Think India Journal
ISSN: 0971-1260Vol-22, Special Issue-21
National Conference on
Recent Advances in Commerce, Management and Computer Science (NRCACMC-2020) sponsored by
Department of Commerce, VEL TECH RangaSanku Arts College,
Avadi, Chennai-62
Held on 4th January 2020

A Study on Social Changes in India: Concept, Study and Other Details

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ABSTRACT

The concept of social change is a very broad one. It consists of a constellation of processes of change in human society in terms of place, time and context. Since it is so broad, it is bound to be somewhat imprecise, tentative and value-neutral. We will analyse the processes and patterns of social change and mobility in Indian society. Special attention will be paid to the views of Mahatma Gandhi and to his efforts to bring about a non-violent social revolution in Indian society. Gunnar Myrdal's rationalist approach to the understanding of socio-economic development will also be discussed.

The major approaches for studying social change in India are:

(1) Evolutionary
(2) Cultural
(3) Structura

A discussion of these approaches facilitates understanding of the basic structural and cultural hindrances to social change as envisaged in plans and policies. A study of the resources, distributive processes, institutional devices, educational system, land relations, wages and levels of living in terms of time, people and context is necessary for a comprehensive understanding of

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social change. Along with structural and cultural changes traditional modes of social relations also persist. We will discuss this as a mix of tradition and modernity in Indian society.

CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CHANGE:

Broadly speaking, there are two types of processes:

(1) which sustain the social system; and

(2) which bring about change in the system and change o/the system.

The first processes may be termed as conformity, status quo and continuity. The latter may be called as processes of cultural and structural change. Social change is universal. Its pattern and factors may vary from time to time and from place to place. Change can be seen in terms of the elements of time and history in relation to a given society or social phenomena.

MacIver and Page (1967) write in this regard:

"Society exists only in time-sequence. It is a being not a process, and changing equilibrium of present relationship." Social change is distinct from cultural or civilisational change. In social change the emphasis is on social relationships.

A social structure is a nexus of relationships. It is sustained by those members who participate in social relationships. Social change means change in social structure. Change in social values, institutions, property relations, economic pursuits, personnel and role distribution may be cited as examples of social change in modern society. Social change is always relative in terms of time, space and economy.

In fact, one can compare patterns of change on the basis of these three elements. Resistance to social change is also quite a common feature as change disturbs the ongoing social order and relations. Resistance is registered particularly by those who are adversely affected by processes of social change.

Kingsley Davis (1967) has listed several questions with regard to the understanding of social change. What is the direction of social change? What is the rate of social change? What is

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the source of social change? What is the cause of social change? Is the cause of social change overwhelmingly deterministic in nature? Can social change be regulated to the desired direction?

All the classical theories of society have grappled with these questions related to social change. Peter L. Berger and Brigitte Berger (1976) state that "the experience of social change is at the very core of sociology as a discipline. Sociology developed as an intellectual response to catalytic social change". The French Revolution, the Civil War in America, the Industrial Revolution in Britain, and the Indian Freedom Movement are examples of rapid transformations of society.

Sociology and the Study of Social Change:

Sociology as a discipline would focus on change in society, its social groupings, institutions and behaviour patterns.

Two tendencies can be ascertained in situations of upheaval and transformation:

(1) To contain the change within certain limits; and

(2) To channelise change in a desired direction.

The first has been labelled as a conservative perspective, whereas the second is called a progressive or radical view. Berger and Berger (ibid) observe that "in either case, social change presents itself as a problem in a double sense.

Social change is an intellectual problem, in that it is a challenge to understanding; social change is also a political problem, in that it demands practical actions". Thus, social change is both an ideology and praxis. There is a need to strike a balance between the two. Max Weber (1970) treats the two as distinct from each other, whereas Karl Marx (1970) believes in the unity of theory and practice.

Auguste Comte (1877), who is known as the father of sociology, predicted the direction that change would take in future. The idea of progress is basic to his evolutionary perspective.

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He makes a reference to laws of history. The three stages of evolution of society are theological, metaphysical and scientific.

In Comte's view, sociology can be understood as a kind of religion of progress, with the sociologist playing the role of priest. Comte's emphasis is on scientific reason and progress. Herbert Spencer (1961) was another evolutionary-positivist thinker who applied the Darwinian view about the dynamics of evolution to society and changes therein.

He writes: "As in the biological sphere, social change too is dominated by the conflicts and adaptations that result in natural selection. The purpose of evolution, biological or social, is the survival of the fittest." Karl Marx (1970) explains social change in terms of the class relationships. Both Spencer and Marx emphasise that conflict and struggle are the forces of history.

However, Marx refers to the concept of 'false consciousness' – the consciousness of the people who are unaware of their real social position in society (in relations of production). Marx also predicts the future of society with a more specific emphasis. He visualises the emergence of a capitalist society, class struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and the overthrow of the capitalist system.

Social Change as a Process:

In academic parlance, the term 'change' is considered natural. It implies that the object to which it is applied becomes different with time. According to this view, social change suggests no law, no theory, no direction, and no continuity.

The idea of continuity is introduced when we refer to social change as a process. A process means a continuous change taking place in a definite manner through the operation of forces present from the very beginning within a situation. Examples of process are communication, socialisation, accommodation, integration, disintegration, competition and conflict.

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To study a process, we observe a series of transitions between one state of being and another. The quality of the two stages of the process may not be the same. Nor the same direction is followed. A process may be up or down, forward or backward, towards progression or regression. Thus, a process means movement from one stage to another with a definite direction.

Processes are both system-sustaining and system-transforming. A given social system is regenerated through some processes of social change, whereas some other processes may bring about situations of malfunctioning and breakdown. Social processes are a part of social structure and we come across these frequently in system-sustaining and system-changing exercises.

Global demographic shifts

One of the most obvious changes currently occurring is the change in the relative global population distribution between countries. In the recent decades, developing countries became a larger proportion of world population, increasing from 68% in 1950 to 82% in 2010, while population of the developed countries has declined from 32% of total world population in 1950 to 18% in 2010. China and India continue to be the largest countries, followed by the US as a distant third. However, population growth throughout the world is slowing. Population growth among developed countries has been slowing since the 1950s, and is now at 0.3% annual growth. Population growth among the less developed countries excluding the least developed has also been slowing, since 1960, and is now at 1.3% annual growth. Population growth among the least developed countries has slowed relatively little, and is the highest at 2.7% annual growth.

Another social change in the world that is getting more public recognition is Afrocentrism. Many people get "being black" and African mixed-up. The difference between black and African is, Black is a color and African focuses on people that are from African descent. Afrocentrism is the movement of research and study educating others from the perspectives of historical African people. Afrocentrism takes a stance towards European assumptions and myths about African history. People believe that the movement is totally denying Asian and European impact on African history and only focusing on African culture and technology. Afrocentrism holistic view

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is to mainly focus on the history of Africa and its role in African American culture and Greek philosophy around us. Through Afrocentrism we have many other things, such as Kwanzaa, The Harlem Renaissance, also a way out from mental bondage.

processes and mechanisms of social change, and directions of change.

- **Hegelian**: The classic Hegelian dialectic model of change is based on the interaction of opposing forces. Starting from a point of momentary stasis, Thesis countered by Antithesis first yields conflict, then it subsequently results in a new Synthesis.
- **Marxist**: Marxism presents a dialectical and materialist concept of history; Humankind's history is a fundamental "struggle between social classes".
- **Kuhnian**: The philosopher of science, Thomas Kuhn argues in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* with respect to the Copernican Revolution that people are likely to continue utilizing an apparently unworkable paradigm until a better paradigm is commonly accepted .
- **Heraclitan**: The Greek philosopher Heraclitus used the metaphor of a river to speak of change thus, "On those stepping into rivers staying the same other and other waters flow" (DK22B12). What Heraclitus seems to be suggesting here, later interpretations notwithstanding, is that, in order for the river to remain the river, change must constantly be taking place. Thus one may think of the Heraclitan model as parallel to that of a living organism, which, in order to remain alive, must constantly be changing. A contemporary application of this approach is shown in the social change theory SEED-SCALE which builds off of the complexity theory subfield of Emergence.
- **Daoist**: The Chinese philosophical work *Dao De Jing*, I.8 and II.78 uses the metaphor of water as the ideal agent of change. Water, although soft and yielding, will eventually wear away stone. Change in this model is to be natural, harmonious and steady, albeit imperceptible.

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- **Four Levels of Action**: Will Grant of the Pachamama Alliance describes "Four Levels of Action" for change:
  1. Individual
  2. Friends and family
  3. Community and institutions
  4. Economy and policy

Grant suggests that individuals can have the largest personal impact by focusing on levels.

The Nature Of Modern Society

General features

Modernity must be understood, in part at least, against the background of what went before. Industrial society emerged only patchily and unevenly out of agrarian society, a system that had endured 5,000 years. Industrial structures thus took much of their characteristic form and colour from the rejection, conscious or unconscious, of preindustrial ways. Industrialism certainly contained much that was new, but it remained always at least partly an idea that in both its theory and its practice was to be understood as much by what it denied as by what it affirmed. The force of the modern has always been partly a reactive force, a force that derived meaning and momentum by a comparison or contrast with, and by rejection or negation of, what went before.

Considered at the most general level, this point suggests a view of modernization as a process of individualization, differentiation or specialization, and abstraction. Put more concretely: first, the structures of modern society take as their basic unit the individual rather than, as with agrarian or peasant society, the group or community. Second, modern institutions are assigned the performance of specific, specialized tasks in a social system with a highly developed and complex division of labour; in this they stand in the sharpest possible contrast with, for instance, the family in peasant society, which is at once the unit of production, consumption, socialization, and authoritative decision-making. Third, rather than attaching rights and prerogatives to

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particular groups and persons, or being guided by custom or tradition, modern institutions tend to be governed and guided by general rules and regulations that derive their legitimacy from the methods and findings of science. In principle at least, they are not the agents of particular individuals, such as a king or priest, endowed with divine or prescriptive authority, but act according to the rational and impersonal precepts formulated by "experts."

These contrasts by no means complete the characterization of modern society, nor are they the only ones that might be drawn. Nevertheless, they do illustrate the dependence of the concept of modernity on past structures that form the basis of comparison and exclusion. Indeed, it is such a set of contrasts, not necessarily carefully distinguished, that most people have in mind when they speak of modern as opposed to traditional society.

Becoming Modern

The revolution of modernity

If one imagines all of human social evolution charted on a 12-hour clock, then the modern industrial epoch represents the last five minutes, no more. For more than half a million years, small bands of what we may agree were human beings roamed the earth as hunters and gatherers. With simple stone tools and a social order based on kinship ties they successfully preserved the human species against predators and natural calamities. In observing contemporary Australian Aboriginals, the San (Bushmen) of southern Africa, the Eskimo, the Negritos in Malaysia and the Philippines, and Pygmy groups in Africa, a glimpse may be had of the social life of the Paleolithic period (Old Stone Age)—the oldest and most enduring type of human society.

About 10,000 BC some of these hunters and gatherers took to cultivating the earth and domesticating animals. It is this process that is somewhat misleadingly called the Neolithic revolution, implying that new stone tools were at the root of this vast change. It is now generally accepted that the new technology was not the principal factor. Nevertheless what took place was undoubtedly a revolution. Mobile bands became settled village communities. The development

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of the plow raised the productivity of the land a thousandfold, and in response the human population of the planet increased dramatically. More significantly, herding and agriculture for the first time created a surplus of food. This allowed some members of the population to abandon subsistence activities and become artisans, merchants, priests, and bureaucrats. This division of labour took place in a newly concentrated physical environment. In the 4th millennium BC cities arose, and with them trade, markets, government, laws, and armies.

The technology and social organization of the Neolithic revolution remained the basis of all civilization until the coming of industrialism. With remarkably few additions—the invention of the stirrup was an important one—what served ancient Mesopotamia and ancient Egypt of the third and second millennia BC served as the foundation of all the states and empires of the ancient world, from China and India to Greece and Rome. And it served equally the European Middle Ages, which in some respects, notably in technology, actually fell back from the achievements of the ancient world. Not until the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe did humankind make another leap comparable to that of the Neolithic revolution.

It is against this very slowly evolutionary background that the revolution that underlay modernity must be seen. It is one of just two quantum jumps that human social evolution has made since the primal hunting and gathering stage of early *Homo sapiens*. The Neolithic or agricultural revolution produced, paradoxically, urban civilization; the Industrial Revolution lifted humankind onto a new plane of technological development that vastly increased the scope for transforming the material environment. In its speed and scale the change brought about by the Industrial Revolution has had, indeed, a greater impact on human life than the Neolithic revolution. Neolithic civilization remained throughout confined by a sharply limited technical and economic base; industrial civilization knows no such limits. Nevertheless, an understanding of agrarian society is essential to the analysis of industrial society, for it is

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largely through the contrast with its agrarian past that modern society stands out. The meaning of the modern is to be found as much in what it renounces as in what it aspires to.

Conclusion

The causes of social change are diverse, and the processes of change can be identified as either short-term trends or long-term developments. Change can be either cyclic or one-directional.

The mechanisms of social change can be varied and interconnected. Several mechanisms may be combined in one explanatory model of social change. For example, innovation by business might be stimulated by competition and by government regulation.

To the degree that change processes are regular and interconnected, social change itself is structured. Since about 1965 there has been a shift in emphasis from “structure” to “change” in social theory. Change on different levels—social dynamics in everyday life and short-term transformations and long-term developments in society at large—has become the focus of much attention in the study of society.

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