

## UNIT 2

### THEORIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

#### SOCIAL CHANGE

Social change is a change in the social structures and functions of those Structures. The term social change is also used to indicate the changes that take place in human interactions and interrelations. For example, Change in Structure and Functions of family (Joint to Nuclear Structure of Family and Change in functions of family). For MacIver and Page, Society is a web of social relationships and hence social change means change in the system of social relationships. These are understood in terms of social processes and social interactions and social organization. Auguste Comte the father of Sociology has posed two problems- the question of social statics and the question of social dynamics, what is and how it changes. The sociologists not only outline the structure of the society but also seek to know its causes also. According to Morris Ginsberg social change is a change in the social structure.

**Change is the law of nature.** What is today shall be different from what it would be tomorrow. The social structure is subject to incessant change. Individuals may strive for stability, societies may create the illusion of permanence, the quest for certainty may continue unabated, yet the fact remains that society is an everchanging phenomenon, growing, decaying, renewing and accommodating itself to changing conditions and suffering vast modifications in the course of time. Our understanding of it will not be complete unless we take into consideration this changeable nature of society, study how differences emerge and discover the direction of change.

#### Forms of Social Change

**Change in the system:** It means all the small changes occurring in the system come under this form of social change. Karl Marx has described it in the form of quantitative changes. Such changes keep going on in all the societies like premature communism, ancient society, similarly plenty of changes coming up in modern societies in all areas are the ways of change in the system. Given so much importance to children and women in today's family, is indicator of change in relations. Parsons has also talked about such kind of change.

**Change of the system:** Though, this form of change, brings change in the whole system, for eg the qualitative change explained by Karl Marx described, this kind of change, because under qualitative change, the whole system is replaced by another system. Similarly, if it happens that

in India, caste system is completely abolished and absolute class system is established then it would be said to be change of the system.

**Direction of social change: Though there is not any fixed direction of change and so there is nothing absolute to describe it. But Maclver and Page have given, in general, the following directions of change**

**1. Forward direction of change:** Shows a definite positive change. This is usually seen in the field of science and technology, which in turn, change the existence of life and knowledge.

**2. Downward/Backward direction of change:** Some changes occur, upwards initially but later on a process of degeneration starts, economic change in the best example of it. Metropolitan cities also decay after a big change. In International market also this kind of change is seen.

**3. Wave Like change:** Another direction of change happens as a wave ambulance like motion and example of such kind of changes are seen in the field of fashion, styles of living, attires etc. Which after sometime repeat itself. It does not have any fixed direction of high level of change.

### **Factors of Social Change**

**Internal Factors:** Change in population and geographical conditions, change in production process migration, Individual interests, communal conflicts, change in physical consumerism like in science and technology industrialization, urbanization, consumerism lifestyle etc.

**External Factors:** Cultural contact is the main external factor, which could be direct or indirect and which brings change in the form of acculturation, assimilation and diffusion for eg. India realized change under the direct influence of Islam and Western culture and especially westernization has put a great impact on our societies, in all spheres of life.

### **Nature of Social Change**

- Social change is a universal phenomenon.
- Social change is a community change.
- Speed of social change is not uniform.
- Nature and speed of social change is affected by and related to time factor.
- Social change occurs as an essential law.
- Definite prediction of social change is not possible.

- Social change results from the interaction of a number of factors
- Social change shows chain-reaction sequence
- Social change is chiefly those of modification or of replacement

## **Theories of Social Change**

### **Evolutionary Theories**

The Evolutionary Theory of Social Change is one of the earliest and most influential frameworks in sociology. Rooted in the ideas of biological evolution (particularly Darwin's theory), it proposes that societies evolve progressively from simple to complex forms. Just as organisms develop through adaptation and natural selection, societies are believed to develop through gradual structural and functional differentiation.

This theory dominated 19th-century sociological thought and was closely associated with the emergence of positivism and modernization theory.

### **Core Assumptions of Evolutionary Theory-**

- **Unilinear Progress:** Societies develop along a single, fixed path from primitive to advanced stages.
- **Gradual Change:** Social change is incremental, not abrupt or revolutionary.
- **Complexity Increases Over Time:** Social institutions become more specialized, diverse, and interdependent.
- **Universality:** All societies pass through similar stages, although at different rates.
- **Directionality:** Change is directional, aiming toward higher civilization or progress.

### **Key Thinkers and Contributions**

#### **A. Auguste Comte (1798–1857) Work: Course of Positive Philosophy**

#### **Law of Three Stages:**

- Theological Stage: Explanation of phenomena through supernatural forces.
- Metaphysical Stage: Abstract philosophical reasoning replaces the supernatural.
- Positive Stage: Scientific thinking and empiricism dominate.

**Contribution:** Saw sociology as a scientific discipline and viewed progress as movement toward rationality and order.

#### **B. Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) Work: The Study of Sociology**

**Social Darwinism:** Applied biological evolutionary principles to society—"Survival of the fittest."

**Organic Analogy:** Compared society to a biological organism, with institutions as organs performing specific functions.

**Evolutionary Path:** Movement from militant (compulsory, war-based societies) to industrial (voluntary, cooperation-based societies).

**Contribution:** Advocated for non-interventionist social policy; believed change happens naturally through adaptation.

### **C. Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) Work: The Division of Labour in Society**

#### **Mechanical to Organic Solidarity:**

- Mechanical Solidarity: Social cohesion based on similarity, common values, and traditions in traditional societies.
- Organic Solidarity: Based on interdependence and specialization in modern industrial societies.

**Contribution:** Demonstrated how increasing social differentiation creates new forms of cohesion.

### **D. Lewis H. Morgan (1818–1881) Work: Ancient Society**

#### **Stages of Development:**

- Savagery → Barbarism → Civilization
- Based on technological and material development (fire, pottery, agriculture, writing)

**Contribution:** Influenced Marx and Engels in developing historical materialism.

#### **Features:**

- Slow and cumulative
- Movement from simple to complex societies
- Examples: development of democracy, industrialization, urbanization

#### **Cyclical Theories**

Cyclical theories of social change propose that societies do not progress in a linear or evolutionary direction, but rather go through repetitive cycles of growth and decline, much like

the natural cycles of life. These theories challenge the notion of continuous progress and emphasize that history and civilizations tend to repeat themselves in phases.

### **Core Assumptions of Cyclical Theories**

- 1.Repetition and Recurrence:** Social and historical processes repeat in a cyclic manner.
- 2.No Permanent Progress:** Unlike evolutionary theories, cyclical theories deny linear progression or permanent development.
- 3.Rise and Fall of Civilizations:** Societies or cultures rise, reach a peak, decline, and may even be replaced by others.
- 4.Organic Analogy:** Many cyclical theorists compare society to a living organism that undergoes birth, maturity, and death.

### **Major Thinkers and Theories**

#### **1) Oswald Spengler – The Decline of the West (1918–22)**

**Key Idea:** Civilizations are like biological organisms with a predetermined life span.

**Cultural Life-Cycle:** Each great civilization passes through stages: Childhood → Youth → Maturity → Old Age → Death.

**Examples:** Spengler compared the Greco-Roman, Indian, Chinese, and Western (Faustian) civilizations, asserting that the West was entering its period of decline.

**Critique:** Too deterministic and Eurocentric; ignores human agency and innovation.

#### **2) B. Arnold J. Toynbee – A Study of History**

**Key Idea:** History of civilizations is shaped by a process of challenge and response.

**Cyclic Pattern:** Civilizations rise when they respond creatively to challenges; decline when they fail to respond effectively.

**Stages:** Genesis → Growth → Breakdown → Disintegration.

**Role of the Creative Minority:** A small group within a society leads change and renewal.

**Critique:** Vague criteria for measuring "challenge" and "response"; focuses more on elites than masses.

### 3) C. Pitirim Sorokin – Social and Cultural Dynamics (1937)

#### **Key Idea:**

#### **Societies cycle between three major cultural types:**

- Ideational: Focus on spiritual values and religion.
- Sensate: Focus on sensory experience, materialism, science.
- Idealistic: A synthesis of ideational and sensate.

#### **Conflict Theories**

The Conflict Theory of Social Change argues that social change arises out of tensions, contradictions, and struggles between competing groups within society. It challenges the functionalist view that society is a harmonious system and instead emphasizes conflict as both inevitable and necessary for transformation.

This theory is rooted in the belief that power and inequality are central to the functioning of society, and that social change emerges from the competition for scarce resources—such as wealth, status, and political influence.

#### **Core Assumptions of Conflict Theory**

- Society is marked by inequality—based on class, race, gender, or other divisions.
- Social groups compete for resources, and this competition generates tension.
- Conflict is a driving force of historical development.

#### **Key Thinkers and Theoretical Contributions**

##### **Karl Marx (1818–1883)**

**Key Work:** The Communist Manifesto, Capital (Das Kapital)

**Central Idea:** Society evolves through class conflict, especially between the bourgeoisie (owners of means of production) and the proletariat (working class).

**Historical Materialism:** Economic base (mode of production) shapes the social superstructure (law, politics, ideology). Change occurs when contradictions between the productive forces and relations of production reach a breaking point.

**Social Revolution:** Marx predicted that capitalism would inevitably collapse due to internal contradictions, leading to a proletarian revolution and a classless society (communism).

**Contribution:** Offered a materialist and dynamic understanding of social change rooted in exploitation and struggle.

### **Ralf Dahrendorf (1929–2009)**

**Key Work:** Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (1959)

**Central Idea:** Conflict is not limited to economic class but arises in all social institutions where authority exists.

**Authority and Domination:** Dahrendorf focused on how authority relationships create conflict between those who command and those who obey.

**Institutional Conflict:** All groups (e.g., political parties, unions, organizations) are involved in conflicts over power and resources.

**Change as Structural:** Conflict leads to institutional restructuring, such as policy reforms, legal changes, and redistribution of power.

**Contribution:** Broadened conflict theory beyond economic determinism; introduced the idea of institutional pluralism in conflict.

### **Lewis A. Coser (1913–2003)**

**Key Work:** The Functions of Social Conflict (1956)

**Central Idea:** Conflict can be functional and strengthen social bonds within groups.

**Constructive Role of Conflict:**

- Promotes adaptability
- Clarifies norms and boundaries
- Encourages institutional innovation

**Types of Conflict:**

- Realistic: Based on specific demands or goals
- Non-Realistic: Emotional, symbolic, or expressive

**Contribution:** Added depth to conflict theory by showing how not all conflict is destructive—some is necessary for progress.

**Demographic Theory**

The Demographic Theory of Social Change explains how transformations in population dynamics—such as birth rates, death rates, fertility, mortality, and migration—can lead to significant shifts in the social structure, institutions, and cultural patterns of a society.

This perspective suggests that population trends are not merely biological facts, but are deeply intertwined with social, economic, political, and cultural change. Sociology uses demographic insights to analyze how societies grow, decline, urbanize, or age, and how these shifts affect social roles, relationships, and institutions.

### **Key Concepts in Demographic Change**

- **Fertility** – The average number of children born to a woman over her lifetime.
- **Mortality** – The incidence of death in a population.
- **Migration** – The movement of people from one area to another, often influencing urbanization.
- **Population Growth** – The increase in the number of individuals, which can lead to social strain or economic growth.
- **Population Composition** – Age, sex ratio, density, and distribution significantly affect social systems.

### **Key Thinkers and Theoretical Contributions**

#### **Thomas Robert Malthus (1766–1834)**

**Work:** An Essay on the Principle of Population (1798)

**Core Idea:** Population grows geometrically, while food supply grows arithmetically. This imbalance would lead to poverty, famine, disease, and conflict unless checked by "natural" or "moral" constraints.

#### **Types of Checks:**

- Positive checks: Famine, disease, war
- Preventive checks: Late marriage, moral restraint

**Implication for Social Change:** Population pressure leads to social crises and reorganization of resource distribution.

**Criticism:** Underestimates technological advancement and agricultural innovation.

### **Demographic Transition Theory**

**Key Proponents:** Warren Thompson, Frank Notestein

**Definition:** Describes sequential stages through which all societies pass as they modernize, transitioning from high birth and death rates to low birth and death rates.

**Stages of Demographic Transition:**

**Stage Characteristics**

- I. High Stationary      High birth and death rates, low growth      Subsistence economy, large families
- II. Early Expanding      Death rate declines, birth rate remains high      Population explosion, urbanization begins
- III. Late Expanding      Birth rate begins to fall      Increased literacy, women's status improves
- IV. Low Stationary      Low birth and death rates      Aging population, complex social institutions
- (Some add Stage V)      Very low fertility, declining population      Labor shortages, immigration dependency

**Significance:** Demonstrates how population trends are linked to economic development, modernization, and social planning.

**Kingsley Davis (1908–1997)**

**Concept of Population Pressure:** Population growth can lead to urbanization, occupational diversification, and transformation in family structures (e.g., from joint to nuclear).

**Urban Transition:** Migration from rural to urban areas leads to new social problems like slums, congestion, unemployment, and shifts in cultural norms.

**Technological Theory of Social Change**

The Technological Theory of Social Change emphasizes that technological innovation is a primary driver of transformations in society. It asserts that changes in tools, machines, and techniques—used for production, communication, and daily life—significantly alter the social structure, culture, economy, and institutions.

This theory considers technology not just as mechanical devices, but as systems of knowledge and application that influence how humans interact with their environment and with each other.

## **Core Assumptions of Technological Theory**

- Technology is a causal force in societal transformation.
- Social institutions evolve to adapt to technological advancements.
- Changes in technology affect the mode of production, which in turn shapes social relations.
- Cultural values, lifestyles, and social norms are influenced or even created by technological change.

## **Key Thinkers and Theoretical Contributions**

### **William F. Ogburn (1886–1959)**

**Work:** Social Change with Respect to Culture and Original Nature (1922)

Technological Determinism: Technological innovation is the leading cause of social change. Society must adjust to new tools and inventions, which affect all aspects of life.

### **Ogburn's Four Stages of Technological Development:**

1. Invention – New technological ideas or tools
2. Accumulation – Growth of knowledge through inventions
3. Diffusion – Spread of technology across cultures
4. Adjustment – Societal adaptation to technological changes

### **Cultural Lag:**

1. A key concept introduced by Ogburn
2. Material culture (technology, infrastructure) changes faster than non-material culture (values, norms, laws), leading to imbalance and social problems.
3. Example: Use of smartphones outpaces development of laws regarding digital privacy.

### **Karl Marx (1818–1883)**

**Perspective:** Historical Materialism (relevant to technological theory)

### **Technological Base and Superstructure:**

The forces of production (tools, machines, labor) shape the relations of production (ownership, class relations). Changes in technology can cause contradictions in the economic base, leading to social revolution.

**Example:** The Industrial Revolution introduced machines that changed labor patterns and led to the rise of capitalism and the modern working class.

### **Alvin Toffler (1928–2016) Work: Future Shock, The Third Wave**

#### **Waves of Change:**

- First Wave: Agricultural revolution
- Second Wave: Industrial revolution
- Third Wave: Information revolution (digital age)

**Future Shock:** The psychological and social disorientation caused by too much change in too short a time, driven by rapid technological innovation.

**Contribution:** Forewarned of the sociological consequences of accelerating technologies, including social instability, economic disruption, and cultural dislocation.

#### **Social Evolution**

Social Evolution refers to the gradual, long-term development of society and social institutions. It is a conceptual framework used by early sociologists to explain how societies transition from simple, undifferentiated forms to more complex and organized structures over time. Derived from biological evolution, the idea of social evolution emphasizes progress, differentiation, and the directional movement of societies through historical stages. It is a universal, continuous, and cumulative process, often associated with notions of development and civilization.

#### **Definitions of Social Evolution**

**Herbert Spencer:** “Social evolution is a change from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity.”

**MacIver and Page:** “Social evolution is the process of change involving the growth and development in the structure of society.”

**Morris Ginsberg:** “Evolution is the process involving the continuous change from a simple condition to a more complex form.”

#### **Characteristics of Social Evolution**

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Description</b>
Gradual	It occurs slowly over long periods.
Cumulative	Changes build upon previous ones; progress is continuous.
Directional	Movement is from simple to complex, homogeneous to heterogeneous.
Universal	Applies to all human societies.

**Multifactorial** Involves social, economic, cultural, technological, and political dimensions.

### **Stages of Social Evolution**

**While various theorists propose different stages, the most common stages are:**

- **Savage Stage:** Primitive societies based on hunting and gathering.
- **Barbaric Stage:** Emergence of agriculture, settled life, and kinship structures.
- **Civilized Stage:** Formation of states, organized religion, writing systems, and complex economies.
- **Industrial Stage:** Mechanization, urbanization, and rational-bureaucratic institutions.
- **Post-Industrial Stage:** Knowledge and information-based society with advanced technology.

### **Major Thinkers and Contributions**

#### **Herbert Spencer**

- Viewed society as an organism that evolves.
- Believed in "survival of the fittest" in social life.
- Differentiated between militant and industrial societies.

#### **Auguste Comte**

#### **Law of Three Stages:**

- Theological → Metaphysical → Positive

**Advocated a scientific approach to studying society.**

#### **Lewis H. Morgan**

#### **Proposed evolutionary stages of social development:**

- Savagery → Barbarism → Civilization

Influenced Marx and Engels in their historical materialist approach.

## **Émile Durkheim**

### **Distinguished between:**

- Mechanical Solidarity (homogeneity in traditional societies)
- Organic Solidarity (interdependence in modern societies)

### **Social Change in India: A Sociological Perspective**

Social change refers to the transformation of culture, behavior, social institutions, and social structure over time. In the Indian context, social change is deeply influenced by its historical, cultural, and economic dimensions.

**M.S. A. Rao-** “A significant alteration in the social structure and cultural patterns through time.”

**R.M. MacIver-** “Change in social relationships is social change.”

**Merrill and Eldridge-** “Social change means that large number of persons are engaging in activities that differ from those which their immediate forefathers engaged in some time before.”

**Kingsley Davis-** “Social change is such alteration in the structure and functions of a society.”

**MacIver and Page-** “Social change refers to a process responsive to many types of changes, to changes in the man-made conditions of life, to changes in the attitudes and beliefs of men, and to the changes that go beyond the human control.”

### **Factors of Social Change in India**

**India has witnessed a wide range of social changes due to various interlinked factors:**

#### **1. Historical Legacy**

- Colonial rule disrupted traditional Indian institutions such as the caste system, village panchayats, and the joint family.
- Introduction of Western education, legal systems, and railways led to modernization.

#### **2. Constitutional and Legal Changes**

- Indian Constitution played a transformative role in bringing equality, abolishing untouchability (Article 17), and promoting social justice.
- Laws such as the Hindu Marriage Act (1955), Dowry Prohibition Act (1961), and

**Child Marriage Restraint Act have promoted gender justice and social reform.**

### **3. Modernization and Westernization**

- According to M.N. Srinivas, Westernization refers to the changes brought about in Indian society due to British rule and Western contact.
- Western education, science, democratic values, and English language played crucial roles in bringing social transformation.

### **4. Industrialization and Urbanization**

- Rapid urban growth led to the breakdown of traditional joint families and rise of nuclear families.
- Migration to cities brought exposure to new social norms, reducing the hold of caste and community.

### **5. Social Reform Movements**

- Leaders like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Jyotiba Phule, Swami Vivekananda, and Dr.
- B.R. Ambedkar led reformist efforts against social evils like sati, child marriage, and caste discrimination.

### **6. Education and Media**

- Education has been a key driver in promoting social mobility and modern values.
- Mass media (TV, radio, social media) spreads new ideas and creates awareness on rights, responsibilities, and progressive values.

### **7. Globalization**

- Open-market economy (post-1991 reforms) brought India closer to global trends.
- New aspirations, consumerism, and a digital revolution changed the lifestyle of even rural India.

## **Major Areas of Social Change in India**

### **1. Caste System**

- Though caste remains influential, its rigidity has reduced.
- Sanskritization (M.N. Srinivas) and Dalit assertion have reshaped caste hierarchies.
- Reservation policies aim at social justice for SCs, STs, and OBCs.

## **2. Family and Marriage**

- Rise in nuclear families due to urbanization.
- Changing gender roles, delayed marriages, inter-caste and inter-religious marriages are more common.

## **3. Gender and Women's Status**

- From traditional patriarchal norms, there is growing awareness of women's rights.
- Increase in women's education, employment, and political participation.
- Issues like dowry, domestic violence, and gender inequality still persist, but activism is growing.

## **4. Religion and Secularism**

- India has seen reform in religious practices, debates on personal laws, and increasing emphasis on secularism.
- However, communal tensions also show the contested nature of religious change.

## **5. Political and Democratic Participation**

- Spread of democracy has brought political consciousness among marginalized groups like Dalits, Adivasis, and minorities.
- Rise of regional parties, civil society, and social movements reflects vibrant democratic change.

## **Theoretical Perspectives on Social Change in India**

### **1. Structural-Functionalism (e.g., Parsons, Radcliffe-Brown)**

- Society adapts through institutional change (e.g., changes in the education system or family structure).

### **2. Conflict Perspective (e.g., Marx, Dahrendorf)**

- Change is a result of struggles between classes, castes, and genders.
- Ambedkar's critique of caste reflects a conflict-based understanding of social order.

### **3. Evolutionary Perspective**

- Indian society has progressed from traditional to modern forms through gradual transformation (e.g., from Varna to class).

#### **4. Cultural Perspective (M.N. Srinivas)**

- Sanskritization and Westernization are key cultural processes of change.
- Emphasis on internal dynamics rather than external forces alone.

#### **Contemporary Issues of Social Change in India**

- Digital Divide and E-governance
- Rise of Identity Politics
- LGBTQ+ Rights and Recognition
- Climate Change and Environmental Movements
- Changing Rural-Urban Relations