



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

SOCIAL CHANGE AND ITS RELEVANCE IN THE PRESENT CONTEXT

Dr. Anshika Arthur,

Assistant Professor(Department of Sociology)

Baikunthi Devi Kanya Mahavidyalaya,Agra

Every society and its culture changes with time. There is no society which remain unchanged. Social change holds an important arena of interest among anthropologists and sociologists. British Historian Sir Henry Maine, in his book 'Ancient Law' (1861) was among the first who discussed about social change. Maine said that society moves from simpler state to complex one i.e status-based to contract-based. Similar is the viewpoint of his contemporary anthropologist L.H. Morgan i.e *societas* to *civitas*. August Comte, father of Sociology, suggested that every society passes through three stage: Theological, Metaphysical and Positivistic. Similarly, Hebert Spencer pointed out that militant society changes into industrial society.

Maclver and Page, "The social structure is subject to incessant change, growing, decaying, finding renewal, accommodating itself to extremely variant conditions and suffering vast modifications in the course of time."

Lundberg, "Social change refers to any modifications in the established patterns of inter-human relationship and standard of conduct."

Morris Ginsberg, "By social change I understand a change in social structure, i.e the size of a society, the composition or balance of its parts or the type of its organization."

Social change is a universal and necessary process, though the pace of change is different in different societies. Anthony Giddens point out that since eighteenth century, the pace of social change is comparatively fast, but since late twentieth century onwards, the pace is faster than ever before. Science and technology has given a boost to social change as mentioned by Landes and others. Zeitlin, "The study of social change is concerned with the processes through which societies and cultures are transformed." It means that social change happens due to the following three factors (1) Change in social structure (2) Change in culture (3) other causes. Maclver and Page, in their book *Society* state that social change refers to a change in social relationships. H.M. Johnson says, "Social change is either change in the structure or quasi-structural aspects of a system of change in the relative importance of coexisting structural pattern." From the above-mentioned definitions, it can be inferred that social change is comprehensive in nature. Why social change happens and how it occurs? On this question, sociologists have no unanimity. The pace or speed of social change depends upon the existing causes and their interplay in that particular society.

Characteristics of social change

- (1) Change is social – It means the change in social relationships. Within social relationships, there comes a social processes, social interactions and social organizations.
- (2) Universal – Social change occurs in every kind of society be it primitive, tribal, rural or urban though the rate and degree of change differ from one society to another. No society remains untouched by social change.
- (3) Continuous- Social change is continuous not intermittent. It happens without a break. The sources or causal factors, direction, forms can change with time or sometimes they remain static.
- (4) Inevitable- Nothing can stop social change from occurring. It has to happen though sometimes it is resisted or opposed by many.
- (5) Temporal – Social change is temporal which means that social change takes place through time. Time is the most important factor. Maclver states “Time is a becoming, not a being, a process, not a product”. Thus social change can be characterized by temporary or permanent on the basis of time.
- (6) Degree or rate of change is not uniform – The degree and rate of social change varies from society to society. Even in the same society, the rate varies from time to time. For instance, the rate of social change in rural society differs from that of urban society.
- (7) Social change may be planned or unplanned – Social change may be unplanned when they occur spontaneously or accidentally. On the other hand, social change can be planned in advance to produce desired effect. For example, in India five year plans were started in 1950s to give certain direction. Various plans, programs and policies have been launched for marginalized groups of Indian society like women, minorities, scheduled castes and tribes.
- (8) Social change is multi-causal – Social change can be brought about by a single factor but usually several factors like demography, technological, cultural factors act together for initiating and sustenance of social change.
- (9) Social change causes chain reaction – Social change produce not only a single reaction but chain reaction as society is composed of inter-related and inter-connected parts. For example, when women were given opportunities for education and employment, it led to change in her status, conjugal relationship and intra-familial relationships.
- (10) Uncertain prediction – Social change can be predicted but its prediction remain uncertain because of the following reasons: (a) There is no specific law of social change (b) Social change is multi-causal (3) Non-uniformity of social change.

Why does social change takes place? For this to answer, we need to analyse factors or causes which cause social change. There are numerous factors responsible for social change to take place.

-----Internal factors- Sometimes, social change happens through internal factors. When people are not satisfied with the present state of affairs, they try hard to change their conditions. Usually in a closed society, internal factors (endogenous/orthogenetic) are a major source of change. In India, socio-religious movements of 19th century are an example of internal factors.

_____ External factors- When two different social systems or value-systems come into contact with each other, social change takes place. Changes brought about by Westernisation or Western technology can be included in the category of external factors (exogenous or heterogenetic). Such factors have primacy over endogenous or orthogenetic factors.

-----Non-social environment- Not always social factors are responsible for social change. Sometimes geographical also play an important role. Non-social factors were prominent also prominent in primitive and ancient societies.

_____Demographic factors- Demography is the scientific study of human population ,primarily with respect to its size,structure and its development .High fertility ,low mortality and migration are the three important factors that determine its rise,fall or density of population.Positive effects of population growth are as follows: (1)More population encourages the creativity,innovation and discoveries.(2)Due to excessive growth of population,Government introduces programmes and policies to curb population growth.(3)According to Emile Durheim,with the rise of material and moral density,a different type of solidarity called organic solidarity occurs.The negative effects of population growth are:(1)With the rise of population at a much faster rate,standard of living decreases.(2)Excessive growth of population give rise to many social problems like poverty,unemployment,child labour,crime,juvenile delinquency,beggary etc. (3)Higher growth in the rate of population causes situation of social conflict and disorganization in that particular society.

_____Cultural factors –Culture plays a prominent role in social change.Culture does not remain static rather it keeps on changing.If the culture of the given society is conservative,then in that case,social change is resisted or its speed,direction or degree is effected because culture shapes the attitudes and values of the people. Discovery,Invention and diffusion are the three important factors which brings about change in culture.Culture cause social change in the following ways: (1)Culture influence the direction and character of technological change.Societies adopt technology easily but in what way technological inventions will be put to use is determined by culture.(2)Culture also influence economy and its growth because non-economic factors influence the behavior of individuals in a particular economy.(3)Culture keeps the social relationship intact.Culture helps in maintaining social relationships and thereby social solidarity.

Concept of “Cultural lag”has been described by American Sociologist W.F.Ogburn.He divides culture into two parts- Material and Non-material culture.Material culture includes tangible and visible things like machine,furniture,tools,goods etc. whereas non-material culture includes abstract and intangible elements eg. religion,customs ,values etc. According to Ogburn,material culture changes at a faster rate as compared to non-material culture.Thus ,there occurs a “lag” between the two types of culture which is called “Cultural lag” .Cultural lag is the basis of social change.The concept of Cultural lag holds its place in sociological literature but it is not without criticism.

_____Technological factors- Technology implies an appropriate organization and systematic application of scientific knowledge to meet the human requirements.When the scientific knowledge is applied to the problems of life,it becomes technology.Two important sources of change are the invention and discovery.Besides these two the other three technological factors are Technological innovations;Change in production technology and Changes in transportation and communication.

Theories of social change

Classical theory of Social Change---Sociological theories of 19th century viewed social change in terms of progress or evolution.The evolutionary process of change was viewed as unilinear and systematic process,involving the passage of societies through definite stages.Though earliest thinker to analyse social change through evolution was none other than the founder of sociology itself August Comte but it was Herbert Spencer who presented evolutionary scheme in a more systematic and organized manner which influenced the later-day thinkers like Sumner,Hobhouse and Durkheim.Other proponents of evolutionist approach were L.H.Morgan and Taylor.According to Spencer,evolution is a twin process of differentiation and integration whereby a simple or less differentiated transforms into a complex or more differentiated form.Herbert Spencer also gave the evolutionary sequence of societies which consisted of the following stages:-Simple society(Herds and bands)----Compound society(Tribes with chiefdoms)----Doubly Compound(City states and kingdoms)----Trebly compound societies(Empires and Modern Nation-states).Similarly,L.T.Hobhouse was also influenced by the ideas of evolution and progress.He gave the following stages through which society passes

- Stage of preliterate societies.
- Stage of literacy and proto-science
- Stage of reflective thought
- Stage of critical thought
- Stage of modern science

Durkheim also presented in his own view of evolution. He pointed out that simple society based on mechanical society changes into complex industrial society characterized by organic solidarity. Earlier the evolutionary theory was accepted as they tried to explain social change on the basis of scientific theory but later on criticisms were levelled against them due to the following reasons:

(1) Thinkers belonging to evolutionist tradition based their theories on the idea of *progress*. They perceived primitive societies as uncivilized or savage. On the contrary, they viewed European societies as highly modern, civilized and progress. However, such viewpoint was rendered redundant when World War broke out in 20th century unleashing bloodshed, violence and terror.

(2) Early evolutionists of 19th century were basically of "arm-chair" variety. Without fieldwork and collection of data, their presentation was based on their own viewpoints and perceptions.

(3) Lastly, their theories were macro-theories which treat whole society as one unit. In fact, macro-theories are very hard to analyse on justify on the criterion of reliability and validity

Neo-evolutionist's theory of change- Some of the theories tried to rectify shortcomings of the classical evolutionist theory. Such theories came to be known as neo-evolutionist theories. Thinkers linked with such theories are the Talcott Parsons, V. Gordon Childe and Leslie White.

Marxian theory of social change – Marx explained social change on the basis of dialectical materialism. Dialectical materialism posits that political and historical events result from the conflict of social forces and are interpretable as a series of contradictions and their solutions. Thus, Marx highlights the positive aspects of conflict as an agent of social change. He also gave the stages through which a society passes through as following: Primitive Communism-----Ancient Society-----Feudal Society-----Capitalist Society-----Communist Society. Further, Marx analyses social structure on the basis of contradiction between emerging forces of production and existing relations of production. Forces of production are the ways in which material goods are produced. They include the technological knowhow, the types of equipment in use and goods being produced for example, tools, machinery, labour and levels of technology are all included within the forces of production. On the other hand, relations of production are the social relations of production. They include relations between the workers and employers and relations amongst workers. Marxian theory is both evolutionary as well as revolutionary as ruling class is thrown off by subject class through revolution. Marx presented a scientific and systematic theory but his imagination of classless communist society could not be fructified as yet.

Cyclical theory of social change- Cyclical theory was propounded by Oswald Spencer (Decline of the West, 1918) and Arnold J. Toynbee (A Study of History, 1956). Their contention is that like the way every individual/organism is born, grow, mature, grow old and die same fate is met by the societies and civilizations. Societies, after decline at last go back to their original state and then the cycle restarts all over again. Spencer analysed Egyptian, Greek, Roman and many other civilizations, concluded that Western civilization is on the decline. Similarly, English historian Arnold J. Toynbee studied 21 civilizations. He propounded the theory of "challenge and response" which means that the society has to respond constructively to challenges in order to survive. Another variant of cyclical theory was given by American Sociologist Pitrim Sorokin (Social and Cultural Dynamics, 1941). His theory is often known as "Pendular theory of change", which sees societies oscillating between three different types of "mentalities" i.e. sensate (emphasizing the role of senses in understanding reality), ideational (religious ways of thinking) and idealistic (transitional types between the two).

Another thinker whose name is associated with cyclical theory of social change is Vilfredo Pareto whose theory is called "Circulation of Elites". He says that society is governed by two kinds of elites----Lions and Foxes. Governing elite rules society, which later on become decadent and ultimately replaced by another type of elite. Thus, one set of elite is replaced by another. The same process goes on and on.

Structural-functionalist perspective----Emile Durkeim, Talcott Parsons, Merton etc. have been associated with structural-functional approach. Structural-functional sees society as consisting of inter-connected and inter-connected parts, each of which performs its "function". It means that society is a balanced system. When a society encounters with disruptions, malfunctioning and situations of stress, its parts make adjustment to restore stability. According to structural-functionalists, change happens in a gradual manner. They, in fact, rule out the possibility of sudden and violent change. It can be said that structural-functionalism explain the society when it is in equilibrium. They emphasize highly on value-consensus, harmony, stability and social solidarity. Revolts, Rebellions, Revolutions and social conflicts which suddenly and spontaneously disrupt the social order are an neglected area of interest of structural-functionalists.

Diffusionist theory of change- Diffusionist theory locates the sources of change outside the society. Diffusionists postulate that the process of change begins with culture. The various possibilities happen when one culture comes into contact with another culture.

- The cultural trait may be accepted partly or fully.
- The cultural trait may be outrightly rejected
- The cultural trait may be accepted after modification.

The acceptance or rejection of a cultural trait depends upon the following. First, if there is direct contact between the two cultures on a wider plane, then "acculturation" process follows. The recipient culture may be changed on a wider scale. Secondly, if the given cultural trait relates to the peripheral aspect of the recipient culture, then it is more likely to be accepted. For example, we Indians readily accepted Western outfits like jeans pants, skirt-top etc. On the contrary, if the given cultural trait touches the core aspect of the recipient culture, then it will be resisted. In fact, this may give rise to revivalist type of protest movement eg. religious revivalist or fundamentalist movements.

Robert Redfield while studying Mexican societies had developed the concept of Little Tradition and Great Tradition to analyse social change brought about by diffusion. Milton Singer and Mackim Marriot have tried to apply this model to study social changes in India. According to this approach, the social structure of civilization operates at two levels----at the level of folks or the ordinary people and at the level of elites. The culture of the folks comprises the Little Tradition whereas the culture of the elites comprises the Great Tradition. There is constant interaction between the two levels of tradition for analyzing social change in India.

In the final analysis, it can be concluded that social change is such a complex process that it is difficult to explain its causes, limits and consequences. The origin of social change can be endogamous or exogamous or both. Factors like demographic, technological, cultural etc. play a crucial role in the process of social change. Thinkers belonging to different approaches tried to analyse social change, its sources, factors, degree and direction. No single theory is adequate to account for its origin, direction, manner or consequences in a definite and specific manner. But still the concept of social change is an area of interest among the sociologists all across the world in an era of globalization.

REFERENCES

Bottomore, T.B., **Sociology**, Vintage Books, New York, 1972

Maclver, R.M. and Page, Charles H., **Society**, Macmillan India Limited, New Delhi, 1985

Giddens, Anthony, **Sociology**, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1993 & 1998

Johnson, Harry M., **Sociology**, Allied Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi, 1983

Aron, Raymond, **Main Currents in Sociological Thought**, Vol.1, Penguin Books, London, 1976

Abraham, M. Francis, **Modern Sociological Theory**, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1985

Haralambos, M., **Sociology**, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1980

