

**Race and Ethnicity: Sociological Theories and Social Disintegration in
Pakistan**

Nasar Khan, PhD Scholar, University of Malakand, Pakistan

Dr. Arab Naz, Professor in Sociology, University of Malakand, Pakistan

Abstract

Race and ethnicity are sociologically important concept. Race and ethnicity are universal and relative. This article provides a theoretical insight to race and ethnicity in terms of its social significance. The article is review based and the major purpose is to accumulate the theories on race and ethnicity. The theories are applied to the situation of race and ethnic divide in Pakistan. Peer reviewed research from Pakistan is also cited, and suggestions in terms of theoretical guidelines for further research and suggestions for future research are provided.

Key Words: Race, Ethnicity, Sociological theory, Pakistan

1.1.Objectives and Methodology

- To illustrate sociological theories regarding race and ethnicity
- To apply sociological theories of race and ethnicity on Pakistani society
- To link the role of race and ethnicity with social disintegration in Pakistan

For the mentioned purposes an extensive search of tertiary articles was carried out. A total of 39 articles were identified specific to the issues where a total of 12 articles were cited which were most relevant and sociological in nature.

Social phenomena are defined relatively; therefore, it is important to provide an insight to an agreed definition of race and ethnicity. Kendall (2012) concludes from the discussion of many theorists that *ethnicity* is a socially important demographic marker in any society. Ethnicity (as concluded from the work of many social theorists) is an abstract social boundary. This boundary exists among social groups based upon cultural differences. With this explanation, the numerous components of culture are also important aspects of distinctions including language, beliefs, practices, art, norms, and values and so on. Race is often used interchangeably with ethnicity; however, race is more biological in nature. The biological differences between certain groups of people are termed as race, for example, Asian has different physique than Europeans. This must be kept in consideration that racial differences are distinction among groups on the basis of physique and individuals do not matter in it. Asians are group of people while Europeans are also a group of people. This example can be understood in terms of sex and gender as well. Sex is biological in nature whereas gender is socio-cultural and psychological in nature. But the major difference is ethnicity and race are theoretically applied to larger social groups whereas sex and gender is theoretical applied at micro level (Goldstein and Ann, 2000). Ethnicity and race are socially constructed though as mentioned earlier that race is biological distinction but is at group level resulting in dominance in social explanation of race. As ethnicity and race are socially constructed there is the concept of relevance associated with it. Ethnicity and race (the social aspects) vary across groups, time, situation and culture (Bennett, 2000).

2.1.The Social Significance of Race and Ethnicity

The social construction of ethnicity and race reflects that it affects the daily life at micro and macro level. At micro level it affect individuals, groups and small communities while at macro level it affects communities, societies and even nation states. Two sociologists namely Michael Omi and Howard Winant assert that:

“...permeates every institution, every relationship, and every individual. Historically, stratification based on race and ethnicity has pervaded all aspects of political, economic, and social life...”

It is a fact that social phenomenon, activities, developments and innovations have positive as well as negative consequences for individuals, communities and societies. However, historically race and ethnicity have remained in the debates for social divides and inequalities.

2.2.Race, Ethnicity and Prejudice

Prejudice has been under consideration for sociologists as a result of racial and ethnic divide across the world. Racial and ethnic divide results in negative attitude towards certain individuals, groups and communities. The negative attitude resulting from racial and ethnic divide primarily results from faulty generalizations. In situation of racial and ethnic prejudice one individual, group or community gets an advantage over the other.

2.2.1. Stereotypes

Racial and ethnic prejudice is rooted in ethnocentrism and stereotypes leading to overgeneralizations about the appearance, behavior, or other characteristics of members of particular categories.

2.3.Theoretical Underpinning of Racial and Ethnic Prejudice

Dollard et al (1939) argues that *frustration-aggression* aspect of prejudice is important. The philosophy of this model is embedded in social learning. The assumption of this theory is based on inability to achieve some objectives or goals through efforts. This leads to achievements of objectives and goals through prejudice which at macro level is also true for communal racial and ethnic divide. This theory was extended later on by Adorno and his colleagues by adding that

use of authority to be prejudice against certain social groups and communities is racial and ethnic prejudice. The authority by dominant group or community is utilized for stereotyping. This type of prejudice is supported by stereotyping and is common at community and state level (Aderno et al., 1950).

2.3.1. Measuring Prejudice

Racial and ethnic prejudice and stereotyping is a highly abstract phenomenon and measuring it is a difficult task. However, Park and Burgess (1921) measured it through another abstract concept of social distancing. According to Park and Burgess racial and ethnic divide related prejudice defines the boundaries of frequency and extent of interaction and establishing relationships with other racially and ethnically different groups. Another theorist and sociologist Emory Bogardus (1925) defined social distancing as:

“....distance in specific situations, ranging from minimal...”

More recently Krysan and Farley (1993) focused the both mentioned theorists and extended that:

“....some groups were consistently ranked as more desirable than others for close interpersonal contacts. More recently, analysts have found that whites who accept racial stereotypes desire greater social distance from people of color than do whites who reject negative stereotypes...”

With prejudice there is discrimination which embodies certain actions and practices of dominant groups, community or society which are harmful for the subordinate group. The work of sociologists namely Joe R. Feagin is very important in context of racial and ethnic discrimination. To Feagon, first, there is an isolated discrimination (intentional harmful actions by the dominant group to support its members against subordinate group). Second, there is small-group discrimination. This include harmful actions intentionally taken by a limited number of dominant group members against members of subordinate groups. Third and importantly, direct institutionalized discrimination referring to discrimination that is organized in order to internalize

a differential and negative impact on members of subordinate groups. This type of discrimination become a part of the normative structure leading to social exclusion of groups and communities on ethnic and racial basis. Fourth, the indirect institutionalized discrimination which are the harmful consequence of racial and ethnic discrimination with devising norms or policies which covertly are not harmful but have some negative repercussions for some groups and communities (Feagin and Feagin, 2008).

2.4.Critical Race Theory

The critical race theory is the most recent sociological contribution to race and ethnicity studies. United States civil rights movement became the background for development this theory or perspective. Important contributors to this theory and perspective includes some prominent contemporary theorists like Martin Luther King, Jr., W. E. B. Du Bois and Malcolm X. These theorists theorizes that racial and ethnic prejudice and discrimination have become so common and embedded in normative structure that it looks like normal and ordinary activities. Therefore, these theorists suggest that formal actions are the only solution to identification and eradication of racial and ethnic prejudice (cited in Delgado, 1995).

2.5.Theorizing the Theoretical Findings to Pakistan's Context

Racially and ethnically Pakistan is a very diverse country. Race and ethnicity is socially significant component of Pakistani society. Race and ethnicity permeates every institution, every relationship, and every individual in Pakistan. In this regard, for example, the most important aspect is the names of regions and provinces in Pakistan. Punjab is known for Punjabi people and culture. Sindh is known for Sindhi people and culture. Balochistan is known for Baloch people and culture. Smaller regions such as Chitral is known for Chitrali people and culture. Even NWFP was renamed as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in order to represent Pakhtuns. In this sense, these are social and cultural boundaries (ethnicity) supported by the biological differences (race).

The biological (racial) and social and cultural (ethnic) boundaries are responsible for many social problems in Pakistan. As mentioned earlier, prejudice, discrimination and stereotypic

approach is very common in Pakistan regarding certain groups and communities. And the situation is more appealing because of the fact that in so densely populated country interaction between racially and ethnically different individuals and groups is very common.

Prejudice and faulty generalizations are common in Pakistan in terms of racial and ethnic divide. This can be framed under a very simple example. Police tends to search Pakhtun individuals and their vehicles more as compared to Punjabi people. It is because of the fact that unlawful acts are always generalized to a racial and ethnic group known as Pakhtuns. Similarly, discrimination is also common on racial and ethnic basis in Pakistan, for instance, Balochistan is discriminated in terms of facilitation of the province and thereby is remained underprivileged for decades despite of having very useful resources for the country. In addition, stereotypes on racial and ethnic basis prevail in Pakistan, for example, criminality is always associated with Pakhtuns and Baloch people.

The frustration-aggression model is relevant as well in Pakistan's context. Discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes confrontation on the basis of race and ethnicity by certain non-dominant groups have created frustration among them. For instance, the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement is probably the most relevant example. The movement initiated because many prejudiced and stereotypic activities by Pakistan's army against Pakhtuns. From over two decades such acts led to frustration among Pakhtuns and led to a movement which is so far documented for the use of aggression against law enforcement agencies of Pakistan.

Park and Burgess (1921) concept of social distancing resulting from racial and ethnic divide is also applicable to Pakistan. The racial and ethnic divide is one the major cause of lack of integrity in Pakistan. Take for example the Urdu language which is the national language of Pakistan. But majority of Pakistanis cannot speak Urdu. In this sense, the races and ethnicities are at distance from each other which can be termed as a social distancing.

The work of Feagon is theoretically applicable to Pakistan. There exists isolated discrimination, small-group discrimination, direct institutionalized discrimination and the indirect institutionalized discrimination in Pakistan. Individuals and small-groups are isolated (such as the

Hazara community incident), law enforcement agencies are involved in direct institutionalized discrimination against Pakhtuns and Baloch people and most importantly prejudice, stereotype and discriminations are the part of daily life interaction and normative structure.

2.6. Some Evidences from Research in Pakistan

Majeed (2012) illustrates that ethnicity is a cause of conflicts in Pakistan. These conflicts are observed in shape religious, lingual, territory and caste basis. Ahmad (1996) stated that ethnic fragmentation in Pakistan is a source lack of integration. Ahmad raised a very important point, for instance, in Pakistan the races and ethnicities have differential access to resources and power and authority. The differential participation in bureaucracy and military is the most appropriate example for it. It is a fact that participation in bureaucracy and military from Punjab is more, and thereby developmental activities, positive stereotypes and favors are given to Punjab. This argument is supported by the work Khan (2017) by arguing that:

“...ethnic conflict is particularly likely in states in which ethnic groups are inadequately represented in the government and the political and judicial systems, exclusionary ideologies tend to creating situations of political uncertainties and economic collapse....”

Same situation prevails in Pakistan whereby there is unequal representation of ethnic groups in government and the political and judicial systems. And this probably is the reason that political parties in Pakistan are often named or titled as movement such as Mutahida Qoumi Movement and Pashtun Tahafuz Movement. These names are significant in terms of considering racial and ethnic divide in Pakistan and the prejudice, discrimination and negative stereotypes in terms power distribution. In the mentioned examples there is use of word Pashtun while in the other a term is used that is Qoum. These are significant in context of considering the racial and ethnic divides.

Decade ago Hurst (2008) stated that one of the challenges to Pakistan being a state is realizing and settling the ethnic separatism. The ethnic separatism is a cause of social disintegration

which is observable in micro to macro level interaction. For example, a Punjabi considers Pakhtun as a criminal and terrorist whereas a Pakhtun labels Punjabi as *beghairat* (a person who is not brave). A Baloch says that government and bureaucracy is in the hands of Punjab so they must seek a movement for separation.

3. Conclusion

Race and ethnicity are sociologically important concept. Race and ethnicity are universal and relative. Race and ethnicity are socially constructed and therefore social theorist have worked on it. Race is biological divide among group of people while ethnicity is the social and cultural divide but race is also more social in nature as it reflects on and divides group of people from other groups.

Social theorists explain that race and ethnicity are socially significant as they play a major role in social inequalities. Discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes are the key aspects related to race and ethnicity which are responsible to inequality and social exclusion. Some important theorists worked on the sociology of race and ethnicity include Dollard and his colleagues, Aderno and his colleagues, Park and Burgess, Feagon, Bogardus, Martin Luther King, Du Bois, Malcolm and Delgado. Frustration-aggression theory and the critical race theory are two main theories explaining discrimination, prejudice and stereotypes embedded in racial and ethnic divide and resulting in violence.

The social theories are applicable to Pakistani society and as a state. Racially and ethnically Pakistan is a highly diverse country. Regions in Pakistan represent racial and ethnic divides. The racial and ethnic divide in Pakistan is observable in terms in religious, lingual, territorial and caste basis. The racial and ethnic divide is responsible for social disintegration in the Pakistan. Violence has been reported on regular basis in Pakistan whereby hidden racial and ethnic causes are the culprit. In addition, discrimination and prejudice are observable in Pakistan on ethnic and racial grounds whereby the frustration aggression model is applicable to study the rise of different social movements in Pakistan on racial and ethnic basis.

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