**SOCIAL CHANGE**

**Meaning:**

Any alteration, difference or modification that takes place in a situation or in an object through tie can be called change. The term ‘social change’ is used to indicate the changes that take place in human interactions and interrelations. Society is a “web of social relationships” and hence ‘social change’ obviously means a change in the system of social relationships. Social relationships are understood in terms of social processes and social interactions and social organization. Thus the term ‘social change’ is used to desirable variations in social interaction, social processes and social organization. It includes alterations in the structure and functions of the society.

**Definition:**

***M.E. Jones:*** “Social change is a term used to describe variations in, or modifications of, any aspect of social processes, social patterns, social interaction or social organization.”

***MacIver and Page:*** “Social change refers to ‘a process’ responsive to many types of changes; to changes in the manmade conditions of life; to changes in the attitudes and beliefs of men; and to the changes that go beyond the human control to the biological and the physical nature of things”.

**Theories of Social Change:**

1. **Evolutionary Theories:** Evolutionary theories are based on the assumption that societies gradually change from simple beginnings into even more complex forms. They saw changes as positive and beneficial. To them the evolutionary process implied that societies would necessarily reach new and higher levels of civilization.

This evolutionary view of social change was highly influenced by *Charles Darwin’s* theory of *‘Organic Evolution’*. Those who were fascinated by this theory applied it to the human society and argued that societies must have evolved from the too simple and primitive to that of too complex and advanced such as the western society. *Herbert Spencer*, a British sociologist, carried this analogy to its extremity. He argued that society itself is an organism. He even applied Darwin’s principle of *“the survival of the fittest”* to human societies. He said that society has been gradually progressing towards a better state. This view also known as ‘*Social Darwinism’* got widespread popularity in the late 19th Century.

*Emile Durkheim* identified the cause of societal evolution as a society’s increasing *“moral density”.* Durkheim viewed societies as changing in the direction of greater differentiation, interdependence and formal control under the pressure of increasing moral density”.

1. **Cyclical Theories:** “Cyclical theories of social change focus on the rise and fall of civilizations attempting to discover and account for these patterns of growth and decay.”- *Ian Robertson*.

*Oswald Spengler - ‘The Destiny of Civilizations’*: Each civilization is like a biological organism and has a similar life-cycle; birth, maturity, old age and death. In his study of eight major civilizations, he concluded that the western societies were entering a period of decay as evident by war, conflicts and social breakdown heralded their doom.

*Toynbee – ‘Challenge and Response’*: “Every society faces challenges – at first, challenges posed by the environment; later challenges from internal and external enemies. The achievements of a civilization consist of its successful responses to challenges; if it cannot mount an effective response, it dies”.

*Sorkorin – ‘Sensate and Ideational Culture’*: The sensate culture stresses those things which can be perceived directly by the senses. Ideational culture emphasizes those things which can be perceived only by the mind. It is abstract, religious, concerned with faith and ultimate truth. Both represent ‘pure’ types of culture. Hence, no society develops towards one pure type. Too much emphasis on one type of culture leads to a reaction towards the other. *“Societies contain both these impulses in varying degrees and the tension between them creates long-term instability”.*

1. **Functionalists or Dynamic or Equilibrium Theories:** *Talcott Parsons* and his followers have been the main advocates of this theory. Parsons stressed the importance of cultural patterns in controlling the stability of a society. According to hi, society has the ability to absorb disruptive forces while maintaining overall stability. Because it is “*constantly straining for equilibrium or balance*”. The conservative forces of society such as shared norms and values resist radical changes and serve to hold the society together. He has stated that changes may arise from two sources. They may come from outside the society, through contact with other societies. They may also come from inside the society, through adjustments that must be made to resolve strains within the system.

Parsons speaks of two processes that are at work in social change, i.e., *‘undifferentiated’*, which is a single institution serves many functions and, *‘differentiated’*, which takes place when the society becomes more and more complex. Further, *‘bridging institution’*, such as law courts which resolve conflicts between other components in the system.

1. **Conflict Theories:** The conflict theory highlights the forces producing instability, struggle, and social disorganization. *Karl Marx* – *“Every hitherto existing society is a society of class struggle”*. *“Violence is the midwife of history”* – Marx declared. Individuals and groups with opposing interests are bound to be at conflict. History is actually the story of conflict between the exploiting and the exploited classes. This conflict repeats itself off and on until capitalism is overthrown by the workers and a socialist state is created. Marx and other conflict theorists deem society as basically dynamic and not static. They consider conflict as a normal, not an abnormal process. They believed that *“the existing conditions in any society contain the seeds of future social change.”*

*George Simmel* stressed that conflict is a permanent feature of society and not just a temporary event. It is a process that binds people together in interaction. It encourages people of similar interests to unite together to achieve their objectives. ‘*Continuous conflict keeps society dynamic and ever changing’*.

**FACTORS OF SOCIAL CHANGE**

Society is in continuous flux. Various forces and factors internal as well as external are at work to make society changeful. Factors of social change are as follows:

1. **Geographic or the Physical factors:** Rate and direction of social change are governed by the physical environment. Man has disturbed the ecological balances by exhausting the earth resources. The modes of culture and the whole system of social institutions have undergone modifications. Consequently, the centers of population, the routes of trade, the seats of empire and the systems of structures of societies have been vastly affected.
2. **Biological Factors:** Influenced by non-human biological factors, man has always utilized plan and animal life to meet his basic needs which affect the numbers, composition, birth rate, the death rate, the fertility rate and the hereditary quality of successive generations. The size and composition of population produce social changes and brought different social problems.
3. **Cultural Factors:** Cultural factors consist of our values and beliefs, ideas and ideologies, moral and manners, customs and traditions and various institutions. These cultural factors change with time, and in turn, initiate change in the social order. In some periods ideas of liberty, equality and democracy may be found and still in some other religious orthodoxy or religious non-conformity may prevail. *Culture gives speed and direction to the social change. It is said that ‘ideologies rule the world’.*
4. **Technological Factors:** When scientific knowledge is applied to the problems of life, it becomes technology. The effect of technology includes:-

* ***Industrialization:*** It is associated with the factory system of production. The family has lost its economic importance. The traditional skills have declined and the growth of a society in which a major role is played by manufacturing industry of modern type.
* ***Urbanization:*** Urbanization denotes a diffusion of the influence of urban centers to a rural hinterland. Urbanization leads to various socio-economic problems such as crime, juvenile delinquency, gambling, prostitution, etc.
* ***Modernization:*** It is a process which indicates the adoption of the modern ways of life and values, giving more importance to science and technology. It installed new ideologies in the place of traditional ones.
* ***Transport and Communication:*** It leads to the creation of a global village. The intermixing of the people has led to the removal of prejudices and misunderstanding.
* ***Changes in values:*** All the technological changes have led to a vast transformation in the values of life. Traditional values have changed giving movement towards individualism, moving away from family and community loyalty and responsibility.
* ***Changes in social institutions:*** Many functions of the family have been taken away by other agencies. Marriage has lost its sanctity becoming a civil contract rather than a sacred bond. Religion is losing its hold over members. Functions of the state have been widened calling itself a welfare state. New types of economic organization have been set up changing the relations between employer and the employee.

1. **Social Legislations:** *“Laws are a form of social rule emanating from political agencies”.* Through legislations the state and society try to bring the legal norms in line with the existing social norms. Legislations are also used to improve social norms on the basis of new legal norms.
2. **Education:** Durkheim conceives of education as *“the socialization of the younger generation”.* Modern education is a process which brings about changes in the behavior of society. Modern education has changed our attitude and outlook. It becomes a means for attaining social and economic rewards in society, a gateway to an improved social position. It increases political awareness among the people and improves the status of women in human society.