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.

22.10 References

Anthias, F. 1992, 'Connecting "Race" and Ethnic Phenomena' *Sociology*, 26, pp421-38

Banks (M.), 1996, *Anthropological Constructions of Ethnicity: AN Introductory Guide,* London: Routeldge

Banton (M.), 1967. *Race Relations*. London : Tavistock

Barth, Fredrik, 1969(ed.). *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Cultural Difference*. London: Allen and Unwin

Bauman,Z. 1990, *Thinking Sociologically,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell

Bell, Daniel 1975, "Ethnicity and Social Change." In Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moymihan (eds.), *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience.* Cambridge et al: Harvard University Press

Berge, Van Den Pierre (L). 1981. *The Ethnic Phenomenon*. New York: Elsevier

Brass, Paul 1985 (1974), *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Bromley, Yu. 1974 (ed.), *Soviet Ethnology and Anthropology Today*. Netherlands, The Hague: Mouton & Co., N.V. Publishers et al

Brass, Paul, 1991, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*. New Delhi et al: Sage Publications

Cohen, Abner, 1974 (ed.), *Two Dimensional Man: An Essay on Power and Symbolism in Complex Society*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

Cohen, Ronald 1978, Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology "*Annual*

Review of Anthropology. Vol.7, Pp. 379-404

Geertz, Clifford. 1973, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books

Glaser, Daniel 1958, 'Dynamics of Ethnic Identification' In *American Sociological Review,* 23 (1958), 31-40

Glazer, Nathan and Moynihan, Daniel P. 1963, *Beyond the Melting Pot*. Cambridge: MIT Press

Glazer, Nathan and Moymihan, Daniel P. 1978 (1975), *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience.* Cambridge et al: Harvard University Press

Gleason, Philip, 1980, "American All: Ethnicity, Ideology and American Identity in the Era of World War II". *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (eds.) Stephan A. Thernstrom, Oscar Handlin and Ann Orlov. USA

Handlin, Oscar, 1952, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that made the American People*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap

Hirschfeld, Magnu, 1938, *Racism.* Translated and edited by Eden and Cedar Paul, London: Victor Gollancz

Jenkins, Richard, 1977, *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations*. Sage Publications

Merton, Robert K. 1972, 'Insiders and Outsiders' In *The American Journal of Sociology,* 78(1) (July 1972), pp.9-47

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant 1989 (1986). *Racial Formation in the United States*: From the 1960s to the 1980s. New York: Routledge

Ostergard, U. 1992, "Peasants and Danes: The Danish National Identity and Political Culture". *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 34: 3-27

Shaw, R. P. and Wong, Y. 1989, *Genetic Seeds of Warfare*. Boston: Unwin and Hyman

Sollors, Werner (ed.) 1996. *Theories of Ethnicity: A Classical Reader*. Honndmills ital: Macmillan Press Ltd

Sollors, Werner 1981, 'Theory of American Ethnicity'. *American Quarterly,* 33(3), pp. 257-83

Stone, John, 1996 "Ethnicity''. In Adam Kuper and Jessica Kuper (eds.), *The Social Science Encyclopedia.* London & New York: Routledge (Second Edition)

Vermuelen, Hans and Grovers, Cora, 1994 (eds.). *The Anthropology of Ethnicity: Beyond "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries"* Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis

Wallman, Sandra 1986, 'Ethnicity and the Boundary Process in Context', In John Rex and David Mason (eds.), *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Waters, Mary C. 1990, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America.* Berkeley: University of California Press

Weber, Max 1968 (1922.) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, 3 Vols., Guenther Roth & Claus Wittich, (eds.) New York: Bedminster Press