

# Theories of Social Change

The five theories of social change are as follows: 1. Evolutionary Theory 2. Cyclical Theory 3. Economic (Mandan) Theory of Social Change 4. Conflict Theory 5. Technological Theory.

A variety of reasons have been offered throughout history to explain why social change occurs. The problem of explaining social change was central to nineteenth century sociology. Many earlier theories of society that claimed to be scientific were in fact theories of change. They sought to explain the present in terms of the past. Auguste Comte, the French sociologist, who coined the term 'sociology' described society as starting from the 'logical' stage, passing through a 'metaphysical' stage and finally reaching a 'positivistic' stage.

Many different theories were propounded to define and explain social change. Broadly, theories of nineteenth century may be divided into theories of social evolution (Saint-Simon, Comte, Spencer, Durkheim etc.) and theories of social revolution (Marx).

Among the general theoretical explanations offered for understanding social change are geographical, biological, economic and cultural. All these we have discussed in the previous section.

**Theories of social change can be divided into two groups:**

**(1) Theories relating to the direction of social change:**

Various types of evolutionary theories, and cyclical theory.

**(2) Theories relating to causation of change:**

(a) Those explaining change in terms of endogamous factors or processes; and

(b) Those emphasising exogamous factors such as economic, cultural or historical.

### **1. Evolutionary Theory:**

Despite the wide variety in the possible directions change may take, various generalisations have been set forth. Because the lot of mankind generally has improved over the long term, by far the most numerous classes of theories of the direction of change comprise various cumulative or evolutionary trends. Though varying in many ways, these theories share an important conclusion that the course of man's history is marked up 'upward' trend through time.

The notion of evolution came into social sciences from the theories of biological evolution. With the advent of Darwinian Theory of biological evolution, society and culture began to be regarded as undergoing the same changes and demonstrating the same trends.

It was conceived that society and culture were subject to the same general laws of biological and organism growth. Some thinkers even identified evolution with progress and proceeded to project into the future more and more perfect and better-adapted social and cultural forms.

Charles Darwin (1859), the British biologist, who propounded the theory of biological evolution, showed that species of organisms have evolved from simpler organisms to the more complicated organisms through the processes of variations and natural selection. After Darwin, 'evolution', in fact, became the buzz word in all

intellectual inquiry and Darwin and Spencer were the key names of an era in the history of thought.

Herbert Spencer (1890), who is known to be the forerunner of this evolutionary thought in sociology, took the position that sociology is “the study of evolution in its most complex form”. For him, evolution is a process of differentiation and integration.

### **Basic Assumptions And Distinctive Features Of The Evolutionary Change:**

The basic assumption of this theory is that change is the characteristic feature of human society. The present observed condition of the society is presumed to be the result of change in the past. Another assumption is that change is inevitable or it is ‘natural’.

It was assumed that the change is basically the result of operation of forces within the society or culture. Underlying all theories of evolution, there exists a belief of infinite improvement in the next stage over the preceding one.

### **All these assumptions can be summarised as under:**

1. That change is inevitable and natural.
2. That change is gradual and continuous.
3. That change is sequential and in certain stages.
4. That all successive stages of change are higher over preceding stage, i.e., evolution is progressive.
5. That stages of change are non-reversible.

6. That forces of change are inherent in the object.

7. That the direction of change is from simple to complex, from homogeneity to heterogeneity, from undifferentiated to the differentiated in form and function.

8. That all societies pass through same stages of development.

All thinking of early sociologists was dominated by a conception of man and society as seen progressing up definite steps of evolution leading through every greater complexity to some final stage of perfection. The notion of evolutionary principles was extremely popular with British anthropologists and sociologists of nineteenth century.

Such as Morgan (1877), Tyler (1889), Spencer (1890) and Hobhouse (1906). Although evolutionary theory in sociology is attributed to Herbert Spencer, it is clear that it was taken for granted by writers as diverse as Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and V. Gordon Childe.

The fact that it was used by both radical and conservative theorists is indicative of the profound cultural importance of evolutionism in the nineteenth century thought. The conception of evolution was applied not only to the development of societies but also to art, literature, music, philosophy, sciences, religion, economic and political life (state) and almost every other achievement of the mind of man. Both Spencer and Durkheim employed the concept of structural differentiation to indicate that as society develops more functions, it becomes structurally more complex. This perspective has been elaborated more recently by Talcott Parsons.

The general evolutionary model of society is represented by a large number of specific theories. C.H. Saint-Simon, one of the earliest founders of sociology, along with Auguste Comte, for example, put an evolutionary idea of social development, as a sequential progression of organic societies representing increasing levels of advancement.

His three stages were later elaborated in Comte's evolutionary scheme. Comte linked developments in human knowledge, culture and society and delineated the following three great stages through which all societies must go—those of conquest, defense and industry. Societies passed through three stages—the primitive, the intermediary and the scientific, which corresponded to the forms of human knowledge (thought).

He conceived these stages as progressing from the theological through the metaphysical to arrive ultimately at the perfection of positive reasoning. He argued all mankind inevitably passed through these stages as it developed, suggesting both unilinear direction and progress. Spencer also displayed a linear concept of evolutionary stages. He argued that the trend of human societies was from simple, undifferentiated wholes to complex and heterogeneous ones, where the parts of the whole become more specialised but remained integrated.

William Graham Sumner (1840-1910), who has been labelled as a 'Social Darwinist' also used the idea of evolution, as had Spencer, to block efforts at reform and social change, arguing that social evolution must follow its own course, dictated by nature. He said: "It is the

greatest folly of which a man can be capable, to sit down with a slate and pencil to plan out a new social world.”

The evolutionary approach to social development was also followed by radical thinkers, such as Marx and Engels, who were greatly influenced by the work of the anthropologist L.H. Morgan, who sought to prove that all societies went through fixed stages of development each succeeding the other, from savagery through barbarism to civilisation. Marx and Engels maintained that each stage of civilisation, such as feudalism, prepared the ground for the next.

It contained within itself “the seeds of its own destruction”, and would inevitably be succeeded by that stage next ‘higher’ on the scale of evolution. On this basis they concluded that the next stage in social evolution after the stage of capitalism could be attained only by violent revolution. All these theories are referred to as unilinear theories of social evolution.

Durkheim’s view of the progressive division of labour in society and German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies’ view of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* types of society to some extent also represent the evolutionary perspective but their schemes of classifying societies are less sweeping and less explicit, and are, therefore referred to as quasi-evolutionary theories. For Durkheim the most important dimension of society was the degree of specialisation, as he called it, “the division of labour”.

He believed that there was a historical trend, or evolution, from a low to a high degree of specialisation. Durkheim distinguished two

main types of society on the basis of this division of labour—the first based on mechanical solidarity and the second on organic solidarity. Durkheim believed that this second type always evolved from and succeeded the first as the degree of specialisation, the division of labour, increased.

Tonnies' *gemeinschaft* type of society corresponded quite well to Durkheim's mechanical solidarity and the second *gesellschaft* to organic solidarity. Numerous other scholars put forth similar ideas. The scheme of the American anthropologist Robert Redfield, who elaborated on the contrast between 'folk' and 'urban' society, reiterates the same basic dichotomy of social types suggested by Durkheim and Tonnies. Modern theorist Talcott Parsons also viewed social change as a process of 'social evolution' from simple to more complex form of society. He regards changes in adaptation as a major driving force of social evolution. The history of human society from simple hunting and gathering band to the complex nation-state represents an increase in the 'general adaptive capacity of society.

### **Types of Evolutionary Theory:**

**There are three main types of evolutionary theory:**

#### **(1) Theory of Unilinear Evolution:**

It postulates the straight-line, ordered or progressive nature of social change. According to this theory, change always proceeds toward a predestined goal in a unilinear fashion. There is no place of repetition of the same stage in this theory. Followers of this pattern of change argue that society gradually moves to an even higher state of civilisation which advances in a linear fashion and in the direction of improvement. The pace of this change may be swift

or slow. In brief, linear hypothesis states that all aspects of society change continually in a certain direction, never faltering, never repeating themselves.

Theories of Saint-Simon, Comte, Morgan, Marx and Engels, and many other anthropologists and sociologists come under the category of unilinear theories of social evolution because they are based on the assumption that each society does, indeed must, pass through a fixed and limited numbers of stages in a given sequence. Such theories long dominated the sociological scene.

## **(2) Universal Theory of Evolution:**

It is a little bit variant form of unilinear evolution which states that every society does not necessarily go through the same fixed stages of development. It argues, rather, that the culture of mankind, taken as a whole, has followed a definite line of evolution.

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Spencer's views can be categorised under this perspective who said that mankind had progressed from small groups to large and from simple to compound and in more general terms, from homogenous to the heterogeneous. The anthropologist Leslie White has been a leading exponent of this conception.

Similar ideas were greatly elaborated by William Ogburn, who stressed the role of invention in social change. On this basis he gave birth to the famous concept of 'cultural lag' which states that change in our non-material culture, i.e., in our ideas and social arrangements, always lag behind changes in material culture, i.e., in our technology and invention.



### **(3) Multilinear Theory of Evolution:**

This brand of evolutionism has more recently developed and is more realistic than the unilinear and universal brand of evolutionary change. Multilinear evolution is a concept, which attempts to account for diversity. It essentially means identification of different sequential patterns for different culture or types of cultures. This theory holds that change can occur in several ways and that it does not inevitably lead in the same direction. Theorists of this persuasion recognise that human culture has evolved along a number of lines.

Those who share this perspective, such as Julian Steward (1960), attempt to explain neither the straight-line evolution of each society, nor the progress of mankind as a whole, but rather concentrate on much more limited sequences of development.

It does identify some social trends as merely universal: the progression from smaller to larger, simpler to more complex, rural to urban, and low technology to higher technology but it recognises that these can come about in various ways and with distinct consequences. This theory is related to what is known as episodic approach, which stresses the importance of accidents and unique historical, social and environmental circumstances that help to explain a particular course of social change. Later on, the views of Leslie White and Julian Steward were named as neo-evolutionism.

### **Criticism of Evolutionary Theory:**

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Evolutionary scheme (gradual and continuous development in stages) of any kind fell under both theoretical and empirical attack in the last century. It was criticised heavily on many grounds but mainly for its sweeping or over-generalisation about historical sequences, uniform stages of development and evolutionary rate of change. The biological evolution, from which the main ideas of social evolution were borrowed, provided somewhat clumsy and unsatisfactory answers.

Such explanations came under attack for lack of evidence. Evolutionary scales were also questioned from a somewhat different, but more empirical source. The easy assumption that societies evolved from simple to complex forms, was mainly based on a scale of predominant productive technology turned out to be unwarranted.

The doctrine of 'cultural relativity' inhibited even static or cross-sectional generalisation, provided a new basis for satisfying the common features of societies. The evolutionary scheme also failed to specify the systematic characteristics of evolving societies or institutions and also the mechanisms and processes of change through which the transition from one stage to another was affected.

Most of the classical evolutionary schools tended to point out general causes of change (economic, technological or spiritual etc.) or some general trend to complexity inherent in the development of societies. Very often they confused such general tendencies with the causes of change or assumed that the general tendencies explain concrete instances of change.

Because of the above shortcomings, the evolutionary theory is less popular today. A leading modern theorist Anthony Giddens (1979) has consistently attacked on evolutionism and functionalism of any brand. He rejects them as an appropriate approach to understanding society and social change. Spencer's optimistic theory is regarded with some skepticism. It is said that growth may create social problems rather than social progress.

Modern sociology has tended to neglect or even to reject this theory, mainly because it was too uncritically applied by an earlier generation of sociologists. In spite of its all weaknesses, it has a very significant place in the interpretation of social change. The recent tentative revival in an evolutionary perspective is closely related to growing interest in historical and comparative studies.

## **2. Cyclical Theory:**

Cyclical change is a variation on unilinear theory which was developed by Oswald Spengler (*Decline of the West*, 1918) and Arnold J. Toynbee (*A Study of History*, 1956). They argued that societies and civilisations change according to cycles of rise, decline and fall just as individual persons are born, mature, grow old, and die. According to German thinker Spengler, every society has a predetermined life cycle—birth, growth, maturity and decline. Society, after passing through all these stages of life cycle, returns to the original stage and thus the cycle begins again.

On the basis of his analysis of Egyptian, Greek Roman and many other civilisations, he concluded that the Western civilisation is now on its decline. The world renowned British historian Toyanbee has also upheld this theory. He has studied the history of various

civilisations and has found that every civilisation has its rise, development and fall such as the civilisation of Egypt. They have all come and gone, repeating a recurrent cycle of birth, growth, breakdown and decay. He propounded the theory of “challenge and response” which means that those who can cope with a changing environment survive and those who cannot die.

Thus, a society can grow and survive if it can constructively respond to the challenges. Cyclical theory of change or sometimes called ‘rise and fall theory’ presumes that social phenomena of whatever sort recur again and again, exactly as they were before in a cyclical fashion.

A variant of cyclical process is the theory of a well-known American sociologist P.A. Sorokin (Social and Cultural Dynamics, 1941), which is known as ‘pendular theory of social change’. He considers the course of history to be continuous, though irregular, fluctuating between two basic kinds of cultures: the ‘sensate’ and the ‘ideational’ through the ‘idealistic’. According to him, culture oscillates like the pendulum of a clock between two points.

The pendulum of a clock swings with the passage of time, but ultimately it comes to its original position and re-proceeds to its previous journey. Thus, it is just like a cyclical process but oscillating in character. A sensate culture is one that appeals to the senses and sensual desires.

It is hedonistic in its ethics and stresses science and empiricism. On the other hand, the ideational culture is one in which expressions of art, literature, religion and ethics do not appeal to the senses but to

the mind or the spirit. It is more abstract and symbolic than the sensate culture.

The pendulum of culture swings from sensate pole and leads towards the ideational pole through the middle pole called 'idealistic' culture, which is a mixed form of sensate and ideational cultures—a somewhat stable mixture of faith, reason, and senses as the source of truth. Sorokin places contemporary European and American cultures in the last stage of disintegration of sensate culture, and argues that only way out of our 'crisis' is a new synthesis of faith and sensation. There is no other possibility.

In Sorokin's analysis of cultures, we find the seeds of both the theories—cyclical and linear change. In his view, culture may proceed in a given direction for a time and thus appear to conform to a linear formula. But, eventually, as a result of forces that are inherent in the culture itself, there will be shift of direction and a new period of development will be ushered in. This new trend may be linear, perhaps it is oscillating or it may conform to some particular type of curve.

Vilfredo Pareto's (1963) theory of 'Circulation of Elites' is also essentially of this variety. According to this theory, major social change in society occurs when one elite replaces another, a process Pareto calls it 'circulation of elites'. All elites tend to become decadent in the course of time. They 'decay in quality' and lose their 'vigour'. According to Marx, history ultimately leads to and ends with the communist Utopia, whereas history to Pareto is a never-ending circulation of elites. He said that societies pass through the

periods of political vigour and decline which repeat themselves in a cyclical fashion.

### **Functionalism and Social Change:**

Functionalism, as a new approach of study of society, developed mainly as a reaction to evolutionism, in the early years of twentieth century. Critics of evolutionism advocated that there was no use to know the first appearance of any item of culture and social behaviour. They called it the “fruitless quest for origin”. One of the most significant assumptions of functionalists is that society (or culture) is comprised of functionally interdependent parts or the system as a whole.

These theorists believed that the society, like human body, is a balanced system of institutions, each of which serves a function in maintaining society. When events outside or inside the society’ disrupts the equilibrium, social institution makes adjustments to restore stability.

This fundamental assumption became the main basis of the critics of functionalism to charge that if the system is in equilibrium with its various parts contributing towards order and stability, it is difficult to see how it changes. Critics (mostly conflict theorists) argued that functionists have no adequate explanation of change. They cannot account for change, in that there appears to be no mechanism which will disturb existing functional relationships.

Thus, functionalists have nothing or very little to offer to the study of social change as this approach is concerned only about the maintenance of the system, i.e., how social order is maintained in

the society. G. Homans, in one of his articles “Bringing men back” (1964) stressed that the dominant characteristic in the functionalist model is an inherent tendency towards stability. Society may change, but it remains stable through new forms of integration.

The functionalists responded to this charge by employing concepts such as equilibrium and differentiation. For instance, a leading proponent of functionalist approach, Talcott Parsons approaches this problem in the following way: He maintained, no system is in a perfect state of equilibrium although a certain degree of equilibrium is essential for the survival of societies. Changes occur in one part of society, there must be adjustments in other parts. If this does not occur, the society’s equilibrium will be disturbed and strain will occur. The process of social change can therefore be thought of as a ‘moving equilibrium’.

Parsons views social change as a process of ‘social evolution’ from simple to more complex form of society. Social evolution involves a process of social differentiation. The institutions and roles which form the social system become increasingly differentiated and specialised in terms of their function. As the parts of society become more and more specialised and distinct, it increases the problem of integration of parts which in turn set forth the process of social change and social equilibrium.

Some followers of functionalism argued that if it is a theory of social persistence (stability), then it must be also a theory of change. In the process of adaptation of social institutions in a society, change is a necessary condition or rather it is imminent in it. Thus, one can explain changes in the economy as adaptations to other economics

or to the polity, or changes in the family structure in terms of adaptation to other institutions, and so on. In an article 'Dialectic and

**Functionalism' (ASR, 1963), P. Van den Berghe states that according to functional theory change may come from three main sources:**

1. Adjustment to external disturbances such as a recession in world trade.
2. Structural differentiation in response to problems within the system, e.g., electoral reforms in response to political unrest.
3. Creative innovations within the system, e.g., scientific discoveries or technological advances.

### **3. Economic (Mandan) Theory of Social Change:**

Owing largely to the influence of Marx and Marxism, the economic theory of change is also known as the Marxian theory of change. Of course, economic interpretations of social change need not be always Marxist, but none of the other versions (such as Veblen who also stressed on material and economic factor) of the doctrine are quite as important as Marxism.

The Marxian theory rests on this fundamental assumption that changes in the economic 'infra-structure' of society are the prime movers of social change. For Marx, society consists of two structures—'infra-structure' and 'super-structure'. The 'infra-structure' consists of the 'forces of production' and 'relations of production'.



The 'super-structure' consists of those features of the social system, such as legal, ideological, political and religious institutions, which serve to maintain the 'infra-structure', and which are moulded by it. To be more clear, according to Marx, productive forces constitute 'means of production' (natural resources, land, labour, raw material, machines, tools and other instruments of production) and 'mode of production' (techniques of production, mental and moral habits of human beings) both and their level of development determines the social relation of production, i.e., production relations.

These production relations (class relations) constitute the economic structure of society—the totality of production relations. Thus, the socio-economic structure of society is basically determined by the state of productive forces. For Marx, the contradiction between the constantly changing and developing 'productive forces' and the stable 'production relations' is the demiurage of all social development or social change.

**Basic Postulates:**

Change is the order of nature and society. It is inherent in the matter through the contradiction of forces. Marx wrote: "Matter is objective reality, existing outside and independent of the mind. The activity of the mind does not arise independent of the material. Everything mental or spiritual is the product of the material process." The world, by its very nature is material.

Everything which exists comes into being on the basis of material course, arises and develops in accordance with the laws of motion of matter. Things come into being, exist and cease to exist, not each

independent of all other things but each in its relationship with others.

Things cannot be understood each separately and by itself but only in their relation and interconnections. The world does not consist of permanent stable things with definite properties but of unending processes of nature in which things go through a change of coming into being and passing away.

For Marx, production system is the lever of all social changes, and this system is dynamic. Need system determines production and the technological order, i.e., mode of production. It is man's material necessities that are at the root of his productive effort, which in its turn is the basics of all other forms of his life. Marx believed that change occurs through contradiction of forces and this is present throughout the history in some or the other form.

In the 'Preface' of his monumental work *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* Marx's whole philosophy of social change is summarised: "At a certain stage of their development, the material forces of production in society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or with the property relations within which they had been at work before. From forms of development of the forces of production these relations turn into their fetters. Then comes the period of social revolution with the change of the economic foundation, the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed."

Thus, the main thrust of the Preface is the emphasis on changes in the economic base (mode of production), and these in turn produce

ideologies which induce people to fight out social struggles. As it stands, this materialist conception of history certainly encourages us to regard 'evolution' of the economic base as the key to social change—what Engels called 'the law of development of human history'.

Marx viewed the course of history (social change) in terms of the philosophy of 'dialectics'. (An idea borrowed from Hegel but Marx called it materialistic. According to Hegel, evolution proceeds according to a system of three stages—thesis, antithesis and synthesis). Accordingly, the change, development, and progress take place by way of contradiction and conflict and that the resulting change leads to a higher unity.

In particular, Marx viewed the class struggle and the transition from one social system to another as a dialectical process in which the ruling class viewed as 'thesis' evoked its 'negation' ('antithesis') in the challenger class and thus to a 'synthesis' through revolutionary transformation resulting in a higher organisation of elements from the old order. In the dialectical point of view of change, sharp stages and forces are abstracted out of the continuity and gradations in the social process and then explanations are made of the process on the basis of these stages and forces in dialectical conflict.

Marx believed that the class struggle was the driving force of social change. For him it was the 'motor of history'. He states that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Communist Manifesto, 1848).

Society evolves from one stage to another by means of struggle between two classes—one representing the obsolescent system of production and the other nascent (new) order. The emerging class is ultimately victorious in this struggle and establishes a new order of production; within this order, in turn, are contained the seeds of its own destruction—the dialectical process once more. Change will only occur as a victory of the exploited class.

Marx believed that the basic contradictions contained in a capitalist economic system would lead to class consciousness. Class consciousness involves a full awareness by members of the working class of the reality of exploitation, a recognition of common interests, the common identification of an opposing group with whom their interests are in conflict. This realisation will unite them for proletarian revolution.

The proletariat would overthrow the bourgeoisie and seize the forces of production—the source of power. Property would be communally owned. Now, all members of society would share the same relationship to the forces of production. A classless society would result. Since the history is the history of the class struggle, history would now end.

### **Critique:**

Marx is often charged for his deterministic attitude toward society and its change. There is some controversy as to whether Marx really meant to assert that social and cultural phenomena are wholly or only determined by economic or 'material' conditions. His various statements are not fully reconciled and are susceptible of either interpretation. In his later writings he has objected to the

interpretation of his ideas that makes other than economic factors purely derivative and non-causal (Selected correspondence). But he holds to the position that the economic situation is the foundation of the social order and this is the gist of Marxian theory.

Few deny that economic factor influences social conditions of life. Its influence is certainly powerful and penetrating. But, it cannot be regarded as a sole factor affecting social change. There are other causes also which are as important as the economic factor.

To say that the super-structure of society is determined by its infrastructure, i.e., production system (economic system) of a society is going too far. The link between the social change and the economic process is far less direct and simple and sufficient than the Marxian psychology admits.

Moreover, Marx oversimplified the class structure of society and its dynamics of social change in the form of class struggle. Dorothy S. Thomas (1925) commented that “it is not difficult to establish correlation between social changes and economic changes, though it is harder to interpret them”. Thus, economic determinism does not solve the major problem of social causation.

#### **4. Conflict Theory:**

Social theorists in the nineteenth and early twentieth century's were concerned with conflict in society. But, the label of conflict theorists is generally applied to those sociologists who opposed the dominance of structural-functionalism. These theorists contend that in functionalism there is no place of change and as such it cannot explain change.

They have neglected conflict in favour of a unitary concept of society which emphasises social integration. By contrast to functionalist approach, conflict theorists contend that institutions and practices continue because powerful groups have the ability to maintain the status quo. Change has a crucial significance, since it is needed to correct social injustices and inequalities.

Conflict theorists do not believe that societies smoothly evolve to higher level. Instead, they believe that conflicting groups struggle to ensure progress (Coser, 1956). Conflict theorists assert that conflict is a necessary condition for change. It must be the cause of change. There is no society, changing or unchanging, which does not have conflict of some kind or another. Thus, conflict is associated with all types of social change in some way or other.

The modern conflict theory is heavily influenced by the ideas of Karl Marx. It may be regarded as the offshoot of his economic theory of social change which states that economic change only occurs and produces other change through the mechanism of intensified conflict between social groups and between different parts of the social system. Conflict would ultimately transform society. While Marx emphasised economic conflict, Max Weber based his arguments on conflict about power. Ralf Dahrendorf (1959), although critical of Marxist notions of class, tried to reconcile the contrast between the functionalist and conflict approaches of society.

He contends that these approaches are ultimately compatible despite their many areas of disagreement. He disagreed with Marx not only on the notions of class but on many other points also. Marx

viewed social change as a resolution of conflict over scarce economic resources, whereas Dahrendorf viewed social change as a resolution of conflict over power. Marx believed a grand conflict would occur between those who had economic resources and those who did not, whereas Dahrendorf believed that there is constant simultaneous conflict among many segments of society.

Commenting on this theory, Percy S. Cohen (Modern Social Theory, 1968) writes: "This theory is plausible, but it is not necessarily true. The contention that group conflict is a sufficient condition for social change is obviously false. It is arguable that structured conflict, when it involves a fairly equal balance of forces, actually obstructs change which might otherwise occur.

For example, in societies where there are deep divisions between regional, ethnic or racial groups, there may be little possibility of promoting economic development or welfare policies; such 'ameliorative' changes require some degree of consensus. The simple point is that conflict may lead to impasse not to change. It should be emphasised that social conflict is often as much the product of social change as the cause. And it is commonly a great obstacle to certain types of change."

## **5. Technological Theory:**

When the average person speaks of the changes brought about by 'science', he is generally thinking of 'technology' and the manifold wonders wrought thereby. The 'technology' refers to the application of knowledge to the making of tools and the utilisation of natural resources (Schaefer and Lamm, 1992). It involves the creation of material instruments (such as machines) used in human interaction

with nature. It is not synonymous with machinery as it is understood in common parlance. Machines are the result of the knowledge gained by science but they themselves are not technology.

Social change takes place due to the working of many factors. Technology is not only one of them but an important factor of social change. When it is said that almost whole of human civilisation is the product of technological development, it only means that any change in technology would initiate a corresponding change in the arrangement of social relationships.

It is believed that Marx has attached great importance to technology in his scheme of mode of production, which forms the main basis for the change in society. For Marx, the stage of technological development determines the mode of production and the relationships and the institutions that constitute the economic system. This set of relationships is in turn the chief determinant of the whole social order.

Technological development creates new conditions of life which forces new conditions in adaptation. W.F. Ogburn, in his article, 'How Technology Changes Society' (1947), writes: "Technology changes by changing our environment to which we, in turn, adapt. This change is usually in the material environment, and the adjustment we make to the changes often modifies customs and social institutions." Anthropologist Leslie White (Science and Culture, 1949) held that "technology, particularly the amount of energy harnessed and the way in which it is used, determines the



forms and content of culture and society”. Technology affects directly and indirectly both.

Certain social consequences are the direct result of mechanisation, such as new organisation of labour, destruction of domestic system of production, the expansion of the range of social contacts, the specialisation of function etc. Its indirect consequences are the increase of unemployment, the heightening of competition etc. Conflict between the states, as they strive for dominance, security or better prospects are the result of competition.

The invention of wheel, compass, gunpowder, steam engine, printing press, telephone (now mobile phone), radio, TV, internet, aeroplane, motor car and so many other inventions in medical and other fields have revolutionised the human life. Advances in agricultural technology, ranging from the iron-tipped plow to the tractor technology and the three-crop rotation system made possible the creation of a surplus. One of the earliest books on social change written by W.F. Ogburn (1922) has analysed such changes in detail.

He has narrated about 150 such changes (both immediate and distant social effects) in social life brought about by the invention of radio alone. Ogburn gives many illustrations of this kind. He suggests, for example, that the invention of the self-starter on automobiles had something to do with the emancipation of women. The self-starter gave them freedom of a kind. Similarly, many labour saving devices in the home have also contributed to the emancipation of women.

In this connection, Ogburn and Nimkoff (1958) argue: “An important invention need not be limited to only a single social effect. Sometimes it exerts many influences which spread out in different directions like the spokes of a wheel.” Technological developments have affected a lot of changes in attitudes, beliefs and even in traditions. These influence almost all aspects of our life and culture. These include social customs and practical techniques for converting raw material to finished products.

The production and use of food, shelter, clothing and commodities, physical structures, and fabrics all are also aspects of society’s technology. The most important aspect of technology in that a man thinks rationally and objectively about things and events. Man has become more pragmatic in his outlook. He is more disciplined (time-oriented) in his working habits. New forms of transportation and communication, which have contributed to significant changes in social life, are all due to the change in technology.

There is a greater mobility of population today than that was in the nineteenth or twentieth century because of the modern rapid means of transport. The life of the modern man is always on wheels. It is an important factor in the determination of spatial aspect of social relationships. Changes in communication devices (e-mail, internet, mobile phones etc.) have also influenced all aspects of social life (work, leisure, family, friendship, sports etc.) enormously. The basic function of all communication and transportation devices is the conquest of time and space. Shrinking space and time through the speed and low cost of electronic communication and air travel has developed a new phenomenon called ‘globalisation’.

“Any technological change which is great enough will produce some other social change as a consequence” (Cohen, 1968). This is summum bonum (gist) of this theory. For example, new techniques of manufacture are found to affect social relations in the relevant industry. A single invention of geared wheel has produced thousands of inventions which in turn affected social relations enormously. The automobile has brought number of social changes which have altered individual lifestyles. Computers and the Internet are the latest of a long line of developments to prompt Utopian and anti-utopian visions of a world transformed by technology.

Computers have affected almost all aspects of our life from reservations at the railway ticket window or registration for hospitals or colleges to the maintenance of accounts in banks and large business corporations. The popularity of science fiction (Harry Potter) and the films like Jurassic Park are other indicators of the mythical and abundant power which technology can have in the modern world.

Modern technology has also revolutionised the concept and quality of the systems of production, communication, social organisation and various processes of acculturation and symbolisation in societies. Technology helps in realising of our goals with less effort, less cost and with greater efficiency. Technology creates desire for novelty and innovation. Novelty is sought everywhere and transient interests give a corresponding character to social relationships.

Technology has advanced in leaps and bounds over the last 25 years and the single invention that has had to greatest impact on our lives is the cell phone. It is now not only used as a means of communi-

cation but it has enabled us to operate home appliances and entertainment devices, monitor our home's safety, customise our internal home environment.

In the light of these technical advances the anthropologist Peter Worsely (1984) was actuated to comment, "until our day, human society has never existed", meaning that it is only in quite recent times that we can speak of forms of social association which span the earth. The world has become in important respects a single social system as a growing ties of interdependence which now affect virtually everyone. The idea of 'global village' developed by Marshall McLuban (1960) reflects that the world is becoming more integrated in economic, political and cultural terms.

### **Critique:**

The goals and consequences of technology and the production of material goods are being seriously questioned today. Does a high level of technology increase happiness and improve our family life? Do complex technologies bring us clean air, pure water and help us conserve natural resources? Do we not think that the rapidly changing technology is the cause of our all types of environmental degradation, pollution, health and social problems? People do not hesitate to say that modem technology (science) is responsible for moral degradation of our society. Medical advances that prolong life, for example, may surpass our ability for elderly or an honourable life for them. Technical advances have often been portrayed as routes to heaven or hell—a source of deliverance of damnation.

Every new factor, whether it is a creed or a machine, disturbs an old adjustment. The disturbance created by mechanism was so great that it seemed the enemy of culture. The wealth-bringing technology brought also ugliness, shoddiness, and haste standardisation. It brought new hazards, new diseases and fatigue. That was not the fault of the technology (machines). It was due to the ruthlessness and greed of those who controlled these great inventions. But human values started reasserting themselves against all types of exploitation (economic, ecological or social).

Though technology is an important factor of change, it does not mean that technological change alone can produce social changes of all types. Nor technological change always a necessary condition for other social changes. It may be that certain technological conditions are necessary before other factors can produce certain changes, but these need not precipitate social change. For instance, it required no change in technology to bring about a democratic society in India. Moreover, culture in turn seeks to direct technology to its own ends. Man may be master as well as the slave of the machine. Man is a critic as well as a creature of circumstances.