

09. SOCIAL CHANGE

Change is the law of nature. What is today shall be different from what it would be tomorrow. Modern world is a world of rapid change. People too much change and acquire the facility of change. The social structure is also subject to change. Over a period of fifty years the government is changed. Family, religion etc. are also changed. Our understanding of the society will not be complete unless we take into consideration the changeable nature of society, however, differences emerge and discover the direction of change. So let us see what are social change and its characters.

Definition

The word 'change' denotes a difference in anything observed over some period of time. Following are some of the definitions.

1. **Jones:** Social change is a term used to describe variations in or modifications of any aspect of social process, social patterns, social interaction or social organization.
2. **Gillin and Gillin:** Social changes are variations from the accepted modes of life; whether due to alteration in geographical conditions, in cultural equipment, composition on the population or ideologies and whether brought about by diffusion or inventions within the group.
3. **Davis & Mac Iver:** Social change is change in the relationships.

Theories of Social change

While studying the theories of social change one should know the theories regarding (i) the direction of social change and (ii) the causes of social change.

The direction of social change

Early sociologists viewed the culture of primitive people as completely static. Anthropologists now agree that primitive cultures have undergone changes although as such a slow pace as to give the impression of being stationary. In recent years the social change has proceeded at a very rapid rate. Since World War I numerous countries have passed through profound changes not only in their political institutions but in their class structure, their economic system, their modes of living, etc. Various theories have been advanced to explain the direction of social change. Each of them is described.

- i) **Theory of Deterioration:** Some thinkers have identified social change with deterioration. According to them, man originally lived in a perfect state of happiness in a golden age. Subsequently, however, deterioration began to take place with the result man has reached the degeneration. That is why the modern age is called as the age of 'Kaliyug', wherein man is

false, dishonest, selfish and consequently unhappy. This concept is understandable since we observe deterioration in every walk of life today.

ii) **Cyclic Theory:** Some Sociologists believe that society has a predetermined life cycle and has birth, growth, maturity and decline. Modern society is in the last stage. It is in its old age. Then the history repeats itself. Society after passing all stages returns to the original stage where the cycle again begins. According to this present "Kaliyug" will be over and after that "satyug" will again start which is the best again in which man will be honest, truthful and perfectly happy.

iii) **Sage Theory:** Some thinkers subscribe to the stage theory of social change. According to them, society gradually moves to an even higher state of civilization and that it advances in a linear fashion and in the direction of improvement. **August Comte** postulated three stages of social change: the theological, the metaphysical and the positive. Man has passed the first two stages. In the first stage man believed the supernatural powers controlled and designed the world. He advanced gradually from belief to metaphysical stage where man tried to explain by resorting to abstractions. On the third stages of positive stage man considers searching for ultimate causes and seeks the explanatory facts that can be empirically observed.

The causes of Social Change

It has briefed about the direction in which social change has taken place. But none of the above theories strikes the central question of causation of change. Among the causal theories change the deterministic theory is the most popular.

Deterministic theory

According to this theory there are certain forces, social or natural or both, which brings about social change. It is not reason or intellect, but the presence of certain forces and circumstances, which determines the course of social change. Summer and Keller stated that social change is automatically determined by economic factors. Conscious effort has very little effect to change, social change is essentially unconscious process. Many sociologists held the religion as the chief initiator of social change.

The theory of religious determination has been criticized by Sorokin in his Contemporary Sociological Theories. According to him change is caused by the interaction of various parts of a culture and none of them is considered as primary. It means that change is pluralistic rather than monistic in origin.

Factors of Social Change

Social Change has occurred in all societies and in all periods of time. But the rate of change differs from society. In one society the rate is rapid while in another it is slow. There

are various factors which determine the rate and direction of social change. Some of the factors are:

I. Biological Factors

By biological factors we mean the factors that determine the number, composition, the selection and the hereditary quality of the successive generations. Every human element in society is always changing. If we compare ourselves with our parents, we will know that we are different from them in our make-up, ideas and in most other things. No new generations are an exact replica of the old. Each new generation is a new beginning.

The changes in population in both number and composition have effect on society. For example, in a society where the number of girls is greater than the number of male children one will find out a different system of courtship, marriage and family organization from where the case is reverse.

II. The physical factors

The surface of our planet is never at rest. There are slow geographical changes as well as occasional convulsions of nature in storm, earthquakes and floods. These changes in the physical environment sometimes bring about important changes in society. The flood in India may hasten the birth of model village in place of those which have been washed off or they may lead to the construction of dams in order to prevent future floods.

III. Technological Factors

Technology affects society greatly. A variation in technology causes a variation in some institution or custom. The introduction of machine technology as a result of the discovery of the new sources energy has made such far-reaching consequences that it is often described as a 'revolution'. Invention and discovery are significant characteristics of our age. The present age is often called the "age of power", the scientific age. For example mechanization has changed not only the economic structure of society but also led to a study devaluation of old forms of social organization and old ideologies.

a) Changes in the production technology

Our attitudes, beliefs and traditions have crumbled before technological advance. Take the familiar example of status of women in industrial age. Industrialism has destroyed the domestic system of production, brought women from the home to the factory and the office and distinguished their earnings. It has meant a new social life for women. Changes in agricultural techniques have affected the rural community. With the invention of new agricultural tools, chemicals and fertilizers agricultural production has increased and thereby

the standard of living of rural people rose. Fewer people needed for agricultural labourers shifted to cities.

b) Changes in the means of communication

The changes in the means of communication have also affected the social life greatly. However, the changes in the means of communication depend upon the production technology, for example, the newspaper and automobile are industrial products that have been made possible by modern technological developments.

The primary techniques of communication are speech and gesture, which greatly influences the intimacy and understanding between people of different societies and groups. The press has influenced entertainment, education, politics, and trade. Similarly radio, telegraph, telephone, television, etc has influenced the business, public opinion, recreation and furthered the development of new modes of organization.

c) Changes in the means of Transportation

Transport is the physical consequent of space. The methods and means of transportation determine how easily man can move themselves and easily meet the people of other places or other societies to exchange goods or ideas. Modern man lives so much on wheels. If the wheels are stopped for a single day, the life of modern society would be put out of gears.

Transport has broken the barrier to cultural isolation. People who were culturally isolated may under modern means of transportation technology become a host for the entire world. The new transport modes have played significant role as the diffusion of cultural elements.

d) Derivative Social Effects

Invention influences the institution or customs. The influence does not stop there, but continues on and on. For example, the influence of cotton gin in USA was to increase cotton process more quickly with less labour. But cotton cultivation could not be increased without more labour. So additional Negroes were brought from outside and slavery grew very rapidly. The increase in slavery was the second derivative influence of the cotton gin. The increase in slavery led to the Civil war, the third derivative influence of the cotton gin.

e) Social inventions may bring social changes

Technological invention may also give rise to social inventions. Social inventions are inventions that are not materials and not a discovery in natural science. Non cooperation movement, boycott, representations, old age pensions, juvenile court, civil service,

matrimonial bureau, rotary and other such clubs, are some of the examples of social inventions. So, non-material inventions are social inventions.

This social invention brings about social changes. It is quite evident.

IV. Cultural Factors

The social and cultural factors are so closely interwoven. All cultural changes involve social change. Culture is not something static. Culture gives directions to social behaviour.

Measures of Social Change

Following are the indicators of social change

- i. Nutrition - Calories consumed per head, protein consumption quantity, etc.
- ii. Clothing - Quantity and quality of cloth used per head.
- iii. House - Number of houses for the population. Normally one house should be available for five members.
- iv. Health - Number of hospitals, beds, nurses and doctors available per 10,000 populations.
- v. Education - Percentage of children going to school, literacy level, women literacy level, technical education facility available at school and colleges, etc.
- vi. Media exposure - Number of radio sets, TV sets, cinema seats, newspaper, etc. per 10,000 populations.
- vii. Communication - Length of railways, black topped road, and transport number of vehicles, etc for 10000 population and number of post office and maximum distance for the population to walk to the post office.
- viii. Energy - Percentage of village and town with electricity, domestic consumption consumption of electricity, number of pumpsets in cultivation, etc.
- ix. Proportion of industrial workers
- x. Birth and death - Decreased trend in both the birth and death is a good indicator of rate society's development.
- xi. Urbanization - Proportion of population living in urban area, proportion of population living in slums, etc.

Any similar factor can be taken up to study the social changes based upon the nature of the study, its objective, availability of factors, their importance etc. The success of the researcher depends on how he selects appropriate variables, quantifies them and concludes and changes.