
UNIT 11 MAJOR “RACES” OF THE WORLD*

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Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will know the:

- different races and other racial sub-groups of mankind; and
- detailed information of all the three major groups of mankind known as the Negroid, Caucasoid and Mongoloid.

11.0 INTRODUCTION

It is a general observation that human beings differ from each other physically and also in morphological features. The anthropologists have tried to categorize groups on the basis of some common physical features. In biology a “race” has been customarily defined as a subdimention of a species that inherits physical characteristics distinguishing it from other populations of the species (Montagu, 2001). These features include the pigmentation of the skin, hair colour, its form and quantity, shape of the nose, head and face, eyes, stature, finger and palm prints. It was a natural curiosity of the anthropologists to club the overall diversity of the mankind in certain groups so that it becomes easier to describe them.

There is a lot of overlapping of characters and mixing of features among the races. The system of classification of races is inadequate; it is hypothesized that the physical features of the different people have originated because of adaptation to different types of ecological zones in which they have lived for centuries together. In this unit, you will get information about the different racial groups of the mankind classified by the anthropologists. It must be understood that the classifications offered by different anthropologists are arbitrary as they are based mainly on the physical features of the body.

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Among anthropologists and biologists, race has historically been an idea about the geographic patterning of human biological variations. The term race is never used by modern anthropologists to refer to religious groups, linguistic groups, or nationalities. There are many anatomical or morphological differences between people and populations that reflect underlying biological differences. Some morphological differences are visible to the naked eye, including skin, eye and hair color and body size and shape. Some other biological differences are just as real but are not as easily seen; these include blood type, fingerprint patterns, and disease susceptibilities. Considering all of these traits that differ among members of our species, there is no doubt that Homo sapiens is a species with considerable biological differences. This kind of geographically patterned biological variation is the traditional raw material of racial classification. We can define race, then, as the geographic pattern of variation in some biological traits that distinguish different human populations (Anemone, 2011).

11.1 CLASSIFICATION OF MAJOR RACES

The variety of the mankind has been described by the anthropologists in three major groups or races. These are known as the Negroid, Caucasoid and Mongoloid.

11.1.1 Negroid Group

Negroid race is mainly distributed in Sub-Saharan Africa. They possess very unique facial characteristics. Negroid group is mainly represented by the African people. The distinguishing characteristics of the Negroid group are:

- Skin colour is dark brown to black
- Head hair is woolly and tightly curly
- Head form is more elongated but less broad
- Nose is broad and flat in shape
- Lips are thick and everted
- Body hair is sparsely distributed

There are different sub groups of the Negroid group and these have been described below:

a) The True Negroes

The True Negroes are those who possess almost all the features of the Negroes. They live in West Africa and inhabit areas from the Senegal River to the eastern border of Nigeria. They have an average height of five feet and eight inches. Their arms and legs are long and they are sturdily built. The skin colour is black. Heads are elongated with conspicuous prognathism. The shape of the nose is broad and flat.

b) The Forest Negroes

The Forest Negroes live in Sudan, Uganda and neighboring areas of Africa. They have long arms but short legs. Their chests are barrel shaped and

they have elongated heads. Their lips are everted. Body build of these people is muscular. Forehead is sloping and lower face is protruding.

c) **Nilotic Negroes**

They are the inhabitants of Sudan and upper Nile valley along the great Nile River. The Nilotic Negroes are tall and very slim in body built and have dark skin colour. They have long heads but their face is not protruding. The average height is five feet and ten inches.

d) **Half Hamites**

They inhabit different areas of Kenya, Uganda and Sudan. They have a variety of brown skin colour. The head hair is woolly. Nose is broad and flat and their average height is five feet and eight inches. Their head is long.

e) **Bantu speaking Negroes**

These people are found in a great majority living in Central and Southern Africa. The skin colour varies from yellow to dark brown. The average height of these people is five feet and six inches.

f) **Bushman**

They inhabit southern Angola and parts of Kalahari Desert. In earlier times, they inhabited whole South Africa and tropical areas of central Africa. But now their number has greatly decreased and they have been pushed only to small areas of Africa. The Bushman are typical in appearance and are different from other Negro sub groups. The majority of the Bushman are very small in height and look like pygmies but some of them are also tall. They have an average height of five feet and two inches. They have medium-shaped heads which are neither elongated nor broad. Their hands and feet are small, body build is lean, arms and legs are longer as compared to the trunk. The head hair are tightly rolled in coils and are called "peppercorn". Body hair is lacking and sparse growth of facial hair can be seen. They have short, small and broadened nose. The chin is generally pointed and ears are small without the earlobes.

g) **Hottentots**

The Hottentots are generally distributed in the western part of West Africa. The Bushman and Hottentots are very much similar to each other. The Hottentots have elongated heads as compared to those of the Bushman and are also taller than them.

h) **Pygmies**

The early anthropologists considered the Pygmies as the most primitive people. They are characterized by very small stature. The average height of the Pygmies is 4 feet and 8 inches. They have woolly type of head hair and the colour of their skin varies from yellowish brown to black. The shape of the nose is broad and flat. The lips and the eyes are large. The shape of the head is medium to broad. Prognathism is generally seen. The geographical distribution of the Pygmies extends from Congo region in Africa to Malay and East Sumatra, Andaman Islands and the Philippine islands. On the basis of the geographical distribution and physical

characteristics, the Pygmies are further divided into three distinct groups, viz., the African Pygmies, Asiatic Pygmies and Oceanic Pygmies.

i) **The Veddahs**

The Veddahs of Ceylon have an average height of about five feet. They have wavy or slightly curled head hair which are generally black. Facial hair are sparse on the chin and the body hair are generally lacking. The size of the head is small and its shape is elongated.

j) **The Pre-Dravidians**

They occupy parts of Central and Southern India and are considered to be the oldest inhabitants of these regions. It is argued that formerly they inhabited larger parts of India but now they live in the jungles. Prominent among them are the Bhil, Gond, Oraon, Kadar, Kurumba, Paniyan, etc. They have an average height of five feet and two inches (157 cm). The skin colour is black and the shape of the head is dolichocephalic. Forehead is slightly receding. Brow ridges show moderate development.

k) **Ainu**

The Ainu are considered to be the original inhabitants of Japan who were forced to migrate to the northern regions. Presently they inhabit Hokkaido and Sakhalin islands of northern Japan.

The Ainu people show a very prominent growth of facial and head hair seen in any group of the humans. They show a range of skin colour from brown to white. They have an average height of five feet and two inches and are stockily built. The shape of the head is mesocephalic.

The first classification based on cranial morphology is attributed to the Professor of Anatomy Anders Retzius (1840). Retzius described as *gentes dolichocephalae* those individuals who had an elongated skull shape, and *gentes brachycephalae* those whose skulls were short. However, he assigned no numerical values to set the boundaries between individual types in both groups and neither did he use the intermediate term *mesocephalae*, which was introduced at a later time. The measures used by Retzius-when applied to living individuals are known as cephalic index, and when referring to dry skulls, cranial index. These indices are calculated by determining the ratio between maximum width and maximum length of the head. The concept was subsequently enhanced with the definition of intermediate values, which provide a classification system and reflect more accurately the diversity found in human facial morphology. Both the cephalic and cranial indices are therefore measures related to the shape of the skull. The index used in anthropometry to describe the face proportions is the facial index, a product of morphological facial height, measured from the Nasion (N) to Gnathion (Gn) anatomical landmarks, divided by the bizygomatic width, measured from the right to the left Zygion (Zyr-Zyl). Semantically, the terms used in the facial index are derived from Greek, where the word for face is *prosopon*. According to this classification system, numerical values are assigned which establish the euryprosopic, mesoprosopic and leptoprosopic categories (Franco et al., 2013).

Table 1: Head classification according to the cephalic index

Ultradolichocephalic	x – 64.9
Hyperdolichocephalic	65.0-69.9
Dolichocephalic	70.0 - 74.9
Mesocephalic	75.0 - 79.9
Brachycephalic	80.0 - 84.9
Hyperbrachycephalic	85.0 - 89.9
Ultrabrachycephalic	90.0 – x
Facial index	$\frac{\text{Morphological facial height} \times 100}{\text{Bizygomatic width}}$

Table 2: Face classification according to facial index

Hypereuryprosopic	x - 79.9
Euryprosopic	80.0 - 84.9
Mesoprosopic	85.0 - 89.9
Leptoprosopic	90.0 - 94.9
Hyperleptoprosopic	95.0 - x

11.1.2 Caucasoid Group

The Caucasoid are generally referred to as the 'White' people. However, the term seems to be a misnomer as this group includes many people with dark skin colour too. The major characteristics of this group include:

- Head hair is generally wavy but may be straight or somewhat curly
- Skin colour may range from white to brown
- Shape of the head shows a large variety from narrow headed to broad headed
- Narrow and pointed nose
- Face is straight and does not show prognathism
- Cheek bones are not prominent
- Lips are generally thin
- Forehead and chin are relatively prominent

The Caucasoid include the following sub groups:

a) **Mediterranean**

This is a large group of different populations which inhabit the areas spreading out in every direction from the Mediterranean Sea and extending up to the Northern India. These include the Portuguese, Italians, Spaniards, Frenchmen, Turks, Greeks, Iranians, Indians, Afghans and North Africans, among others. Their skin colour varies from tanned white to brown. The hair is generally black. The head is dolichocephalic. The average height is five feet and four inches. The face does not show prognathism. The lips are full.

Three distinct types can be found in this sub groups which are recognized as the Basic Mediterranean, Atlanto Mediterranean and Irano Afghan Mediterranean.

b) **The Nordic**

The Nordic people live in the Scandinavian countries viz., Iceland, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Poland and Western Russia. The hair colour is from blonde to other light colours. The skin colour is white or slightly pinkish. The eyes are either blue or grey. The head is either elongated or of medium breadth. The nose is prominent, long and pointed. The average height is five feet and eight inches (172 cm).

c) **Alpine**

The Alpine people inhabit along all areas of the Alps Mountains of Europe, France, Russia and Siberia. The Alpine people have broad heads with strongly developed brow ridges. The hair colour is blonde or black-brown. The average height is five feet and five inches (165 cm). The nose is prominent at the tip. They are strongly built.

d) **Dinaric**

The area of Switzerland, Slovakia and Albania is the home of the Dinarics. The head form ranges from mesocephaly to brachycephaly. The forehead is generally vertical. The hair colour varies from black to brown whereas the shape of the head hair is straight or wavy. They have full lips and chin is strongly developed. The nose is generally curved with fleshy tips. They have an average height of five feet and eight inches (172 cm).

e) **Armenoid**

The geographic distribution of these people is towards the eastern side of the Black Sea, Armenia and Turkey. They have a good resemblance with the Dinaric people. They have curved and fleshy noses which are prominent at the tips. The head shape ranges from mesocephaly to brachycephaly. The hair colour is dark brown to black. The mean height of Armenoids is five feet and six inches (167 cm).

f) **Hamites**

The Hamites occupy vast areas of East and North Africa. They show a great range of skin colour from white to black. The head hair also shows large variations from straight to frizzly. They have very little body hair. The shape of the head is dolichocephalic. They have elongated face with pointed chin. Their body build is lean and they are of average height of five feet and five inches (165 cm).

g) **East Baltic**

The Baltic group is native to Germany, Poland, Finland and other Baltic areas. They have very little pigmentation of the hair, skin and eyes and hence they are generally blonde, have white skin colour with very light coloured eyes. The head is broad which means they are brachycephalic. They are called square headed people as the head is evenly and proportionately developed in all areas. The average height is five feet and four inches (164 cm).

h) **The Lapp**

The Lapps inhabit areas of Sweden, Norway, Finland and some parts of Russia. They used to live around coastal area, forests and rivers in very harsh snowy conditions. They have broad head (brachycephaly) and the forehead is steep but narrow. The skin colour is yellowish to brown whereas the hair color is brown and black. The texture of hair is straight or wavy. The average height is five feet and three inches (159 cm).

i) **Indo-Dravidian**

The Indo-Dravidians inhabit most parts of India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). The shape of the head varies largely from dolichocephalic to brachycephalic. The faces are narrow and small and without any prognathism. The skin colour is dark brown and the hairs are generally black. They have full lips and prominent noses and have an average height of five feet and four inches (164 cm).

j) **Polynesians**

The Polynesians inhabit a geographical area spreading from Hawaii Islands to Fiji Islands and New Zealand. They are very strongly built. Their head shape is broad (brachycephalic) and the cheek bones are prominent. They have broad faces with well developed chins. The skin colour is light brown whereas hair colour varies from black to dark brown. The hair form is generally straight or wavy. The average height is five feet and eight inches (172 cm).

11.1.3 Mongoloid Group

Mongoloids have probably originated in Central Asia and moved to different directions. This group has vast and diverse geographical distribution. People of China and Japan are key representatives of this group. The Mongoloid group is characterized as follows:

- Skin colour varies from yellowish to yellowish brown.
- Head form is broad (brachycephalic).
- Hair colour is black and texture of hair is generally straight.
- Cheek bones are very prominent.
- Upper eyelid has a fold of the skin known as the epicanthic fold.
- Hair density per unit of body surface area is very less.

There are four major sub-groups of the Mongoloid group, viz., the Central or Classical Mongoloids, Arctic Mongoloids or Eskimoids, American Indians or Amerindians and Indonesian Malays.

a) **Central or Classical Mongoloids**

Almost all of the characteristics of the Mongoloids are present in this group. The regions inhabited by this group include areas of the Northern China, Tibet and Mongolia. Their head form is broad and epicanthic eye folds are always present. They have prominent cheek bones and flattened faces.

b) **The Arctic Mongoloids or Eskimoids**

The areas of Greenland, Alaska, Arctic coast of North America, Northeast Asia constitute the home of the Arctic Mongoloids or Eskimoids. This group shows typical epicanthic eye fold, prominent cheek bones, black and straight hair, large torso and small extremities.

c) **The American Indians or Amerindians**

The original Indians of the North, Middle and South America fall in this group of Mongoloid people. The skin colour varies from yellow brown to red brown. The hair are generally straight or wavy and black in colour. The body and facial hair growth is very sparse. The internal epicanthic

eye fold is present but the external epicanthic eye fold is not always present. The face is broad with large cheek bones.

d) **Indonesian-Malays**

The Indonesian-Malays are a little shorter (average height five feet and one inch) than the Malay people (average height five feet and two inches); while the former is long-headed the latter is broad-headed. The other features of the Mongoloid group are more prominent in the Malay group than in the Indonesian group. The Indonesian-Malays inhabit different areas of the South China, Burma and Thailand. This group belongs to the Malay Peninsula, Philippines and Japan.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Describe the major features of the Negroid group.

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- 2) Draw a comparison between the Negroid and Mongoloid groups.

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- 3) Describe the important features which form the basis of racial classifications.

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- 4) What is geographic distribution of the Mongoloid people?

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11.2 CRITICISM OF VARIOUS CLASSIFICATIONS OF RACES

All human beings inhabiting this world belong to a single species of *Homo sapiens*. Yet by virtue of the external appearance they look very different from each other. May be it is the skin colour, the shape of the nose, the colour of the eyes, the shape of the head or the hair form and colour. The above classification of the mankind into three major groups and numerous sub groups can be considered to be basic but is often termed as flawed because of numerous drawbacks some of which have been listed and described below:

- 1) *Arbitrary and crude*

The classification of the mankind can be referred to as arbitrary and crude simply because of the fact that it is based on visibly distinguishing features. These features include the skin color, shape of the head, nose and hair etc. The underlying genetic relationships have not been considered and thus

do not form the basis of this classification. The humans have always been on the move in search of food and security. Racial admixture has been happening along with confrontation amongst different groups, probably led to the change in gene pools and gene frequencies. The human groups are dynamic and keep on changing their habitat. The racial admixture may have led to the formation of different groups. In short, it is logical to conclude that the criteria on the basis of which the present classification has been made is arbitrary.

2) *Geographic distribution as a limiting factor*

The continuity of geographical areas in describing various groups of the mankind has been the mainstay of this classification. However, people with many similar characteristics may be seen in many areas far flung from each other. But these may not have been included in that group on the basis of geographic discontinuity.

3) *Overlapping of characteristics*

The characteristics used for racial classification show continuity and hence pose a real difficulty of the cut-off limits for each trait. Within group variations for a characteristic should be much smaller compared to between group variations for it to qualify as a classifying trait. But the numerous examples of this not happening are available hence, compromise on the accuracy of the racial classification. Had there been no continuity in the characteristics, the issue of racial classification would have been resolved very easily, but then it is not the case.

4) *No genetic basis*

The present classification does not take into consideration the genetic basis of the differences in different groups. Of course, the anthropologists have studied the genetic structure of different populations and obtained the gene (allele) frequencies of different genetic traits. The best way would have been to consider numerous genetic traits to find out commonality amongst the members of a specific group to name it as a separate group. Most of the characteristics studied and included in the classification may be genetically determined and modifiable under environmental conditions but they are not exclusively determined by genetics such as various blood groups.

Check Your Progress 2

5) Describe why the present classification of the mankind into three major groups is arbitrary.

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6) Why genetic traits should be preferred for classification of the mankind?

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7) Do you think geographical areas restrict the inclusion of similar groups in a given race?

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11.3 SUMMARY

Race is defined as the geographic pattern of variation in some biological traits that distinguishes different human populations. A belief in the existence of biological race within the human species is usually associated with the attempt to classify all human populations into a finite number of races based on some set of features. The mankind has been classified into three major groups, viz., the Negroid, Caucasoid and Mongoloid. It is based on the morphological characteristics such as the pigmentation of the skin, hair colour, hair form and quantity, shapes of the nose, head and face, eyes, stature, finger and palm prints, etc. The Negroid group inhabits various parts of Africa and some other regions of the world. Their skin colour ranges from dark brown to black, the head hair are woolly and tightly curly, head form is more elongated but less broad, nose is broad and flat in shape, lips are thick and everted and body hair is sparsely distributed. The Caucasoid group inhabits areas of the Europe and Central Asia and the Middle East. The head hair are generally wavy but may be straight or somewhat curled, the skin colour may range from white to brown, the shape of the head shows a large variety from narrow headed to broad headed, narrow and pointed nose, the face is straight and does not show prognathism, the cheek bones are not prominent, the lips are generally thin, and the forehead and chin are relatively prominent. The Mongoloid group inhabits areas of the East Asia, Japan, and South East Asia. The skin colour varies from yellowish to yellowish brown, the head form is broad (brachycephalic), hair colour is black and hair are generally straight, the cheek bones are very prominent, upper eyelid has a fold of skin known as the epicanthic fold, hair density per unit of body surface area is very less.

However, this classification of the mankind suffers from the arbitrariness of features, genetic basis being doubtful, geographical distributions being a limiting factor and there being overlapping of the characteristics among different groups.

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11.5 ANSWERS/HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) The following are the most important distinguishing characteristics of Negroid Group:
 - Skin colour is dark brown to black
 - Head hair are wooly and tightly curly
 - Head form is more elongated but less broad
 - Nose is broad and flat in shape
 - Lips are thick and everted
 - Body hair is sparsely distributed (Refer section 11.1.1).
- 2) The skin of Negroid group is black whereas that of Mongoloid is Yellow. The Former have thick everted lips while the later have epicanthic eye folds. Negroid have wooly or tightly curled hair whereas Mongoloid have smooth hair form (Refer section 11.1.1 and 11.1.3).
- 3) All human beings inhabiting this world belong to a single species of *Homo sapiens*. Yet by virtue of external appearance we look very different from each other. May be it is the skin color, the shape of the nose, the color of the eyes, the shape of the head or the hair form and color. The above classification of mankind into three major groups and numerous sub-groups can be considered to be basic but is often termed as flawed because of numerous drawbacks (Refer section 11.0).
- 4) Mongoloid people inhabit the following geographic regions of the world mainly Asia Pacific: China and Japan (Refer section 11.1.3).
- 5) The above classification of mankind can be referred to as arbitrary and crude simply because of the fact that it is based on visibly distinguishing features. These features include skin color, shape of the head, nose, hair etc., which have already been described. The underlying genetic relationships have not been considered and thus do not form the basis of this classification. The humans have always been on the move in search of food and security. Racial admixture has been happening along with confrontation amongst different groups. This may have lead to the change in gene pools and gene frequencies. The human groups are dynamic and keep on changing their habitats. Racial admixture may have led to the formation of different groups. In a nutshell, it is logical to conclude that

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the criteria on the basis of which the present classification has been made is arbitrary. (Refer section 11.2).

- 6) The present classification does not take into consideration the genetic basis of the differences in different groups. Of course, the anthropologists gave studied the genetic structure of different populations and obtained the gene frequencies of different genetic traits. The best way would have been to consider numerous genetic traits to find out commonality amongst the members of a specific group to name it as a separate group. Most of the characteristics studied and included in the classification may be genetically determined and modifiable under environmental conditions but they are not exclusively determined by heredity such as blood groups (Refer section 11.2).
- 7) The continuity of geographical areas in describing various groups of mankind has been the mainstay of this classification. However, people with many similar characteristics may be seen in many areas far flung from each other. But these may not have been included in that group on the basis of geographic discontinuity (Refer section 11.2).



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