

Dr. Rajkumari Ahir

(Assistant Professor)

(Department of Sociology, MLSU)

BA 3rd Year

Title: Theories of Social Change



Theories of Social Change

Introduction:

Social change is such a prevalent and often disturbing feature of contemporary life that one may be tempted to suppose that it is peculiarly modern. Social change is the significant alteration of social structures i.e. the patterns of social action and interaction including consequences and manifestations of such structures embodied in norms (rules of conduct) values, cultural products and symbols.

In our society changes are bound to come. In some societies these changes are very slow while in others changes are rapid and fast. But no society can escape from changes. It is therefore required to take these changes into consideration for proper study of society. In our times we find that changes have been counting rapidly.



Social structures

Theories of Social Change:

It is very difficult to attribute one single reason for a social change. Oswald Spengler is of the view that birth, vigour maturity and senile decay move in a circle and are causes of social change. Pitrim Sorokin views ideational sensate and idealistic reasons for such a change. Toynbee is of the view that inner spiritual force is the cause of all social change.

1. Theory of Determination:

According to exponents of this theory, with the passage of time society is deteriorating and from happiness we are advancing towards dissatisfaction. They therefore feel that social changes come due to this ever going determination which is inevitable. They even take the help of mythology in support of their theory.

2. Cyclic Theory:

Many of our present day thinkers have put forward the cyclic theory of social change. These include Spengler, Vacher-de-Lapouge, Vilfredo Pareto, F. Staury Chopin, Sorokin and Arnold J. Toynbee. Spengler is of the view that like day and night, society too has a pre-determined course which includes its birth, growth, maturity and decline. J.B. Bury has also contributed to this idea. On the basis of analysis of some of the great civilizations like Egyptian, Roman and Greek civilizations, he came to the conclusion that all these civilization saw its decline due to cyclical theory. Vilfredo Pareto is of the view that social change is due to political circumstances. He feels that vigorous politicians try to capture power by disturbing the existing social order but with the passage of time it becomes impossible to vigorously pursue the change and they try to use their energies for maintaining status quo. This status quo is tolerated till such time when new aristocracy does not come to the forefront to disturb the existing order. Therefore, he believes that disturbing social order and maintaining status quo is in a cyclical order and thus inevitable.



Egyptian civilization



Roman civilization



Greek civilization

3. Auguste Comte's Theory:

Comte said that society has passed through three stages namely theological, metaphysical and positive. In the theological stage society, they believed in supernatural powers and accepted the idea that these powers controlled our social behaviour. During the second stage i.e. the metaphysical stage his ideas about supernatural powers changes and from god he came to abstraction and tried to explain social behavior through abstraction. In the third stage which is called positive stage, everything is being empirically studied and all this is going on in a cyclical order.

4. Herbert Spencer's Theory:



Integration

Herbert Spencer linked his theory of social change with organism. According to him a society was initially a militant society which necessitated struggle for



Industrialism

existence. Each one struggled to exist. This militant society then passed to industrialism in which there is differentiation and then comes to the next stage in which we pass from differentiation to integration.

5. Karl Marx's Theory of Social Change:

Karl Marx's theory of social change is also called deterministic or single factor theory of social change. According to this theory there is only one factor and not many factors are responsible for bringing social change. According to Karl Marx, economic factor is the only factor responsible for bringing social change. Marx believed that except economic factor all other factors are useless and superfluous and sometimes even harmful. He also believed that religion was the opium of the people and it distracted masses from hard realities of life. For Marx, all ideas change with economic ideas and so also the living standard of the people. Not only this but for Marx, social changes which are being witnessed in the society are nothing but due to continuous class struggle. A class struggle is always going on between the rich and the poor, between the employer and the employee, between the exploiter and the exploited and between the bourgeoisie and proletariat. In his own words, history of hitherto existing struggle is of only class struggle. He was sure that each economic change brought along a social change as well.

6. Veblen's Theory of Social Change:

Veblen has given his own theory which is again a deterministic theory. In this theory stress has been laid on one factor namely habit. In his opinion, way of habit is a way of thought. According to him environment plays a far reaching role in bringing about social change. Our social and economic structure is directly influenced by our environment. According to him "habit and environments embody themselves in institutions which in the course of time intervene between the material exigencies of life and speculative scheme of things."

7. Theory of Religion:

There are many who refute Marx's theory of economic determinism for social change. They feel that no doubt economic considerations play a considerably important role but they feel that there are many other considerations as well according to them, more than economic consideration are religious considerations. Max Weber contributes to the idea that religion is responsible for bringing about social change. From history, he quotes that emergence of Hinduism, Islam, Christianity or Judaism brought considerable social changes and thus they give more importance to religion rather than to economic aspects of life for change.



Hinduism



Islam



Christianity



8. Theory of Systematic Efforts:

Supporters of this theory include Ludwig Stein and Hobhouse who believe that social change does not come of its own. They believe that neither materialistic nor non-materialistic efforts bring a social change of their own. On the other hand, pointed and concerned efforts will have to make for bringing social change. These efforts include spreads of knowledge and literacy. According to them our conscious efforts in a planned way are more effective for bringing a social change than unplanned and unsystematic efforts because in the latter processes, social process is very slow.

9. Structural-Factor Theory:

According to this theory each function of the society directly and positively influences the other. Every social function is complementary and none is exclusive. Therefore they believe that changes in functions are reasons behind social change. This theory is supported by Parsons and Merton.

10. Pluralistic Theory:

According to the exponents of this theory, it is difficult to point out a single factor, either materialistic or non-materialistic, cultural or technological which produces social change. All combined or many collective causes combined together bring social change.

Conclusion:

Social changes are rapidly coming and in fact their occurrence is inevitable. But what is the rate of social change. A change may occur in different societies or in the same society at different times. It is more or less impossible to decide about the rapidity of change and determine whether change is faster than the other.

From the above discussion, we may conclude that various factors must come together to bring about a rapid and effective social change. Planned and systematic efforts are needed and such efforts are very conducive for this process.
