MAJOR RACIAL GROUPS OF THE WORLD AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

In this module, we will discuss about the three major races of the world and their characteristic features. Perhaps the first categorization of the population of the world was based on the skin colour. They were referred as White race, Black race and Yellow race. The White race was that particular group of individuals whose skin colour was light or close to white. The black race was the people whose skin colour were either black, dark brown or any other variant of dark brown. The Yellow race was the one which did not fit in the first or the second category of the white and the black races and who were referred to slightly pale or off white skin colour. Perhaps this was the first criteria being taken to discriminate the people based on their skin colour and they were termed as The Three Great Races of the World.

Fig.1 Different races of the world

Distribution and Characteristics of the major racial groups

From the beginning of the 20th century, the Anthropologists have studied three major races of the world and made attempts to classify the different populations groups into certain convenient categories and referred them as the Three Major Races of the World.
Different classifications have been set forth using different characteristic features, to their distribution and the people who are migrating from one place to another and how they are being fitted in the framework of the three major races of the world. It is one of the most common questions raised time and again that why do we called them the great races of the world. They are called the great races because right from the beginning the population of the world has been classified into three groups, i.e. The Negroid, the Mongoloid and the Caucasoid.

The travelers and ethnographers who moved around the world from one place to another found people belonging to different categories. Columbus when set forth to discover India by default went to the coast of America and found the original inhabitant of that particular part with slightly reddish skin colour and identified them as the Red Indians because he thought that the land he found was India. The Red Indians were the tribal people of America and for quite some time they were known as the Red Indians. There are numerous tribes who lived in that area but if we look at their typical features they don’t have the features like Indians because it was the time when India was known to the western world for the spices and certain other things. However, what kind of people lived in India was not known to the rest of the world, especially the western
world. So the Red Indians were later on renamed as American Indians. They had features like the Mongoloids but the only difference was their skin color, which was not exactly the same as that of the Mongoloids.

Fig. 3 Red Indians

Coming to the African continent all people were found with the black skin color with a few exceptions exhibiting white or the lighter shade of the skin colour. This group mainly inhabited the South Africa, because it was the colony of the Britishers for a long period. So all the British who were there as administrators stayed there for generations and had their progeny and it was considered as a country where blacks and whites lived together but blacks were like slaves and whites were the ruling people.

Around the same time, the Mughals invaded India and it was under Mughal Empire. They brought Islam to India and ruled India for pretty long till the Britishers invaded. They also observed different groups of people in India with variable skin colour, facial features with different kinds of head shape, nose shape, eye form, facial contour, stature and other criteria. They were identified as a mixed group of individuals, because Indians did not fall into any of the three racial groups of the world, i.e. the Negroid, the Caucasoid and the Mongoloid. India had a mixed variety of people, both racially as well as linguistically. British administrators went to every region (tribal and non-tribal) of
India, to set up their administrative control, met people, tried to understand their way of life, culture and wrote books and travelogues on the tribal and non-tribal communities and the other groups inhabiting there. Taking help of the interpreters, they provided ethnographic account of the original inhabitants of the sub-continent. This way the people of India were made known to the Indians and to the rest of the world.

![Fig.4 Britishers meet Indian rulers](image)

The Europeans who were more enterprising spread out to different parts of the world. The Britishers had spread out to various places around the globe. The French who invaded a number of places and ruled followed them. The Spanish people also went to different parts of the world and ruled them like Britishers and French. They intermixed with the local people and settled there. Migration of these groups caused racial intermixture that caused genetic admixture thereby formulating mixed racial groups and that was the cause of the formation of the new races. These new races were subsequently termed as sub-categories under the three major races because the Caucasoid have numbers of divisions, which are present at the European continent, Alpines, Dinaric, Nordics, and Mediterranean and their different sub-groups living in the different European countries.

On coming to the Gulf (Arabian Countries), they show somewhat different features. Majority of them fall under the Caucasoid group because of their fair skin colour. The Africans continent was solely categorized as the native place of Negros due to their
predominance in that region. Traders took Negros as slaves or the class four workers on the ship. They were taken to different places as servants/slaves and they stayed there forever.

Similarly, certain Europeans ventured to discover India through alternative sea route, like Vasco-De –Gama, who came to India from Portugal and settled at Goa. Along with him, certain African slaves also came and they settled on the Gujarat coast, especially close to Dwarika and Jamnagar. Most of them stayed there only and never went back; they are referred to as Siddis of Gujarat. They have their features like Negros but the only difference is their skin colour has become comparatively lighter in shade unlike their ancestors who were black skinned. They do have the other feature of Negros, for example broad nose, puffy lips, long heads and spiral hair etc.though they do speak Gujarati. They have almost forgotten their African language and they have become indianized.

Fig.5 Siddis

 Going towards the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, which is inhabited by a number of tribal groups exhibiting Negro like features (skin color, face form, nose form, hair form ,etc.) ,and they are the original inhabitants of the Andaman and Nicobar Island (tribal people) They have different language; their dialects are different from the rest of the Indian dialects. Moreover, they cannot understand English or Hindi language. They
speak their own language and are illiterate (no education system is prevailing among them). Now the Government is making certain efforts to provide them education so that they could survive in a better way because their number is declining day by day. Moreover, the Government is afraid that they become extinct in due course of time. Therefore, they have the Negros like features but the only difference is they are short in stature as compared to the African Negros. According to the stature range, they are classified in Pygmy category. However very few of them are in the medium stature range.

In America, there are a number of American blacks, whose origin is from Africa, from where they migrated generations back and settled there for quite a few centuries. Now they became original population of America. The American blacks have contributed immensely to the development of the country. The Americans are divided into two main categories; American White and the American Black. America has other categories also like the Spanish, the Red Indians etc. So they have all the three major races of the world living within the same continent as original inhabitants for a pretty long time.

European continent is primarily dominated by the Caucasoids, while the Negros and the Mongoloids inhabiting the European countries are the migrant people, they are either students or the businesspersons who migrated a few decades back and have settled in those areas.

Great Britain is another place where you will find people from different countries, like, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and African countries. People from China, Japan, Korea, etc. are also there. Great Britain is another country where the three major races could be found existing simultaneously.

Coming to the Middle East Region, where we find Negros and Caucasoids as predominant groups. Their dark skin color, relatively tall stature coupled with frizzy and peppercorn type or the spiral type of hair identifies Negros population. They have prognathous face, which is like that of Pithecanthropus or Homo-Erectus. It could be perhaps said that the origin of man took place from Africa. After originating there, man
migrated to other parts of the world, spread out, and developed into different races in those regions. Therefore, this is one place where we find plenty of Negros.

On moving towards the Asian continent, there is China and Russia which occupy most of the area geographically. The Russians have Caucasoid like features, they are tall, fair skinned, with medium to broad heads, long noses wavy hair and they are relatively more rugged in their structure and features as compared to the rest of the Caucasoid groups.

Chinese, on the other hand, have very soft features with yellowish/ pale skin colour, short to medium in stature with very small nose, round/broad heads, flat cheeks and straight and black hair. We do not find curly/wavy hair among the Chinese presence of epicanthic eye fold is a typical feature of the Mongoloid group. The curly and the wavy hairs are not found among the mongoloid group nor do they have the frizzy or the peppercorn type of hair like that of the Negros. On the contrary, the Mongoloids have thick, coarse and straight hair. They are distributed almost in the entire China, Mongolia, Taiwan. Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Hong Kong, etc. The Mongoloids dominate all these places to the extent that the upper region of the Indian sub continent i.e. the northeastern region, where people hailing from Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur etc. show typical Mongoloid features. The typical epicanthic fold, relatively small sized nose coupled with broad face, flat cheeks are the typical features of the Mongoloids. Rests of the Indian subcontinent is dominated by the variants of the Caucasoid and Negroid.
Going across to Australia, and New Zealand, we can see the mixed races. Primarily the Caucasoid dominates them, because they are the migrants from America and Great Britain. Australian Aborigines, who have very rough feature, also co-inhabit the same geographical boundaries with Caucasoid. They do not fall under the specific category of the major three races of the world. They are considered as the mixed variants. They have been identified based on their skin colour, stature, facial features, nose form, eye form and the facial outline.

‘Racism’ A myth

The concept of racial classification continues despite of the fact that in 1962 the UNESCO, statement was put forward and they discarded the use of the term race. In the UNESCO statement, it is specifically mentioned that “ethnic group” should replace the term “race”.

When Adolf Hitler was in power, he identified himself as an Aryan He considered Aryans as superior race and wanted to eliminate the inferior race, the Jews. That became one of the major causes of the Second World War, which he started. He was basically against the Jews community and killed thousands of them. However, the ultimate result was that he was eliminated himself.
All humans are alike and there is nothing as inferior or superior, as far as the human population groups (races) are concerned. All people are alike, it is only the skin color or it is the head form, or the head index, which differentiate people of one group from another. Some people have tried to put the population of the world in the small compartments (Racial categories), which becomes very difficult due to the intermixtures of people. International border are also open so there are marriages taking place around the world between different groups. The Chinese are getting married to Negros, and Negros getting married to Caucasoid, and the new races /ethnic groups are coming up almost every now and then. Moreover, we see that the international borders are being crushed. All human groups are being taken as one humanity, nothing superior or nothing inferior. Therefore, we do have to study about the concept of race, from the historical point of view and to study the variation, the distribution, and the different population of the world to have a generalized idea about the great races of the world.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, we discussed in this module, the three major races of the world, the Negroids, the Caucasoids, and the Mongoloids. The initial discrimination was done on the basis of the skin colour, Negros was considered as the black people or the black race. The Caucasoid were considered as the white people or the white race. The
Mongoloids were considered as the yellow people or the yellow race. So this was the initial concept on which the racial discrimination was being done for the population of the world. Other features were also taken into consideration like the stature, the hair colour, the hair form, the eye colour, the eye shape, the fold of the eye, the nasal form, nasal profile and the facial outline and so on. These features strengthen the classification of races but it is not proper to compartmentalize people of the world into small watertight compartment like the races of the world because you cannot technically divide the total population of the world into three categories, Caucasoid, Mongoloid and Negroid. There are many varieties, which do not fall directly under any one of these categories. So therefore, the boundaries need to be broadened. The concept of race was discarded in 1962 as per the UNESCO statement on race and the term race was replaced by “ethnic group”. The compartmentalization into great three races has its historical importance but at present, it is only a fundamental or the foundation of the study of people of the world. The term race is now outdated, it is to be studied only for historical importance.