century, the linked concepts of ethnicity and ethnic group have been taken in many directions, academically (Stone, 1996) *and otherwise. They have passed into everyday discourse, and become central to the politics of group differentiation and advantage, in the culturally diverse social democracies of Europe and North America. With the notions of 'race' in public and scientific disrepute since 1945, ethnicity has obligingly stepped into the gap, becoming a rallying cry in the bloody often reorganisation of the post-cold-war world. The obscenity of 'ethnic cleansing' stands shoulder to shoulder with earlier euphemism such as 'racial hygiene' and 'the final solution'* (1997:9).

Two things emerge in Jenkins interesting interpretation of 'ethnicity'. First suggests that notions of 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic group' travel together. If ethnicity emerged as a key sociological and political concept only in the early 70s it was in operation as a sociological reality much before that and was commonly addressed in solidarities and differences that marked social and cultural groups. The second point that is highlighted in the excerpt is that the nomenclature 'ethnic group' appeared as a natural and neutral option to the much beleaguered and abused notion of race. Jenkins also refers to advantages that accrue because of ethnic affiliations. Sometimes these advantages are granted to groups because they are perceived to be marginal to the other groups in the societies. You are probably familiar with the notion of *protective discrimination* or *reservations, which* is addressed as *affirmative action* in favour of racially under-privileged groups in North America. It is important to understand here that 'being part of an ethnic group' provides a sense of belonging and an assertion of 'identity'. This sense of belonging and identity also accompany certain advantages and disadvantages. We will discuss some of these issues in the following lessons on 'construction of identity' and 'boundary and boundary maintenance'. In this lesson, we will essentially focus on 'conceptualising ethnicity'—its historical roots and various theories propounded by various scholars for its sustenance.

22.3 Construction of Ethnicity

Some contributors to the theory of ethnicity trace back its origins to the early works of Max Weber. Weber in one of his important contributions namely *Economy and Society* first published in 1922 and reprinted in 1968 regards an ethnic group to be a group whose members share a belief that they have a common ancestor or to put it differently 'they are of common descent'. He qualifies his statement by suggesting that:

Ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organised, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity (1968:389).

It is apparent from Weber's statement that biology had little role to play in cultivating 'sense of belonging'. Weber perceived Ethnic group as a *status group*. A status group may be rooted in perceptions of shared religion, language or culture. Members of the group on the basis of **shared communality** tend to form 'monopolistic social closure'—that is they refuse to let others enter their exclusive domain. Every member of the group knows what is expected of him in situations of collective participation. They also function together to protect each other's honour and dignity. It is on these perceptions that 'suicide squads' operate in political struggles. Weber also argues that 'since the possibilities for collective action rooted in ethnicity are 'indefinite', the *ethnic group*, and its close relative *nation,* cannot easily be precisely defined for sociological purposes'. (for details refer to Jenkins, 1997:10). This profound statement by Weber enables us to understand how political acts of subversion under one regime are celebrated as heroic and patriotic by those who are seeking political sovereignty; and are condemned as acts of treason by those governing the nation states. You must be reading articles in Newspapers about ongoing struggle between Israel and Palestine and various other so called insurgent groups and the nation states. Ethnicity forms complex equations and simple cultural or ethnological explanations are not enough to unfold its mysteries.

Ethnicity as a theoretical tool for understanding complex questions of social interaction and political formations holds equal interest not only for sociologists but also for anthropologists and political scientists. In a broad sense, three approaches to the understanding of ethnicity can be considered, namely *Primordialist, Instrumentalist and constructivist.*

22.4 Primordialist Approach

The primordialist approach recognises biology as the fundamental for establishing ethnic identity. The biological roots are determined by genetic and geographical factors. These linkages result in the formation of close-knit kin- groups. Kinship loyalties demand that near relatives are favored by those in situations of command and controlling resources. In contemporary terminology such favours are rebuked for being *nepotistic. Nepotism* is defined as the 'tendency to favour kin over non-kin'. This principle of kin-selection based on conceptions of socio-biology is not acceptable in societies that claim to be democratic and follow principles of meritocracy. **Pierre Van den Berghe** explains that:

In general ethnicity is defined as a comprehensive form of natural selection

and kinship connections, a primordial instinctive impulse. Which continues to be present even in the most industrialised mass societies of today.(1981:35)

Socio-biological interpretations of ethnicity assume that there are tangible explanations for ethnicity. Some of the followers of this school are convinced that genetic linkages by itself are responsible for accentuating ethnic ties. Another group within the same school thinks that biological and kinship ties evolve and are furthered by cultural influences. The explanations offered by various scholars suggest that this school of though is primarily rooted in evolutionary construction of human societies. Shaw and Wong(1989) argue that 'recognition of group affiliation is genetically encoded, being a product of early human evolution, when the ability to recognise the members of one's family group was necessary for survival'.

Box 22.2: Concept of Ethnos

There are frequent references and endorsement of primordialist position in Russian and Soviet anthropology. The concept of *Ethnos* in the works of Russian scholars that was later developed by **Y.U. Bromley**(1974) among others defines it as:

Ethnos as a 'group of people, speaking one and the same language and admitting common origin, characterised by a set of customs and a life style which are preserved and sanctified by tradition , which distinguishes it from others of the same kind'.

The socio-biological interpretations of ethnicity were critical in developing a framework for the study of *ethno genesis*. According to the theory of ethnogensis '**ethnos** emerged as a consequence of joint effect of cosmic energies and landscape'. The primordial model of studying ethnicity has received diverse reactions. Simple socio-biological explanations of ethnicity that interpret ethnic groups as only 'extended kin-groups' were severely critiqued by some scholars but found support in the writings of scholars such as Clifford Geertz(1973). **Geertz** argued that 'ties of blood, language and culture are seen by actors to be ineffable and obligatory; that they are seen as natural'— as members of society — most of you must have experienced these sentiments yourself.

Important question in the understanding of ethnicity is how are these sentiments rationalised in the context of empirical situations demanding loyalties. Primordialists would argue that kinship bonds and cultural attachments would always reign supreme and govern social and political actions. Geertz extends this argument when he writes:

[the] crystallization of a direct conflict between primordial and civil sentiments –this 'longing not to belong to any other group'-…..gives to the problem variously called tribalism, parochialism, communalism, and so on, a more ominous and deeply threatening quality than most of the other, also very serious and intractable, problem the new state face(1973:261).

It is this debate that dominates discussions in the construction of modern day civil society in which equality is considered as the only legitimate principle. Differences in terms of culture, language, religion and origins are accepted and celebrated but perpetuation of any of these primary attributes for establishing separate 'political identities' within any existing nation state

are viewed with disdain. Students of ethnicity are constantly engaged in debating whether 'ethnicity' is primordial or manipulated by individuals with political intents.

22.5 Instrumentalist Approach

Students of ethnicity are constantly asking:

Is ethnicity an aspect of 'human nature'? Or is it, to whatever extent, defined situationallly, strategically or tactically manipulable, and capable of change at both the individual and collective levels? Is it wholly socially constructed? (Jenkins, 1997).

We have already reflected upon the first question and made you familiar with different positions that scholars take on ethnicity being an integral part of human nature. We will now discuss the second question, also discussed as *instrumentalist* approach to ethnicity. The instrumentalist approach became popular in sociological and political science writings in late sixties and early seventy's. Names of **Fredrik Barth and Paul Brass** are commonly associated with popularising instrumentalist position in social science literature. Also sometimes referred to as *Situationalist* perspective it emphasises plasticity in maintaining ethnic group boundaries. It argues that people can change membership and move from one ethnic group to another. The change can take place either because of circumstances or as Paul Brass says because of manipulation by Political elites. He regarded ethnicity:

As a product of political myths, created and manipulated by cultural elites in their pursuit of advantages and power. The cultural forms, values and practices of ethnic groups become resources for elites in competition for political power and economic advantage. They become symbols and referents for the identification of members of group, which are called up in order to ease the creation of political identity *(1985).*

In his two books — **Language, Religion and Politics in North India** *(1985),* **Ethnicity and Nationalism***: Theory and Comparison (1991), Brass closely examines issues of ethnicity and Nationalism in the context of India. Brass borrowed De Vos's definition of Ethnicity that viewed ethnicity as consisting of 'subjective, symbolic or emblematic use' by a group of people…of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups' and modified it replacing the last phrase to suggest 'in order to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups'(1991). In this explanation Brass is asserting the importance of symbols and the need for internal cohesion for ethnicity to flourish. When we examine these assertions in empirical context we can understand why political parties constantly keep inventing and reinventing symbols attached to different groups for commanding loyalty in situations of political realignments. Cow slaughter, Muslim Personal law and dwindling importance of Urdu language are some of symbolic issues that are frequently raised in political debates.*

Fredrik Barth on the other hand was always convinced that the focus for the investigation of ethnicity should be 'the ethnic boundary that defines the group' adapting the definition that ethnicity is social organisation of cultural differences. *Barth in his symposium* **Ethnic groups and Boundaries** *(1969) regarded* ascription *and* self-ascription *critical to the process of establishing group boundaries.*

Box 22.3: Corporate Model of Ethnic Group

An ethnic group was biologically self-perpetuating; members of the group shared basic cultural values and these values manifest it-self in overt cultural forms; third the group was a bounded social field of communication and interaction; and fourth its members identified themselves and were identified by others as belonging to that group.

Barth in his critique of the corporate model argued that this elucidation of ethnic group assumed that various groups in the society lived in relative isolation 'as an island in itself'. In his interpretation ethnic groups as ontological collectivities are malleable. He argued that ethnic identity, and its production and reproduction in social interaction is to be treated as 'problematic' feature of social reality. He recommended that the ethnographer must examine the practices and processes whereby ethnicity and ethnic boundaries are socially constructed and perpetuated. To arrive at this understanding Barth asserted that this construction is possible only when we acknowledge that **ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves** *(Barth, 1969). Barth's model of ethnicity highlights the following features:*

Analysis of ethnicity begins by understanding the situation held by social actors e.g. actors are being asked to ascertain their identity in a situation of confrontation or cooperation. The shades that ethnic identity acquires will be essentially determined by this perception.

Second, the focus of attention then becomes the maintenance of ethnic boundaries. If it is a situation of confrontation, ethnicity attains center stage. It expresses itself in far more assertive terms then it would do either in a neutral situation or underplay differences in a situation asking for economic or political cooperation. The structured interaction between 'us' and 'them' across boundary is defined by strategic situation.

Reflection and Action 22.1

Outline the features of Barth's model of ethnicity.

Third and most critical of these criteria are notions of ascription-both by members of the ethnic group in question and those outside the group. Ethnicity acquires political impetus primarily because of this criterion of ascription. In situations where an individual assumes himself to be a member but is not so perceived by others, his own sense of belongingness carries little or no weight at all.

Fourth, ethnicity is not fixed; it is situationally defined. Most interesting example of this is observed in situations of trans-migration, wherein individuals may ascribe themselves to different ethnic groups or attach differential degree of importance to their sense of belonging –in other words either overplay or underplay ethnicity situationally.

Fifth, ecological issues are particularly influential in determining ethnic identity. If economic niches are constrictive and resources limited, it is invariably seen that in such situations ethnicity becomes much more pronounced.

Commenting on Barth's understanding of Ethnicity, Jenkins writes:

Barth emphasises that ethnic identity is generated, confirmed or transformed in the course of interaction and transaction between decision-making, strategising individuals. Ethnicity in **Ethnic group and boundaries** is, perhaps before it is anything else, a matter of politics, decision making and goal orientation…shared culture is, in this model, best understood as generated in and by processes of ethnic boundary maintenance, rather than the other way round: the production and reproduction of difference vis-à-vis external others is what creates the image of similarity internally, vis-à-vis each other.

Sociologists and Social anthropologists have argued that this model of ethnicity is essentially borrowed from the works of Max Weber. Barth facilitated its understanding by differentiating it from notions of race and culture. According to Vermeulen and Grovers (1994:2) 'Barth presented ethnicity or ethnic identity as an aspect of social organisation, not of culture'.

Wallman (1986 et al) *furthered Barth's understanding and argues that:*

Ethnicity is the process by which 'their' difference is used to enhance the sense of 'us' for purposes of organisation or identification…..Because it takes two, ethnicity can only happen at the boundary of 'us', in contact or confrontation or by contrast with 'them'. And as the sense of 'us' changes, so the boundary between 'us' and 'them' shifts. Not only does the boundary shift, but the criteria which mark it change.

This explanation makes it clear that ethnicity is transactional, it is essentially impermanent and in that sense has nothing to do with biological inheritance. It is this feature that distinguishes instrumentalist approach from primoridalist perceptions of ethnicity. Ethnic identity is shifting. It is always two sided. Our being Hindus or Muslims, Gujarati or Telgu is immaterial unless these identities are locked in vis-à-vis situations. The key issue in these interactions is manipulation of 'perceived significant differences in their generation'.

Abner Cohen(1974) while analysing Barth's contributions have differences with his perception of ethnicity. Handelman believes that the 'cultural content of ethnicity is an important aspect of its social organisation: a crude dichotomy between the cultural and social is misleading'. To this he adds that ethnicity is socially organised or incorporated in differing degrees of group-ness,—on which depends its salience and importance of individual experience. Moving from 'the casual to corporate', Handelman distinguishes the ethnic set, ethnic category, the ethnic network, the ethnic association and the ethnic community. *Ethnic identities can, for example, organise everyday life without ethnic groups featuring locally as significant social forms'(cf. Jenkins,1997:20)*

22.6 Constructivist Model of Ethnicity

The constructivist model of ethnicity is located in the **interpretive paradigm** *based on* **postmodernism.** *In this interpretation emphasis has shifted to* **negotiation of multiple subjects over group boundaries and identity.** *Sokolovskii and Tishkov stress that*

In this atmosphere of renewed sensitivity to the dialectics of the objective and subjective in the process of ethnic identity formation and maintenance,

even the negotiable ethnic character of ethnic boundaries stressed by Barth was too reminiscent of his objectivist predecessors tendency to reification. It was argued that terms like 'group', 'boundary' still connote a fixed identity, and Barth's concern with maintenance tends to reify it still more *(Cohen, 1978:386).* The mercurial nature of ethnicity was accounted for when it was defined 'as a set of sociocultural diacritics *[*physical appearance, name language, history, religion, nationality*]* which define a shared identity for members and nonmembers'; a series of nesting dichotomisations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness' *(Cohen, 1978:386-7).*

22.7 Jenkins' Model of Ethnicity

Jenkins has offered 'a basic social anthropological model of ethnicity' which is equally relevant for sociological understanding. The model is summarised as follows:

- ethnicity is about cultural differentiation-although, to retrieate the main theme of *Social Identity* (Jenkins,1996), identity is always a dialectic between similarity and difference;
- ethnicity is centrally concerned with culture-shared meaning—but it is also rooted in, and to a considerable extent the outcome of, social interaction;
- ethnicity is no more fixed or unchanging than the culture of which it is a component or the situations in which it is produced and reproduced;
- ethnicity as a social identity is collective and individual, externalised in social interaction and internalised in personal identification (Jenkins,1997:13-14).

Jenkins cautions against 'our tendency to reify culture and ethnicity'. It is essential for us to remember that *ethnicity or culture is not something that people have or they belong* but it is a *complex repertories which people experience, use, learn and 'do' in their daily lives, within which they construct ongoing sense of themselves and an understanding of their fellows* (1997:14).

Jenkins is representing modern school of thinkers on 'ethnicity' who assume constructivist position.

The fundamental of the concept defined above 'emphasise social construction and everyday practice, acknowledging change as well as stability, and allowing us to recognise individuality in experience and agency as well as stability, and allowing us to recognise individuality in experience and agency as well as the sharing of culture and collective identification'(Jenkins, 1997:165). This reconstruction of ethnicity holds the view that ethnicity is neither inherited nor completely manipulable –positions that were assumed by instrumentalist and primordialists respectively.

Box 22.4: The Plasticity of Ethnicity

—there are limits to the plasticity of ethnicity, as well as to its fixity and solidity, is the founding premise for the development of an understanding of ethnicity which permits us to appreciate that although it is imagined it is not imaginary; to acknowledge its antiquity as well its modernity. Rethinking demands that we should strike a balanced view of the authenticity of ethnic attachments. Somewhere between irresistible emotion an utter cynicism,

neither blindly primordial nor completely manipulable, ethnicity and its allotropes are principles of collective identification and social organisation in terms of culture and history, similarly and difference, that show little signs of withering away. In itself this is neither a 'good thing' nor a 'bad thing'. It is probably just very human. It is hard to imagine the social world in their absence (Jenkins, 1997).

22.8 Race and Ethnicity

Relationship between race and ethnicity is complex. Genesis of the term race are traced to "Latin words 'generatio','ratio','natio', and 'radix' to Spanish and Castilian 'razza', Italian 'razza', and old French 'haraz' with such diverse meanings as generation, root, nobility of blood, patch of threadbare or defective cloth, taint or contamination, or horse breeding" (Sollors, 1996). The term race has been in popular use much before ethnicity was adapted in popular and academic vocabulary. Race came into scientific academic parlance as a classificatory feature. Physical Anthropologists used physical features to classify what some may describe as 'human types'. However man's lust to conquer his fellow beings and subordinate them resulted in tremendous abuse of these so called classificatory studies that were prompted to facilitate scientific research. Magnus Hirschfeld in 1938 described racial abuse as 'racism'. The genocide that was unleashed in World War II in the name of protection of purity of races made academicians and politicians equally shy of using it in public domain. The concept of ethnic group introduced in the mid fifty's was an acknowledged attempt to provide a neutral system of classifying human groups on the basis of 'cultural differences' rather than distinguishing them on the basis of racial characteristic'. It was argued that the terminology of ethnic group would provide a value neutral construct and avoid prejudiced and stereotypical categorisation of people in hierarchical and discriminatory categories. Many scholars believed in the usefulness of this distinction but others thought there was hardly any merit in this distinction as 'race is only one of the markers through which ethnic differences are validated and ethnic boundary markers established' (Wallman, 1986). Those authors supporting the expediency of making this distinction would argue that 'while "ethnic" social relations are not necessarily hierarchical and conflictual, 'race relations' would certainly appear to be' (Jenkins, 1998:75).

Reflection and Action 22.2

Discuss the relationship between race and ethnicity and bring out the points of comparison.

One may reason that even when race is often constructed and conceived in terms of physical or phenotypical differences, prejudices and stereotypes accompanying this perception are socially articulated and perceived. In this sense, many would argue that 'race' is an allotrope of 'ethnicity'. Jenkins prefers to argue the other way suggesting that 'ethnicity and race are different kinds of concept; they do not actually constitute a true pair. The most that can be said is that, at certain times and in certain places, culturally specific conception of 'race'-or more correctly, of 'racial' differentiation – have featured, sometimes very powerfully, in the repertoire of ethnic boundary-maintaining devices' (ibid: 79). Banton (1967:10) has argued that primary difference between race and ethnic group is that membership in an ethnic group is voluntary whereas membership in a racial group is not' and

this would imply that an ethnic group is all about *inclusion* whereas race is all about *exclusion'*. We are once again returning to the basic categories of 'us' versus 'them' critical to our understanding of ethnicity as well as race; but as perceived by Jenkins would argue ethnicity is about 'group identification' whereas 'race' is about 'social categorisation'.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant in their book, *Racial Formation in the United States* (1986), take the position that opting a maxim incorporating, race within the broader confines of ethnic group will encourage the 'strategy of blaming the victim'. Sollors summing up of these differing positions makes perceptive reading:

Omi and Winant argue, partly on political grounds, that any 'true' sociological concept could also conceivably be put to bad political ends. It is also necessary to believe that scholars who see a family relationship between race and ethnicity are therefore guided by an assimilations it bias. Omi and Winant's last point, however, is well taken. Gordon's maxim that all races are ethnic groups could be misunderstood as inviting a method of regarding all blacks as only one ethnic group, because they are also 'race'. Races may be, and often are, ethnically differentiated (African Americans and Jamaicans in the united states), just as ethnic groups may be racially differentiated (Hispanics-who 'may be of any race'—). Omi and Winant's argument supports the need for a careful examination of the relationships of 'visible' and 'cultural' modes of group's construction in specific cases, but not the assumption that there is an absolute dualism between 'race' and 'ethnicity', and a deep rift between them.

22.9 Conclusion

Pierre L.Van den Berghe is the one who offers systematic interpretations of differences between 'race' and 'ethnicity'. Berghe's much acclaimed work *Race and Racism* written in 1996 suggests that four principal connotations of 'race' make it confusing. At the outset he rejects physical anthropological construction of three or four races arguing that this outdated connotation is no longer 'tenable'. The second connotation of race that he prefers to be used in terms of 'ethnic group' is when we speak of the 'French race' or the 'Jewish race' etc.etc. The third explanation argues race to be a synonym of 'species'. It is only the fourth construction offered by Berghe that he recommends we should use. According to this view:

Race refers to *human groups that define itself and/ or is defined by other groups as different from other groups by virtue of innate and immutable physical characteristics.*

It is important for the students to note here that sociological conceptions of race takes specific note of 'visible' and 'physical' as suggested by Gordon or as described by Berghe that of 'innate' and 'immutable' distinctions from those described as 'cultural'. The most discerning contribution made by these scholars is that distinctions whether 'racial' or 'ethnic' are a matter of both 'physical' and 'verbal perceptions'. Qualifying this insight Berghe reasons:

In practice, the distinction between a racial and ethnic group is sometimes blurred by several facts. Cultural traits are often regarded as genetic and inherited (e.g. body odor, which is a function of diet, cosmetics, and other

cultural items); physical appearance can be culturally changed (by scarification, surgery, and cosmetics); and the sensory perception of physical differences is affected by cultural perception of race (e.g. a rich Negro may be seen as lighter than an equally dark poor Negro, as suggested by the Brazilian proverb: 'Money bleaches'). However distinction between race and ethnicity remains analytically useful.

This rhetoric of making distinctions on the basis of 'cultural content' or 'descent' overlooks the fact that matters relating to descent accentuate cultural crux on which cultural differences are constructed and boundaries defined or redefined. Sollors sums up this admirably saying 'it is a matter of a 'tendency', not of absolute distinction. Mary Waters (1990) in her distinguished work *Ethnic options* chronicle it as follows:

Certain ancestries take precedence over others in the societal rules on descent and ancestry reckoning. If one believes one is part English and part German and identifies as German, one is not in danger of being accused of trying to 'pass' as non-English and of being 'redefined' English—But if one were part African and part German, one's self identification as German would be highly suspect and probably not accepted if one 'looked' black according to the prevailing social norms.

Without taking either or positions it is important for us to understand that while constructing 'ethnicity'- 'identification' based either on physical features or cultural similarities becomes the key factor. It is this construction of identity and the sociological process of how processes of identification operate as markers of establishing boundaries that will be discussed in the following lessons.

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Unit 23

Construction of Identities

Contents

Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you will be able to

- describe the search for identity
- outline Erikson views on identity construction
- explain identity and identification
- discuss multiple identifies with reference to national character

23.1 Introduction

Identity is a quest, a vision and internalisation of an attitude. This attitude provides us images of self and of others. It is with this standardised mode of perception that we relate to others. Identity in other words refers to generalisations that one evolves about 'self' and 'others'. It is about distinctions and similarities. The term is complex and is often interpreted differently in varied contexts. Some may also argue that its usage in sociological and anthropological texts is ambiguous. The term came into popular sociological usage in early fifty's. The *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1968) listed two separate articles on *Identity* titled '**Identity, psychosocial',** and '**Identification political**'. This becomes significant due to the fact that the *Encyclopedia of the social sciences* published in 1930 carried no mention of the term **Identity.**

Erik.H.Erikson (1959), who happened to be a 'psychoanalytic theorist' introduced the term identity and also focused on inherent ambiguities of the term identity? Erikson's contributions in this regard will be discussed in the later part of the lesson but first we will make an attempt to locate the origin of the term and its meaning in social science writings.

Identity is rooted in the Latin word *idem.* This is in common use in the English language since the sixteenth century. Philip Gleason (1983) draws our attention to the technical and philosophical use of the term *Identity:*

Identity has a technical meaning in algebra and logic and has been associated with the perennial mind body problem in philosophy since the time of John Locke (cf. Sollors, 1996)

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines **Identity** as:

The quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness; oneness-in social science writings this definition of identity is commonly not adopted because of its focus on inseparable, impregnable homogeneity. It is the second definition quoted as follows that is germane to our understanding of identity and it states:
The sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality.

23.2 The Search for Identity

Personal Identity in psychology refers to the condition or fact of remaining the same person throughout the various phases of existence; continuity of the personality.

Social historians trace the meaning of identity in Oxford dictionary to Locke's essay *Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) and David Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature*(1739). The evolutionary theory in early anthropological writings talked about *psychic unity of mankind* thereby denying notions of individuality and identity. 'The unity of the self' was also the preponderant perception in Christianity. Locke questioned the perception, when he argued that:

A man's identity …..consists in nothing but a participation of the same continued life, by constantly fleeting particles of matter, in succession vitally united to the same organised body'.

Langbaum has written a treatise documenting how writers and poets of the ilk of D.H. Lawrence and William Wordsworth took up the challenge posed by Locke to the notion of 'unity of the self'. The review also documents the seriousness with which questions of identity in relation to personality and sense of individuality were taken up by the intellectual leadership of different eras.

Immigration was identified as one of the important factors in strengthening configurations of identity. Identity in a personalised sense referring to a sense of *alienation, uprooted ness, loneliness, loss of belongingness etc.* It was a metaphorical manifestation of how and the way an individual feels separated from his kin group and immediate neighborhood in which he had his primary socialisation. There were little or no hints of sociological categorisation in terms of loss of identity or construction or reconstruction of identity in terms of belonging to a particular group or community. *The uprooted* by Oscar Handlin (1951) is regarded as a major work that used *identity* or *identification* in 'an unselfconscious manner as part of the ordinary vocabulary of common discourse' (Gleason,1983). In contrast Will Herberg's *Protestant –Catholic Jew* (1955) placed *identity* and *identification* as key to locating oneself in a social context—in this case religion as the marker. Herberg said religion had become the most important tool for 'locating oneself in society' and thereby answering the most 'aching question' of 'identity': 'who am I'.

Herberg's work acquires strategic significance for later analysis of identity in sociological literature as it argues that ethnic identities of 'an immigrant-

derived population had transformed themselves into religious identification with organised Protestantism, Catholicism, or Judaism through the working of **Hansen's Law that argued that what the son wants to forget, the grandson wants to remember'.** This may be said to be the beginning of what has come to be called as 'the search for identity' in anthropological and sociological literature.

Let us draw some works that appeared in the fifty's and used *identity* with relative ease as compared to many writers in the seventy's and late eighty's who were particularly troubled by complexities of the term and its varied use in different contexts to evoke loyalties that went beyond the personal domain of identifying self in different religious, linguistic or ethnic categories. Take for example W.L.Morton's *The Canadian Identity* (1965) which regarded the construct of identity as unproblematic. But soon it was recognised in social science writings that 'identity becomes a problem for the individual in a fast changing society'. We must remember that context for majority of these writings was United States of America that was being portrayed as the 'Melting Pot' within which numerous markers of identity assumed by people before migrating were supposedly melted away and reconfigured to acquire a new nationality camouflaged as 'American identity'. By 1970s with onset of Vietnam War the myth of an encompassing American identity was broken.

As is evident from the brief historical overview, the journey of constructing identity has a long and established pathway. It is an altogether a different matter as to how it was conceptualised in different decades of social experiences by individuals for self and for locating themselves in social spaces where they interacted with others.

Box 23.1: Construction of Identity

In one sense, the term refers to qualities of sameness, in that persons may associate themselves or be associated by others, with groups or categories on the basis of some salient common feature, e.g. 'ethnic identity'. The term may also be applied to groups, categories, segments and institutions of all kinds, as well as to individual persons; thus families, communities, classes and nations are frequently said to have identities.

I am deliberately not elaboration on the concept if ethnic identity per se in this lesson as that is the subject matter of the lesson to follow. It will be suffice to say following Jenkins that 'ethnic identity, although every bit (and only) a social and cultural construction, should be conceptualised as a basis or first-order dimension of human experience' (Jenkins, 1998:75). We construct and reconstruct our 'ethnic identities' on the turf of our experiences that may differ from situation to situation. In this lesson our focus will remain on theoretical insights into identity construction (Byron, 2002).

23.3 Erikson's Contributions to Identity Construction

Erikson was trained in the discipline of psychology. He primarily worked as a clinical psychoanalyst with children. He lived in USA and his experiences as a European refugee and polices of Adolf Hitler and Second World War deeply influenced his writings. It was in the context of fallout of World War II that Erikson started constructing notions of identity. His early writings mostly published in the decade between fifty's and sixty's remained largely confined to intellectual community. It was in 1963 that his book *Childhood*

and Society was reprinted and that brought him immense popularity and acceptance among the general reader. His most significant contribution was his study of Mahatma Gandhi that won him both a Pulitzer Prize and a National book award. In 1973 he was selected to deliver prestigious Jefferson Lectures in Humanities that established him as an opinion leader and as Gleason says 'his ideas became something of a cultural phenomenon' (1983).

According to Erikson **Identity** is located *in the core of the individual and also in the core of his communal culture.* He elaborates this notion in the context of developing American identity and writes:

The process of American identity formation seems to support an individual's ego identity as long as he can preserve a certain element of deliberate tentativeness of autonomous choice. The individual must be able to convince himself that the next step is up to him and that no matter where he is staying or going he always has the choice of leaving or turning in the opposite direction if he chooses to do so. In this country the migrant does not want to be told to move on, nor the sedentary man to stay where he is: for the life style (and the family history) of each contains the opposite element as a potential alternative which he wishes to consider his most private and individual decision (1963:285-286).

Construction of social identities that border the domain of political remained pivotal to Erikson's writings though his primary focus was on personality formation during adolescence that essentially monitored future perception of identity by the individual. In his opinion:

Adolescence is the age of the final establishment of a dominant positive ego identity. It is then that a future within reach becomes part of the conscious life plan. It is then that the question arises whether or not the future was anticipated in earlier expectations. (Ibid) [1]

Reflection and Action 23.1

To what extent is identity formed in the adolescent years? What are its social components? Discuss and write down in your notebook.

Erikson's construction of identity draws inspiration from Freudian perceptions. In his article on 'American identity' he quotes Anna Freud at length and argues:

—in terms of the individual ego, which appears to be invaded by a newly mobilized and vastly augmented id as though from a hostile inner world, an inner outer world. Our interest is directed toward the quantity and quality of support to the adolescent ego, thus set upon, may expect from the outer world; and toward the question of whether ego defenses as well as identity fragments developed in earlier stages receive the necessary additional sustenance. What the regressing and growing, rebelling and maturing youths are now primarily concerned with is who and what they are in the eyes of a wider circle of significant people as compared with what they themselves have come to feel they are; and how to connect dreams, idiosyncrasies, roles, and skills cultivated earlier with the occupational and sexual prototypes of the day (ibid.250).

As you read through Erikson's original text you will come to terms with

intricacies of construction of identity as an individual and as an individual located in social context among individuals. Gleason developing this frame of reference for the construction of identity reasons that 'identity involves an interaction between the interior development of the individual personality, understood in terms derived from the Freudian id-ego-superego model, and the growth of a sense of selfhood that arises from participating in society, internalising its cultural norms, acquiring different statuses, and playing different roles'(1983: 465).

Erikson (1959) elaborated upon this notion of personal identity stating:

Personal identity was located deep in the unconscious as a durable and persistent sense of sameness of the self, whatever happens, however traumatic or dramatic the passage from one phase of life to another, the non pathological individual does not normally consider himself to have become someone else.

Largely drawing inspiration from the Freudian school as stated earlier Erikson believed that identity was located in the deep psychic structure of the individual. Our past experiences, our inhibitions and silent protests coupled with the kind of socialisation processes one has been subjected to, the adult constructs individual structures of identity accordingly. There is no denying that these structures mould themselves in correspondence with external social milieu. But inherent to it is an 'accrued confidence' in the 'inner sameness and continuity' of one's own being.

23.4 Identity and Identification

It is important at this stage to examine a closely related notion of identification. The term identification is in common use in different contexts. It was formally used in psychology by Sigmund Freud to explain a process by which a child relates and assimilate to itself external persons and objects. The concept was used as the key tool in psychoanalytical explanations of socialisation processes. For nearly two decades in the forty's and fifty's the concept of identification remained confined to psychoanalytical understandings. In 1954 Gordon W.Allport extended the notion of identification to explore ethnicity in his popular work The Nature of Prejudice.

Box 23.2: Concept of Identification

One of the areas where identification may most easily take place is that of social values and attitudes. Sometimes a child who confronts a social issue for the first time will ask his parent what attitude he should hold. Thus he may say, 'Daddy, what are we? Are we Jews or gentiles; Protestants or Catholics; Republicans or Democrats?' When told what 'we' are, the child is fully satisfied. From then on, he will accept his membership and the ready made attitudes that with it (Allport, 1954: *293-294).*

Contemporary social scientists recognise limitations of such assertions as we all know that individuals do not necessarily accept membership of 'ethnic groups' in this matter of fact manner that 'dad said it' and 'I believe in it'. In the later part of this lesson we will be discussing various modalities that intercept social and psychological domains of individuals to provide them markers for identification and identity assertions. However, it is important to assert here that in the history of evolution of construction of identity

and identity theories, Allport's contributions paved the way for relating notions of identity to popular sociological theories of role and reference group propounded by Ralph Linton and Merton respectively. Foote (1951) felt that Linton's role theory lacked 'a satisfactory account of motivation' and thus it will be better if theories of identification are mooted as explanations for 'motivation in social interactions'. Foote distinguished his use of the term identification from that of Freud. Foote defined Identification as: appropriation of and commitment to a particular identity or series of identities' on the part of an individual. Identification proceeds by naming and it meant individual to whom that name was given accepted and committed himself to that identity. In other words he accepts assignment to a category given to him on the basis of family, lineage, kinship religion, work activity or other attributes.

Identification thus construed provides for appropriation of these identities. It promotes ascription to identified categories and evolves a sense of 'selfhood'. A process of self-discovery and self-actualization is initiated-a process that is voluntary and not enforced by society. It is a different matter that as individuals grows they 'combine and modify identities by conscious choice more effectively then was possible for a child or a young person' (ibid, 466).

J. Milton Yinger examines identification as a consequence of process of assimilation. He argues that 'individuals from separate groups may come to think of themselves as belonging to the same society-a new society, blended from their societies of origin'. The context for Identification theorists as stated earlier remained United States of America. Numerous groups that migrated to US in the last two hundred years have gone through various phases of identification. Sometimes these groups surrendered to the dominant 'white culture' on others they asserted their traditional ethnic identities refusing to identify with the dominant culture.

Theoretically speaking Yinger reasons that shifts in identification are not really related to individual mindset but determined by cultural processes. These 'shifts may be one-sided, with members of group A identifying with society B, or members of group B identifying with society A'. All these three identification processes may go on simultaneously encouraging people to identify 'themselves simply as Americans', as Hispanics, Africans or Asian Americans. It is also equally true that throughout American history, some people have gone about identifying themselves as Indians, opting to live in traditional village settings and also accepting to become the village chief. Yinger concludes that 'identification is sometimes the major causal influence in the ethnic order; at other times it is more neatly dependent on the levels of integration, acculturation, and amalgamation'. (1997:137-139) It is important to note here that self-identification and identification by others is not necessarily correspondent to each other. Individuals or groups may ascribe themselves to certain nationalities or regions but are not necessarily accepted by others to be so. Ethnic conflicts in the North –East or displaced populations in Kashmir can constitute examples that may fit into this model. Yinger makes a very important point here, when he says that 'group solidarity among members of a group may block identification even with an open society' (ibid: 140).

23.5 Identity in Sociological Theory

Erikson's intellectual dominance in developing notions of identity has often paled contribution and importance of sociological theories in formulating constructs of social identity. Linton's contributions to the theory of status and role put forward in his important work The Study of Man (1936) came close to analysing notions of identity. Role theory developed by Linton showed how individuals performed roles in correspondence with statuses that they occupy. In doing so he demonstrated that individuals identified themselves in specified role positions. The role theory focused on the interactive nature of identity. People asserted their identities in response to specific situations where there were designated roles accompanying defined statuses that were perceived both by the actors and people in their surroundings. It was this perception that was critiqued by Foote and later modified by introducing elements of motivation paving way for constructing notions of identity that were closer to its vernacular meaning then to Erikson's notion of personal identity.

Reflection and Action 23.2

Relate and compare reference group theory to the personal identity theory.

Also at the same time Robert Merton developed one of the classic sociological theories called Reference group theory. The reference group was first brought in academic usage in 1942 and once again was popularly used by social psychologists. It was in 1950 that Robert Merton along with Alice S.Kitt introduced the term in sociological writings in an essay titled 'Contributions to the theory of Reference group Behaviour'. The concept was critical to the understanding of formation of identity as it highlighted the way a person's 'attitudes, values and sense of identity' was shaped by 'alignment with, or rejection of, 'reference groups' that had significance for the individual, either positively or negatively' (Gleason, 1983). The concept of reference group was further refined by Merton (1968) in his classic sociological text, Social Theory and Social Structure. Merton's primary concern was with examining Social Structures. He did not directly write much on identity or identification but emphasised on the need to place these concepts in the context of reference group theory as the reference group was instrumental in determining the core content of these constructs.

Box 23.3: Self and Identity

Identity acquired center space in sociological literature with the rise of theoretical perspectives referred to as Symbolic interactionists. *The school that came into prominence in the forty's tried to understand as to how 'social interaction mediated through shared symbolic systems, shaped the self consciousness of the individual' (Merton, 1968: 467). The protagonists of this school Charles Horton Cooley and George Herbert mead did not use the term identity; instead spoke of 'the self'. 'The self' remained popular in sociological writings to connote what we have been discussing as 'identity' in this lessons till early sixty's. Erving Goffman (1963) was responsible in substituting 'the self' by 'Identity' in popular sociological writings. Goffman's work* Stigma: Notes on the Management of spoiled Identity *followed by Berger's* Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Approach, *the term identity became virtually a permanent fixture in unfolding intricacies of 'role theory and reference group theory, dramaturgical sociology, and the phenomenological approach'.*

Sociological perception of Identity is an artifact of interaction between the individual and society-it is essentially a matter of being designated by a certain name, accepting that designation, internalizing the role requirement accompanying it, and behaving according to those perceptions (Gleason,1983). As is apparent from this view of identity, identity in social settings accompanies a sense of responsibility combined with commitment or loyalty and perceived role requirements. It is formatted in social interactions and manifests itself in social situations. Sociologists would argue that 'identities are socially bestowed' and 'must also be socially sustained, and fairly steadily so' (cf. Gleason, 1983).

23.6 Multiple Identities

All contemporary theories of identity acknowledge that an individual endows himself with multiple identities. Some of these identities can be mutually exclusive and also competitive. Others may be compatible, allowing one to build on other- resulting in the formation of complex constructions of identity. Yinger explains this complex creation of identity formation saying:

Although some identities clash-if one grows in strength the others become less salient-others are nested into a compatible structure of identities. The smaller, more intimate identities are surrounded by larger and more impersonal ones. Think of the family, the community, the ethnic group, and society as concentric circles of identity. At any given time, any one can be the most salient, preferences varying, alternating sometimes on a calendrical rhythm (at culturally regulated intervals) and sometimes on a critical rhythm (the timing being determined by an event, perhaps a crisis, the occurrence of which cannot be determine) (*1997:*144).

Mehta (1989) made similar assertions in a paper titled 'Dilemma of Identity assertion in a pluralistic society: A case study of Indian polity' whereby a case was made for examining 'core' and 'peripheral identities' while discussing multiple identities experienced by people belonging to diverse communities in India. She argued:

Various religious, cultural and linguistic diversities occupying the Indian subcontinent are not crowds but specified communities to which every member subscribed with a sense of belonging. They have their respective histories and many other intra-community commonalities—the sense of belonging which keeps the members of these communities together irrespective of their geographical placements is termed as 'core identity'. However, members of these communities may not assert or even express these inherent associations ordinarily. It is only under situations of stress and on threat to their ethnic identity that they may express themselves *(ibid: 265).*

Sociological theory would conceptualise these processes of identification within the general purview of processes of assimilation. Yinger (1997) following Stein and Hill (1977), Sandra Wallman (1986) interalia expresses similar opinion —'individuals from separate groups may come to think of themselves as belonging to the same society—a new society, blended from their societies of origin'. Accompanying this construction is fact of 'identification by others which is as important as 'identification of the self within a group' if not more. Cultural anthropology for years has distinguished processes of integration from those of assimilation, amalgamation and acculturation.

Integration may not always mean acceptance of one group by the other. A politically or numerically dominant group may not assimilate a minority or a smaller group within its fold. At the same time a smaller group may be over anxious to be accommodated and may assert larger group identity, rather than acknowledging its ethnic roots. It is rightly argued that each person having multiple identities may express 'dominant identity' either because of the expectations of others, or as a 'matter of personal choice' or is forced by 'circumstances of the moment'.

In a general sense one may concur with Yinger (1997) that:

Identities can be inherited, chosen, assigned or merely inferred from some bit of evidence. If one strengthens the definition of identification to make it more than simply a label or category, one can with Royce, think of it as a validated place in an ethnic group. It is not merely ascription. Some ethnic identities have to be achieved, and they have to be maintained by behavior, by ethnic 'signaling'. "Adequate performance in an identity is much more rigorously judged within a group than it is by outsiders. For the latter, a few tokens of identity are usually sufficient."…….That more commonly, or certainly more visibly, coerced ethnic identity is produced largely by outsiders. Opportunities denied, stereotypes, and legal and political definitions restrict one's ethnic options.

Nisbet also supports these contentions stating:

Throughout recorded history there is a high correlation between alienation of individual loyalties from dominant political institutions and the rise of new forms of community-ethnic, religious, and others- which are at once renunciations of and challenges to these political institutions.

23.7 National Character and Identity Studies

In the post-world war II era construction of identity moved from the domain of personal to constructing national identity as territories were being redefined and new nationalities being created across the world. Semblance of construction of these identities required that national character was defined and ensured as a moral value to make citizens conform to restructured boundaries with a sense of renewed passion and commitment. Large-scale migrations also required realignments. Social scientists attempted to evolve models that inculcated a sense of belonging among citizens prompting them to acquire national characters considered imperative for laying the foundations of nationalism. National character studies carried out by anthropologists like Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict in the forty's acquired immense sociological significance, as it was in the background of these studies that Erikson made his concept of identity popular.

Box 23.4: Eriksons Conceptualisation of Identity

Functioning American……bases his final ego-identity on some tentative combination of dynamic polarities such as migratory and sedentary, individualistic and standardised, competitive and cooperative, pious and free thinking, etc' (Erikson, 1963). *Erikson goes on to talk about the 'subliminal panic' that accompanied large scale testing of 'American identity' in the war. 'Historical change', he said* has reached a coercive universality and a global acceleration, which is experienced as a threat to the emerging

American identity. *(Cf. Gibbson, 1983) . Erikson expanded his ideas of in a chapter titled 'reflections on the American identity' in which he almost equated notions of American character with American identity. He wrote what was true of national characters is true of national identities and that it would be better to use the term identity instead of national character.*

National character studies were brought in the sociological discourse with the publication of Mead's And Keep your Powder Dry (1942) and Ruth Benedict's study of Japanese society The Chrysanthemum and the sword (1946). The focus in these studies was to explore how cultures influence individuals and their personalities and impact formation of their national characters. A concept that in modern day sociological analysis is often addressed in terms of ethnicity studies as has been pointed out in the first lesson on 'Conceptualizing ethnicity'. It is important to note here that Erikson developed his ideas on 'ego identity' and 'group identity' while following 'war time national character studies'. Even though the concept of 'identity' was inspired by national character studies, its popularity surpassed 'character studies. 'National character' studies are now invariably referred in a historical sense whereas 'identity' studies are being reinterpreted in almost all branches of social sciences. Identity construction is as much central to the disciplines of political science, History, Psychology, Anthropology as it is in the discipline of sociology. One tends to agree with Gleason's observations with regard to popularity of identity construction studies, when he says:

Identity promised to elucidate a new kind of conceptual linkage between the two elements of the problem, since it was used in reference to, and dealt with the relationship of, the individual personality and the ensemble of social and cultural features that gave different groups their distinctive character. *(cf. Sollors, 1996).*

Once linkages between construction of 'personal identity' and 'social identity' were firmly established, social scientists started looking at problems that individuals confronted in keeping congruence between the two in situations, where these two constructions of identity came in conflict with each other.

23.8 Conclusion

Alexis de Tocqueville was one of the first scholars to draw attention of the academic community to the possibilities of individuals shrinking their worldview and enclosing their spaces to confine themselves 'in the solitude of his own heart' labeling this phenomenon as 'individualism'. Tocqueville analysed this problem while addressing issues emerging out of American conceptions of democracy and did not use the term 'identity' or 'identity crisis'.

Questions relating to identity acquired critical dimensions in the post world war period due to crumbling of citadel of colonialism and reconstruction of national boundaries. Vagaries of war resulted in mass exodus and people moved to different geographical zones seeking survival and sustenance for the self and their families. In-migration made local inhabitants circumspect and may individuals started realigning themselves on the basis of their religious, linguistic and racial identities. This resulted in enclosures in which in-group and out-groups were clearly defined and boundaries both psychological and social were deliberately created and reinforced through oral histories.

A peculiar situation emerged in what is often described as 'nation building process'. New nations along with established democracies like USA were promoting what was described earlier as 'national character studies'. This model expected people to conform to prescribed principles of liberty, equality and fraternity laying foundations for what is often described in sociological literature as 'mass societies'. 'Assimilation' was believed to be the natural norm for all those who moved from outside into the domains of their new habitats. National integration and national solidarities emanating from geographical concepts of nation state were the key issues on which political mandate was generated. In this process pursuits for seeking 'self' or 'individual identity' were either confined to the personalized domain of the individual or philosophy. Social identity operated under the assumed assumption of 'identification' with the larger social milieu that was represented by a 'mass society'. It is argued in sociological literature that the threat of mass society becoming 'totalitarian' and subsequently domineering to the extent of producing 'authoritarian personalities' susceptible to 'fascism' was first perceived by refugee intellectuals, many of whom had migrated from Germany. Described as **Frankfurt school,** it was related to two influential publications namely Riesman's The Lonely Crowd and Handlin's The Uprooted. These two works were rooted in a theoretical approach called **Dialectical Method.** Dialectic refers to a process of realising contradictions and reconciling those contradictions in a more realistic frame of reference. People who move from their homelands to other countries often experience a sense of loss that they try to come to terms with, through this process of idealist Hegelian philosophy.

It is important to reassert that 'identity' is a 'higher order concept' — a general organising referent which includes a number of subsidiary facets that include social identity, ego-identity, personal identity as other additional components (Dashefsky, 1976). Identity is all about what is common and what is specific. When interpreted in these dimensions it becomes the critical factor in establishing boundaries. How these boundaries are constructed and legitimized will be discussed in the next lesson.

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Unit 24

Boundaries and Boundary Maintenance

Contents

Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you will be able to

- give definitions of ethnicity
- discuss ethnic group and boundaries
- analyse polyethnic societies
- describe the "melting pot" theory

24.1 Introduction

In the previous two lessons we talked about conceptualising ethnicity and construction of identity. It must be apparent to you by now that the notion of ethnic identity in the globalise world has emerged as the critical concept. It translates itself sometimes as nationalism, on others is responsible for creating sub nationalities within political nation states and determines notions of citizenship. In this lesson we will try and unfold some dimensions of this complex process of Boundaries and boundary maintenance.

24.2 Definitions of Ethnic Group

To begin with, we start with some simple definitions of 'Ethnic Groups'. Macmillan's *Dictionary of Anthropology* (1986) defines an 'Ethnic Group' as:

Any Group of People who set themselves apart and are set apart from other groups with whom they interact or coexist in terms of some distinctive criterion or criteria which may be linguistic, racial or cultural. The term is thus a very broad one, which has been used to include social CLASSES as well as racial or national minority groups in urban and industrial societies, and also to distinguish different cultural and social groupings among indigenous populations. The concept of ethnic group thus combines both social and cultural criteria, and the study of ethnicity focuses precisely on the interrelation of cultural and social process in the identification of and interaction between such groups.

Max Weber (1958) defined 'Ethnic Group' as:

Those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or

be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether or not an objective blood relationship exists. Ethnic membership (Gemeinsamkeit) differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity, not a group with concrete social action, like the latter. In our sense, ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organised, that inspires belief in common ethnicity. This belief tends to persist even after the disintegration of the political community, unless drastic differences in customs, physical type, or, above all, language exist among its members. ……..Groups, in turn, can engender sentiments of likeness which will persist even after their demise and will have an 'ethnic' connotation. The political community in particular can produce such an effect. But most directly, such an effect is created by the language group, which is the bearer of a specific 'cultural possession of the masses' (Massenkulturgut) and makes mutual understanding (verstehen) possible or easier.(Weber,1958)

These definitions draw our attention to subsequent boundaries that ethnic groups evolve to form 'enclosures'. These enclosures are not defined by geographical space or political identities but are distinguished by cultural, linguistic or religious connectivity. Fredrik Barth, who can be called as the original author of construction of this notion of boundaries in his famous essay of 1969 titled 'Ethnic groups and Group boundaries' states categorically:

It is clear that boundaries persist despite a flow of personnel across them. In other words, categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on the absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories.

To this he adds another important dimension that we will be debating in this lesson:

Ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of social interaction and acceptance, but are quite to the contrary often the very foundations on which embracing social systems are built. Interaction in such a social system does not lead to its liquidation through change and acculturation; cultural differences can persist despite inter-ethnic contact and interdependence (Barth, 1969).

It is often argued that boundaries are sustained because people remain confined to cultural spaces. Even when they immigrate, they retain their 'cultural stuff' and do not surrender their individual cultural markers. It was with these perceptions that Barth's historic contributions shifted 'focus of investigation from internal constitution and history of separate groups to ethnic boundaries and boundary maintenance'. Before I dwell any further on Barth's contributions in a separate section of this lesson, I want to emphasise that the construction of boundaries as understood in sociological writings is different from the way boundaries were construed by political scientists. Territoriality certainly plays an important role in assertion and reassertion of these diacritic but is not quintessential to the formation of these categories. Political scientists would largely focus on the relationships that different ethnic groups share with the state. Read with care the following paragraph

by Paul Brass— a name to reckon with, in understanding processes of elite formations and development of ethnic identities. Brass is often described as proponent of Instrumentalist school. He writes in his 1991 publication, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*:

Ethnic identity formation is viewed as a process that involves three sets of struggles. One takes place within the ethnic group itself for control over its material and symbolic resources, which in turn involves defining the group's boundaries and its rules for inclusion and exclusion[2]. The second takes place between ethnic groups as a competition for right, privileges, and available resources. The third takes place between the state and the groups that dominate it, on the one hand, and the populations that inhabit its territory.

Elaborating on these concerns, Brass poses certain significant questions such as:

Is the study of ethnicity a sub-branch of interest group politics or of class analysis or a separate subject in its own right? Or, to put it another way, are interest groups, classes and ethnic groups to be treated as analytically separable and coequivalent or is one or another category primary?

Brass also has definite opinion about sociological analysis of ethnicity and boundary maintenance. In his critical comments, he asserts:

Most sociological theories that are relevant to a discussion of ethnic groups and the state focus on society as a whole and take as their main theoretical issue the conditions for conflict or cohesion, national integration or internal war and treat the societal units-interest groups, classes, or ethnic groups —as givens rather than as objects for examination themselves. Too often neglected is the issue of how identity and cohesion within groups are formed and maintained in the first place, how political mobilisation of groups occurs, and how and why both group cohesion and mobilisation often decline. (Brass, 1985).

Given these deliberations, one may argue that ethnic identities are political positions, acquired and assumed through processes of cultural articulation and re-enforced through repetitive calls to threat to survival of these identities. They are primordial in the sense that people may be born as Hindus, Muslims, Jew, Whites or blacks. But assertion of these inherited categories of identification is dependent on situations in which individuals are involved and what kinds of advantages they perceive for itself in the given circumstances. One must also remember that these categories of ascription are also negotiable. Boundaries that an individual draws are always in inter-active situations. Boundaries are never drawn in social isolation. It is often my boundary versus your line of demarcation. The process remains the same irrespective of the fact whether it is a situation involving two individuals or ethnic groups. Even when dialogue is pursued or positions of confrontation adopted within the construct of a nation state, ethnic groups often assume categories in which those in power are perceived to be as status groups in control, thus different and domineering. Construction of situations of minority-majority conflicts, religious or linguistic conflicts or regional disparities are all construed in a patterned manner.

It is also interesting to underscore the fact that ethnicity is relative. In the context of maintenance of *boundaries* between various groups, Jenkins

notes '*ethnicity* shifting with the contexts of its mobilisation' and reasons that 'ethnicity is a function of inter-group relations; in the absence of such relations and their concomitant group boundaries ethnicity is unthinkable' (1997:90-91). The positions that are taken by Brass, Barth and Jenkins ethnicity becomes a resource that is encashed, manipulated, negotiated both with and between groups. But when it comes to talking about boundary maintenance, we tend to focus on inter-group constructions and how identity is manipulated within groups for assertion of differences.

24.3 Frederik Barth—Ethnic Group and Boundaries

Before, I dwell any further on the notion of manipulation and instrumentalities of maintaining ethnic group boundaries; it is essential to repeat some of assertions made in the seminal essay by Barth. To begin with, the definition of ethnic group as given by Narroll (1964) and described as an ideal type definition that essentially reviews ethnic group being viewed as =race=a culture=language=society is repeated:

- ethnic group is largely biologically self-perpetuating (Primordial)
- shares fundamental cultural values, realised in overt unity in cultural forms
- make up a field of communication and interaction
- has a membership, which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order.

Barth's discomfort with this definition emanates from his position that 'it allows us to assume that *boundary maintenance is unproblematic* and follows from the isolation, which the itemised characteristics imply: racial difference, cultural difference, social separation and language barriers, and spontaneous and organised enmity'. Elucidating his point of view, Barth further asserts in the same paragraph:

This also limits the range of factors that we use to explain cultural diversity: we are led to imagine each group developing its cultural and social form in relative isolation, mainly in response to local ecologic factors, through a history of adaptation by invention and selective borrowing. This history has produced world of separate peoples, each with their culture and each organised in a society, which can legitimately be isolated for description as an island itself.

Reflection and Action 24.1

Outline Barth's position on boundary maintenance, and then discuss its various aspects.

Barth in his analysis prefers to look at sharing of these important attributes not as being primacy or definitional attribute but as 'implied' or 'resultant'. These attributes may be examined as repositories for 're-inventing' oneself and not necessarily as morphological attributes for establishing group identities within contained geographical spaces. People may move away, yet retain some if not all of their core cultural attributes. They may also live at the same place but modify some of their cultural traits for ecological adjustments or for social adaptation without allowing their sense of belonging to their specific cultural group being invaded in any form. In Barth's own terms:

It is thus inadequate to regard overt institutional forms as constituting the cultural features, which at any time distinguish ethnic group — these overt forms are determined by ecology as well as by transmitted culture. Nor can it be claimed that every such diversification within a group represents a first step in the direction of subdivision and multiplication of units. We have also known documented cases of one ethnic group, also at a relatively simple level of economic organisation, occupying several different ecologic niches and yet retaining basic cultural and ethnic unity over long periods (cf; e.g., inland and coastal Chukchee (Bogoras, 1904-9) or reindeer, river, and coast Lapps (Gjessing, 1954; Barth, 1969).

After asserting importance of retaining cultural features, and their importance as building blocks of 'identity formations' within ethnic groups, Barth highlights the most critical feature of ethnic group formation the fact of 'ascription'.

24.4 Ascription as the Critical Factor

Ethnic groups are recognised as status categories. Within these categories it is crucial that members of these groups ascribe themselves to these formations and their membership is so recognised by the others. Processes of interaction are thus determined by this concept of belongingness, which is not only attributed by the self to the group but is also recognised by the others. Denial of this ascription is problematic for the survival of the individual in a group and that of group in any inter-ethnic situation. Cultural emblems like dress, dialect, symbols play a significant role in the assertion of ascription. Emphasising the criterion of ascription, Barth(1969) states:

When defined as an ascriptive and exclusive group, the nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear: it depends on the maintenance of boundary. The cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organisation formation the group may change-yet the fact of continuing dichotomisation between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity, and investigate the changing cultural form and content.

Box 24.1: Investigating Ethnic Boundaries

Barth argues that for researching that he terms 'investigating', the 'ethnic boundary' that defines the group becomes critical for analysis and not the 'cultural stuff' that comprises the group. This is a position that is confronted by various scholars in particular by Jenkins. The 'cultural stuff' in Barth's definition comprises of language, religion, laws, traditions, customs-infect all the attributes that Tylor addressed in his famous definition of culture. This definition of 'ethnic group' is said to be in direct line with the contention of ethnic group' held by Max Weber-as defined in the beginning of this lesson. According to Jenkins this argument is partly justified and should remain central to our understanding of ethnicity. But he also believes that if we follow this in letter and spirit, we run the risk of considering 'cultural stuff' as irrelevant to the process of boundary maintenance.

It is actually this 'cultural stuff' that outlines distinctiveness and sustains differentiation. In Jenkins words:

In insisting that there is no simple equation between seamless tapestry of cultural variation and the discontinuities of ethnic differentiation, it

prevents us from mistaking the morphological enumeration of cultural traits for the analysis of ethnicity. However, this argument might also be construed as suggesting that the cultural stuff out of which that differentiation is arbitrarily socially constructed is somehow irrelevant, and this surely cannot be true. For example, a situation in which As and Bs are distinguished, inter alia, by languages that are mutually intelligible for most everyday purposes- as with Danish and Norwegian (These were the communities that Jenkins was analysing for constructing his model of ethnicity)*—would seem to differ greatly from one in which the languages involved are, as with English and Welsh, utterly different.* (1997:107).

One may infer then that in polyethnic societies, every ethnic group draws boundaries using its 'cultural stuff' as critical in maintaining these cultural, often political and economic categories. Yet, one need not forget that 'boundaries' may persist, even when there is 'little cultural differentiation'. As sollors would put it:

The cultural content of ethnicity (the stuff which Barth's boundaries enclose) is largely interchangeable and rarely historically authenticated.

24.5 Poly-ethnic Societies

Barth in his construction of 'ethnic boundaries' prefers to use the term poly ethnic instead of more commonly used Greco-Roman term 'multi-ethnic'. He takes us back to the work of Furnivall (1944). Furnivall had said that in a plural society –'poly ethnic society integrated in the market place, under the control of a state system dominated by one of the groups, but leaving large areas of cultural diversity in the religious and domestic sectors of activity.....but what has not been appreciated by later anthropologists is the possible variety of sectors of articulation and separation, and the variety of poly-ethnic systems which entails' (ibid,301).

We in India experience these differentiations in our day-to-day activities. India with its diverse populations, regional differences, linguistic pot pouri and multi religious character shares a unique political umbrella. Ethnic differences are articulated and once accompanied by political ambitions often emerge as strong movements. However, what has been remarkable about these articulations is that homogeneity is never perceived as the common plank against which dissidence is to be voiced. These movements may have been symbolic of seeking representations that were largely 'cultural' but were imbued with political meanings- something that Brass like to term as instrumentalities for achieving political ends. Barth (1969) in this regard has opted for a distinct position arguing:

Nothing can be gained by lumping these various systems (poly-ethnic, multi-cultural systems) *under the increasingly vague label of 'plural society'.....*

What can be referred to as articulation and separation on the macro –level corresponds to systematic sets of role constraints on the micro-level. Common to all these systems is the principle that ethnic identity allowed to play, and partners he may choose for different kinds of transactions.

In other words, regarded as a status, ethnic identity is similar to sex and rank, in that it constraints the incumbent in all his activities, not only in some defined social situations. One might thus also say that it is imperative,

in that it cannot be disregarded and temporarily set aside by other definitions of the situation. The constraints on a person's behavior which springs from his ethnic identity thus tend to be absolute and, in complex poly-ethnic societies, quite comprehensive; and the component moral and social conventions are made further resistant to change by being joined in stereotyped clusters as characteristic of one single identity.

Box 24.2: The Ethnic Nuclei

It is ironic, that even when we try to deny mostly as a patriotic gesture that we are 'Indians first and foremost and Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs or Punjabis, Bengali, Gujarati etc. later, we do sustain and nurture with enormous amount of jealousy our primary identities and subsequently boundaries associated with these identities.. In an effort to remind ourselves about our sub-conscious or conscious boundaries, we often pay ritualistic tribute to cultural traits that tell us — 'we are different'. It can be dress, pride in our rational food or art form. Each of these is a symbolic and essential attribute to assertion of our status in society that is essentially poly-ethnic. We do this also to reorganize ourselves and to sustain what some authors would like to call the 'ethnic nuclei'.

Barth in his work has categorically stated that it is not only the marginalised or ridiculed in the society, responsible for pronouncing the ethnic boundaries but also all members of an ethnic groups in a poly ethnic society can act to maintain dichotomies and differences—sometimes as in the case of Bourne making what one may believe sound intellectual statements.

24.6 Melting Pot and Beyond

It was submersion of individual ethnic nuclei in a larger, somewhat abstract perception of 'national identity' that dominated ethnic debates in America in the post world war II period. A debate that assumed in the light of statements made by Bourne that America was emerging as near perfect example of a 'melting pot of races'- an institution in which all races, groups coming from various parts of the world to settle in America melt their boundaries in a common pot of 'American National Identity'-the trans national Identity.

Milton Gordon (1964) in his book *Assimilation in American Life* made sustained effort to distinguish pluralism from assimilations. The concept of Melting pot implied assimilation at the expense of individual communities forgoing their individual identities and evolving the nationalistic 'American individual'. The concept of 'Melting pot' rooted in notions of 'Anglo-conformity' 'demanded the complete renunciation of the immigrant's ancestral culture in favour of the behaviour and values of the Anglo-Saxon core group', according to Gordon.

Reflection and Action 24.2

Explain the concept of the "melting pot" theory. Put your answer down in your diary.

Newman has evolved a formula to explain this when he suggests that A+B+C=A. In this case A is the dominant culture and others are expected to submerge their differences in this encompassing identity. This may also imply that A+B+C=D, that is, different cultures when put together in a Melting pot give up their individual identities to evolve a different identity that is common

to all and symbolises the citizen in a democratic state. Werner Sollors in the following discussion elaborates on some components of this debate among the students deliberating on notions of ethnicity and boundary maintenance in America:

In common usage, 'melting pot' could stand for both these concepts. The resulting ambiguity –did melting pot translate into A+B+C=D or into A+B+C=A- further contributed to make this image the perfect fall guy in maddeningly circular debate about ethnicity. As 'D' it could be denounced from boundary –constructing ethnic point of view. If the remainder of commitments to what Orlando Patterson has referred to as 'the universal culture' made this position embarrassing, the 'A': melting pot or amalgamation was denounced as a mere smoke screen for Anglo-Saxon conformity (or, in a variant, for racism). The most persistent rhetorical feature of American discussions of the melting pot is therefore contradictory rejection that asserts ethnicity against A+B+C=D and then recoils to defend universalism against A+B+C=A. 'Refuting' the melting pot-an activity American writers and scholars never seem to cease finding delight in (some studies have termed these debates as mushrooming of an anti melting pot industry)*—allows us to have the ethnic cake and eat universalism, and to denounce universalism as a veiled form of 'Anglo-conformity' at the same time.*

Inherent in these debates is the suggestion that cultures do not have temperatures and predicting their malleability beyond a point where they loose both form and content is a mere figment of imagination. In other words the industry that grew up denouncing an ephemeral notion of melting pot simply suggests that come what may, 'boundaries somehow sustain themselves' and thus acquire significant dimensions in any study of ethnic groups.

24.7 Critique of Barth's Model

There is no denying that Barth's model offers interesting insights into processes of cultural configurations and their perseverance, irrespective of forces demanding change and continuous pressures of accommodation. To argue that there is no structure or to put it in Sollors words 'there is no emperor, there are only clothes', is a proposition that some scholars find difficult to comprehend. In his comments on Barth's study of Swat Pathan, Louis Dumont offers a subtle statement: 'The main thing is to *understand,* and therefore ideas and values can not be separated from *"structure".*

Jenkins and Abner Cohen find Barth's arguments restrictive. In their opinion Barth fails to incorporate dynamic nature of ethnicity in his efforts to evolve a model of 'enclosures' defined by 'self ascriptive boundaries'. Cohen's logic is: (Barth's) *separation between 'vessel' and 'content' makes it difficult to appreciate the dynamic nature of ethnicity. It also assumes an inflexible structure of the human psyche and implicitly denies that personality is an open system given to modifications through continual socialization under changing socio-cultural conditions.*

Talal Asad (1972) in his work 'Market Model, Class Structure and Consent: A Reconsideration of Swat Political Organisation' want to maintain Boundaries' places Barth in Hobbesian tradition.

Box 24.3: Boundary Maintenance

Common arguments found in the literature that can be decoded as critique of Barth's model take the course that 'barth's theory leaves us guessing about the reasons why people want to maintain boundaries. Is it a primordial trait according to which human being s want to distance themselves from others, create and maintain boundaries, even when the area that is enclosed by these boundaries appears to be, at least from a structural view, identical?' (Sollors, 1981). Or to put it in the words of Joshua A. Fishman-'If there can be no heartland without boundaries, however distant they may be, there can be no boundaries unless there is a heartland'.

a) Sustenance of Boundaries

Critique not withstanding, there is evidence to suggest that ethnic groups sustain boundaries and retain identity markers to distinguish categories of ascription. We will briefly review some factors that support this process of boundary sustenance. It is understandable that under different circumstances, critical factors sustaining definitions and boundaries are likely to be different. A crucial factor that impacts is the element of security. Barth argues:

In most political regimes, however, where there is less security and people live under a greater threat of arbitrariness and violence outside their primary community, the insecurity itself acts as a constraint on inter-ethnic contacts.

This sense of insecurity promotes a sense of enclosure within the community and results in hardening of boundaries visa-vie other groups. It may further be added that if there are historical and cultural factors that purport differences , the pace at which boundaries are sustained may be accentuated. Essays listed in Barth's edited volume showed that in each case boundaries were maintained by a limited set of cultural features. It may also be remembered that 'the persistence of the unit then depends on the persistence of these cultural differentiae'. Barth in his concluding remarks posits:

However, most of the cultural matter that at any time is associated with a human population is not constrained by this boundary; it can vary, be learnt, and change without any critical relation to the boundary maintenance of the ethnic group through time, one is not simultaneously, in the same sense, tracing the history of 'a culture': the elements of the present culture of that ethnic group have not sprung from the particular set that constituted the group's culture at a previous time, whereas the group has a continual organisational existence with boundaries (criteria of membership) that despite modifications have marked off a continuing unit.

Within the precepts of notions of Nation-state, the Majority-Minority situations further the process of ethnic distancing and segment boundaries. Minority situations are often under pressure for fear of rejection by the host population.

As an epilogue to these three chapters on *ethnicity, Identity and Boundary maintenance,* and to provide a perspective on how relevant these *concepts, constructions and Boundaries* are for understanding contemporary political and social realities; a section on Nationalism, Citizenship and boundaries is incorporated.

24.8 Conclusion

'Nationalism is the political doctrine which holds that humanity can be divided into separate, discrete units-nations-and that each nation should constitute a separate political unit-a state. The claim to nationhood usually invokes the idea of a group of people with a shared culture, often a shared language, sometimes a shared religion, and usually but not always a shared history; to this it adds the political claim that this group of people should, by rights, rule themselves or be ruled by people of the same kind (nation, ethnicity, language, religion etc.)'(Jonathan Spencer, 2002). This conception assumes nations to be homogenous following classical precepts of ethnographic explorations that argued that 'people can be classified as belonging to discrete, bounded cultures or societies'. The construct of a Poly-ethnic society comes loaded with notions of multiple nationalities that are bounded to each other by a common perception of loyalty, while retaining distinct boundaries that do not disturb the precinct of internationally accepted territoriality.

Some recent studies on the subject attempt to study the 'nation-state from the point of view of modern ethnicity theory….. equating regional politics=ethnicity=building blocks of new nations in the post 1947 era, as "self consciousness of a group of people united or closely related, by shared experiences such as language, religious belief, common heritage or political institutions". Increasingly, it is now being perceived that the notion of sovereign nation-state and an over arching concern with one's own nationalism is instrumental in generating violence within the confines of 'legitimate perceptions' of protection of defined national/ethnic boundaries. If people in Kashmir, Bodoland or other parts of the Indian Nation state are fighting for the protection of their perceived boundaries the 'armed forces' are struggling to keep 'national boundaries' intact.

'Ethnicity emerges out of the cusp between the relation between the *citizen* and those officially defined as *outsider, stranger* or *Marginal*. But, it emerges not purely from the logic of citizenship and development, but from the structure of electoral logic, from the normalcy of Majority-Minority politics' (Visvanathan, 2003).

The world today is witnessing upheavals often rooted in notions of 'self'. I am referring back to first and second lesson talking about how individuals perceive and construct 'identity' and it collective translation into 'ethnicity'. We often come across essays on 'resurgence or revival of ethnicity' and how in the context of 'nation-state', these constructions pose problems of 'instability'. I am not making any efforts in these concluding remarks to answer any queries that may trouble your mind as you try and understand these complex processes affecting our lives. I am closing these lessons by repeating some questions that social scientists often pose to themselves and to fellow students to get closer to empirical processes that are unfolding before us.

By the sixteenth century.....the word nation expanded to include a people, a population. National identity now derived from membership in a people and finally nation referred to a "unique people" or a "unique sovereign people". And it is the trajectory of definitions that became problematic. The nation, instead of being an open category, threatens to become an exclusionary

process. The seeds of ambivalence and violence are rooted here and it steps from

- The idea of citizenship as a static entity
- The problematic nature of identity
- The positivism between territory and a people and the fixity of boundaries
- *The genocidal nature of the exclusionary process.*

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