

**Ethnic Identity, Migration, and Diaspora:  
Exploring Ethnocentrism through  
Sociological Analysis**

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**Abstract**

*Human societies have carried diversity and differentiation since their inception, essential for their progress and survival. Every country reflects diversity in its social functioning, and India is especially known for its ethnic, cultural, geographical, linguistic, and religious pluralism. In the context of globalization, India is undergoing rapid transformation, influenced by migration and diaspora. Historically, individuals and communities have been interdependent, promoting the exchange of ideas and resources for survival and development. Migration is a universal sociological phenomenon: while natural forces shaped it in primitive and medieval periods, both natural and human-made factors are significant in modern times. However, migration has never been easy – some benefit while others suffer. Differences, dialogue, and conflicts have always accompanied migration and continue today under stricter nation-state regulations. Over time, cultural differentiation led to domination, integration, and persistent marginalization. The harshest forms of exploitation occurred through slavery, caste, and gender hierarchies. Although aristocracies and feudalism declined after the French Revolution and colonialism, new forms of domination emerged through capitalism and imperialism. In the modern era, nation-states regulate migration, making ethnicity, diaspora, and ethnocentrism increasingly contentious. This review paper examines the evolution of human societies and migration across stages of development, highlighting the growing importance of ethnic groups, diaspora, and ethnocentric concerns.*

**Keywords**

Ethnic identity, Migration and Diaspora, Ethnocentrism and Development Discourse.

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## **Ethnic Identity, Migration, and Diaspora: Exploring Ethnocentrism through Sociological Analysis**

### **1. Introduction**

Human societies have a long history of struggle and survival, but basic foundational needs of diversity and differentiation remain the same. We can easily discern that an individual can live alone, but survival is collective because dependency is basic to human life. Diversity consists of languages, cultures, religions, geographies, and ethnicities. There is no need to waste time arguing over whether dependency or independence is better, because neither is a completely separate concept. However, the history of human society suggests that humans are social animals, meaning they depend on society for development and survival. Each group or community has its own way of life, culture, values, morality, ethics, etc., within which individuals live and survive in a given natural setting. In fact, nature has a tremendous impact on humans and other living beings, and, to some extent, vice versa. Ethnic identity is the identity of a group or community in a given natural setting, where the group/community follows uniform cultural practices, values, and norms, speaks a distinct local language, and follows different gender practices. The United Nations Statistics Division, in its work on ethnocultural characteristics, has provided fundamental insights and perspectives on the concepts and definitions of ethnic and national groups. It states that, "The specific ethnic and/or national groups of the population which are of interest in each country are dependent upon individual national circumstances. Some of the criteria by which ethnic groups are identified are ethnic nationality (i.e., country or area of origin, as distinct from citizenship or country of legal nationality), race, color, language, religion, customs of dress or eating, tribe, or various combinations of these characteristics. In addition, some of the terms used, such as "race", "origin", or "tribe", have multiple connotations. The definitions and criteria applied by each country investigating the ethnic characteristics of its population must therefore be carefully determined, with the involvement of or consultation with representatives of the groups it seeks to categorize. By the nature of this topic, these categories and their definitions will vary widely from country to country; therefore, no internationally accepted criteria are possible; thus, no internationally relevant criteria can be recommended (UN, 2017).

## **2. Objective of the Study**

This paper aims to understand the fundamental tenets of ethnic identity formation and to examine the role of migration and diaspora within the broader context of social development.

## **3. Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on the analysis of secondary data. It relies on a systematic review of existing literature, including academic books, journal articles, and scholarly reports. A thematic and interpretative approach is employed to examine key concepts such as ethnic identity, migration, diaspora, and ethnocentrism across different socio-historical contexts. The study is primarily descriptive and analytical in nature, aiming to synthesize diverse theoretical perspectives and identify emerging patterns and relationships among the variables under consideration.

## **4. Ethnic Identity, Migration, and Diaspora: A Literature Review**

### **4.1 Formation of Ethnic Identities Is a Process**

There are arguments, observations, and studies on the impact of ethnic group functioning on society, culture, and the country's economy. A broad conceptualization suggests that there is no concrete, final definition of ethnic or group identity available in academic discourse; rather, it is described as an ongoing identity-making process. India is one of the countries in the world with significant cultural diversity, including languages, religions, geographical features, castes, tribes, races, and ethnic groups. It is also known as unity in diversity. There are scholars with insights and perspectives on ethnic group formations. Easterly and Levine (1997) and Alesina *et al.* (1997) examine whether ethnic diversity lowers a country's economic growth rate or its level of public good provision. Most empirical studies concern the implications of ethnic diversity. In their understanding, it makes the relevance. According to James D. Fearon (2003), "Primordialists" are said to believe that ethnic groups are either fixed, biologically given entities or, if they are social conventions, deeply rooted, clearly drawn, and historically rigid. He further argued that no plausible definition of "ethnic group" will by itself imply a unique list of groups for a country. He studied the relationship between the nature of ethnic identity and its functioning in a given society. Standard definitions of "ethnic group" in terms of shared beliefs about common ancestry and/or shared cultural features are problematic (Fearon and Laitin, 2000a). It is almost always possible to give examples of groups that fit the definition taken literally but are not intuitively "ethnic", or of groups that do not fit the definition but are

often described as “ethnic”. Alesina *et al.* (2002) attempt to distinguish between ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups in a sample of about 190 countries, and then use their lists to construct measures of ethnic, linguistic, and religious fractionalization. The prototypical ethnic group has the following features as Cited in the article of James D. Fearon (2003):

1. Membership in the group is reckoned primarily by descent by both members and non- members.
2. Members are conscious of group membership and view it as normatively and psychologically important to them.
3. Members share some distinguishing cultural features, such as common language, religion, and customs.
4. These cultural features are held to be valuable by a large majority of members of the group.
5. The group has a homeland, or at least “remembers” one.
6. The group has a shared and collectively represented history as a group. Further, this history is not wholly manufactured, but has some basis in fact.
7. The group is potentially “stand-alone” in a conceptual sense—that is, it is not a caste or caste-like group (e.g., European nobility or commoners).

#### **4.2 Migration is a Dynamic Process of Transformation of Society**

Migration is a global phenomenon that exists in all human societies. However, the nature of migration across societies/countries may differ in terms of its causes and consequences. As the central agency for collecting, classifying, and disseminating information on all types of international migration, the United Nations is of great importance and dynamism to the world community. There are agencies at the national and local levels that also collect, analyze, and disseminate the data on national and international migration. The United Nations Statistical Division collects and disseminates official national data on international migrant flows and stocks through its Demographic Yearbook, and it produces international standards and methods for international migration statistics. It also assists countries in enhancing their capacity for migration statistics. Coordinates statistical programs and activities through the United Nations Expert Group on Migration Statistics. There are other UN system entities working on migration statistics, such as the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In human history, human conflicts have created forced migration and refugees. New concepts like refugee and

asylum have emerged in the global context. The regimes like Nazism, which was a form of fascism and one of the dominant national chauvinisms of racial superiority in the history of Western Europe. However, after the Second World War, many countries adopted democracy as a form of government, and Today, every nation is viewed as independent and sovereign, and in a competitive environment, individuals and nations allow national chauvinism to emerge in politics. However, emerging chauvinism in developed countries in the initial stage was limited to political ideologies and the protection of native citizens' rights to education and employment, but in reality, it made little progress in this regard. Ronald Reagan, the president of America, made his first statement in his political career that "Make America Great", which was echoed in Donald Trump's support to "Make America Great" again, has been spreading in other countries of the world. It has created a conducive environment for other societies to think for themselves and their interests. Concepts such as son of soil and nativism are outcomes of these developments in developed countries, gradually percolating into developing nations worldwide.

Migration is a social phenomenon that was historically regulated and controlled by natural forces, but today, national and international agencies control, regulate, and facilitate the migration process. As a consequence, the nature of migration is changing amid globalization and economic processes. Internal migration offers opportunities for mobility and development to sections of the population; in some cases, it is a survival strategy. So, nations have recognized the right to migrate as a fundamental right of their citizens within their states. In India, the nature of migration changed during colonial rule. Indentured labour has now become diaspora. After independence and during the freedom struggle, many people from rural areas migrated to urban industrial centers. This has created a middle class in India. A new diaspora is emerging after independence. At present, all four streams of migration are considered important and are making progress over time (rural-to-rural, rural-to-urban, urban-to-rural, and urban-to-urban). International migration is viewed as a process of economic integration and a part of the global development agenda. International migration opportunities for the Indian population have increased access to education, business, and knowledge. The Indian diaspora is among the largest, contributing to global culture, the economy, and social development (N. Jayaram 2004). India Migration Reports, 2011 and 2012, brought out by the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs Research Unit on International migration at the Center for Development Studies, Kerala, provide a holistic understanding of migration and diaspora in India. Indian students' migration to other

countries for education has been increasing day by day, but since COVID-19 and the Ukraine war, it has slowed. However, the government of India has introduced the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP-2020), aiming to provide quality education to its people by establishing institutes of national importance, expanding the number of Central and state universities, and opening the higher education sector to foreign universities to establish campuses in India. This may help us become the world's education hub in the near future and attract foreign learners.

### **4.3 Ethnocentrism and Globalization**

Ethnic identity forms naturally over time in a given setting, and it develops a group culture that helps the group maintain its cultural distinctiveness. Since ethnic identity is a dynamic process, it changes over time. There are two perspectives on ethnic culture: cultural relativism and ethnocentrism. Cultural relativism recognizes that cultural processes are subjective and dynamic and an integral part of the social life of a group in a given context. Ethnocentrism is an ideology that develops over time, a feeling of distinctiveness and superiority within a group or community. In democratic societies, culture is considered an autonomous way of life for a particular group within a given society. However, legally, it is not recognized as dominant or superior over others. In today's modern nation-state economy, the economy is becoming a dominant factor, and groups that control and dominate a nation develop an ideology of ethnocentrism to foster a dominant culture. The world is divided on the basis of economic criteria, such as developed, developing, and underdeveloped, and in a broader sense, the global north and the global south. Every country or community claims superiority in one form or another, but in reality, those with economic and cultural power dominate this view. Ethnocentrism is an ideology in which a group, community, or state claims that its culture, values, and norms are superior or represent the global standard. In this view, new concepts like Make America Great Again (MAGA) are emerging and followed by others. There is nothing wrong with making a nation-state great, but in the first place, these nation-states or groups shall ensure liberty, equality, and justice for all internally.

There are views and perspectives on globalization and the global divide in light of the modernization of the world's population. The modern world, according to Max Weber, is defined by institutions that claim a monopoly on permissible coercion. In other words, as an institution that claims to be the only agency entitled to deploy coercive action in order to force the existing state of affairs to be different from what it has been and would continue to be if left alone. According to Zygmunt Bauman (2002), 'the right to draw the line between legitimate (permissible) coercion and



illegitimate (impermissible) coercion is the prime stake of all power struggle'. 'The nation state was a grand vision of a nation blended into the polity; the communal interests dissolved in, and becoming indistinguishable from *raison d'état*. Survival of the nation being identical with the unsapped and intractable might of the state, love of the law of the land, and faithful service to whatever had been presented and recognized as being in the state's interest. The state could claim the undivided loyalty of all its citizens and override all other interests, particularism, when viewed from the perspective of the sovereign totality of the state. Cultural particularities, religious disagreements, linguistic idiosyncrasies, or any other discrepancy in belief and preferences should not matter. Above all, they should not stand in the way of unswerving loyalty to the state, common to all. In case of conflict, priorities were unambiguous and the line of duty one for all.' He further stated that the Solidarity of fate is not a matter of choice. A global world is a place where, for once, the desideratum of moral responsibility and the interest of survival coincide and blend. 'Globalization is an ethical challenge'.

## **5. Findings**

The study finds that the formation of ethnic identities rooted in linguistic and cultural distinctiveness is a natural and ongoing social process. However, when such identities are instrumentalized by nations, states, or groups for domination and subjugation, they give rise to ethnocentric ideologies. The analysis also shows that rapid scientific and technological advancements are accelerating social change, fostering development while simultaneously producing disparities, inequalities, and injustices, particularly in poorer and underdeveloped regions. Globalization presents a dual character: while it promotes integration and facilitates large-scale human development, it also raises serious concerns regarding human rights and equity. Furthermore, the study highlights a strong interrelationship between ethnic identity, migration, and ethnocentrism in shaping contemporary societies.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, social change is an inevitable and continuous process with humans at its core. The interplay of ethnic identity, migration, and globalization is reshaping societies through the emergence of new cultures, institutions, and forms of power and domination. While globalization holds the promise of integration and collective progress, it also risks reinforcing inequalities and ethnocentric tendencies if not managed inclusively. Therefore, a balanced approach that respects cultural diversity while promoting equity and human rights is essential for ensuring that these transformations contribute positively to humanity as a whole.

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