

## **An Introduction to Social Change- A Dynamic Phenomena**

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*"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 man, and to the changes that go beyond the human control to the biological and physical nature of things"*

--Mac Iver and Page

"Nature is never at rest. Change is ever present in the world, because change is the law of nature. Society is not at all a static phenomenon, but it is a dynamic entity and an "on-going process".

--Lucretius

Change, the Greeks were fascinated by; growth, they virtually adored. From the model of growth in the organic world around them they drew some of the deepest and most far-reaching ideas in western philosophy. Change is inherent in nature. Even today in our information cluttered, science saturated and disenchanted age, it is hard to resist the mystery and drama of what is involved in the seed and its transfiguration in time.

There is first the seed itself; hard, dry, seemingly as lifeless as any pebble. We commit it to the earth and thereby begin, with the aid of sun and moisture, a truly amazing succession of changes, changes that in their entirety compose what we call its life cycle. For days no change is visible, then slowly and inexorably the process of genesis and growth becomes manifest in the tiny green shoots which for all their fragility push through the crust of the earth. There follows in fixed order the successive phases of the plant's growth, reaching at climax the full being of the plant, with its life giving bounty for man. Then comes, with the same relentless regularity that had marked its growth, the decline, decay, gradual loss of life, culminating in the death of the plant, with only the sere and yellow to remind man of what had preceded it. But death is only an interlude, for now comes the most awe inspiring of all the seed's transfigurations; the dead becomes, once again the living. What had appeared to be death and termination turns out to have been but a cloak covering an inner reality that is eternal in its capacity for life. Once again genesis occurs, and once again the wonderful cycle of genesis and growth and decay and death. In all this one thing is

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certain-----change.<sup>1</sup>

From the dawn of history, down to this day society has been in continuous flux. The study of social change has never been of any great importance than it is today. It is difficult to think of an area of society that is untouched by the process of social change. The general magnitude of change and rapidity with which it is occurring may be without precedent in human history.

There are two types of theory of social change; those placing their roots in the social structure- the macro level of life- as the starting point for change, and those placing their roots in the individual- the micro level of life as the starting point for change.<sup>2</sup>

In every living society, there is always some movement from within and some movement from without, and therefore there is always some change when the change is minor, however, there is either a return to its previous position, or a peaceful and almost invisible adaptation and the social structure retains its stability, the 'great tradition' remains unscathed, and there is no apparent social change. In other words, though there may be some change in actual fact, it belongs to the order of small and can therefore be regarded as a state of no-change without doing violence to language.

Social Change as we use the expression, arises only when the quantum, comprehensiveness and time span of change are such as to induce or result in significant alterations in the social structure, the relations between categories, the institutions, norms, symbols, and values associated with the old order. That is why factors such as volume, extent and time assume cardinal importance for even identifying social change, let alone explaining its emergence, analyzing its consequences and predicting its future.

Social change can be the result of the action of endogenous or exogenous factors or combination of both. It can begin from one part in the social frame work and spread to the others; the resulting interaction may lead to a change in the social structure resulting in a new balance of structure and ideology. Or, the change may be triggered off on the plane of ideas propagated by a charismatic personality; faced by such a frontal attack- usually the attack is disguised as reinterpretation of ancient or lost

values- the social structure regroups itself and undergoes change in the process of absorbing new ideas. More frequently, the components of the social structure may receive a shock from contact with external structures or social systems that intrude upon them with violence that cannot be wished away; and, then, there is confrontation, conflict, co-operation and compromise, with a revised social fabric emerging as a result of the inter-play of contending factors. Where a society lacks internal vitality and a mystique which can find apt description in the Indian concept of Jivatma (a phrase used in Hindu philosophy to indicate the continuing existence of the individual soul despite many bodies it may assume in the process of birth and re-birth) external contact and collision may destroy it; and this has been the actual history of many societies.<sup>3</sup>

The glory of Indian civilization or Indian society however is its remarkable capacity for absorbing factors making for change whether internal or external. Like Shiva who swallowed the deadly poison and survived, while still retaining it, to become Nilakanta, Indian civilization and culture have shown a remarkable capacity for adaptation, absorption and digestion of change and, even when changing, continue to maintain an appearance of stability, because of the Indian tradition of Pantheism and pluralism, of many Gods and creeds and customs and traditions resting together in spite of contradiction and conflict, and constituting a variegated mosaic of the old and the new and in between. Change may also take place because of altered methods of production and the failure of production relations to keep in step, as Marxists assert in their interpretation of economic and social history. Change may also result from functional needs failing to be satisfied by the existing social structure and therefore forcing adaptation, alteration or destruction of a part or the whole of a social structure. Or change may result from the conscious attempt on the part of a given society to bridge the wide gap between a committed goal and differing reality.

For change to occur, the individual has to abandon or at least modify old action patterns, beliefs, and attitudes. Typically, however, the existing patterns are resistant to change and are not readily given up. To the outside observer, it may often appear evident that the existing patterns are irrational in the face of new information or in the context of the person's own goals. But to the person himself the supposed

irrationality of his existing behaviour may not be as readily apparent, since the behaviour may benefit from various kinds of support that strengthen the person's motivation and ability to maintain this behaviour in the face of contradictory evidence.

It is now clear that social change must be viewed as a multifaceted process, which may run in many directions at once, some of which may be considered "development" and others "antidevelopment"<sup>4</sup>. Here antidevelopment means the conditions under which change in one area- though in itself desirable may create dislocations in other areas that have socially undesirable consequences that may even impede the development process itself. Because of its process nature, social change is without beginning or end, continuous, and flowing through time.<sup>5</sup>

At the heart of all social changes is 'innovation', defined as an idea, practice, or object perceived as new by an individual. An individual's reaction to an innovation is determined by his perception of its newness, which affect his feelings of its riskiness, his desire for further information about it, and his judgement whether to adopt or reject it.

The universe as a system of interconnected and ever changing parts 'Matter in motion' was seen by Marx to be the real existential basis of all human history and the precondition of social development. According to Marx's view, there is an impulse within matter itself which drives everything towards change. He even speaks of 'a tension,' 'a vital spirit', and he even feels driven in spite of his scientific approach to use the language of mysticism to convey the essence of the question. 'Matter is, as it were, in torture; to escape it must jump from one level of development to another. Change is of the essence of all things, and of the relation between things.'<sup>6</sup>Talking of change Marx further opines that-- that which is necessary comes into being; that which has exhausted any possibility of further development must pass away.<sup>7</sup>

The real driving force of change for the Marxist is located in the economic foundations of society. The level of the productive forces of a given society is said to determine the general level of culture, of knowledge and of ideology.<sup>8</sup> Changes which take place in the economic basis are primary. The economic order is decisive as regards both the rate and the nature of change in our ideas.

An ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus in an emphatic way stated the fact that it is impossible for a man to step into the same river twice. It is impossible, because in the interval of time between the first and the second stopping both the river and the man have changed. Neither remains the same. "This is the central theme of the Heraclitean philosophy--- the reality of change, the impermanence of being, the inconsistency of everything but change itself".

As Mac Iver says "It is a becoming, not a being; a process, not a product". Innovation of new things, modification and renovation of the existing behaviour and the discarding of the old behaviour patterns take time. But mere passage of time does not cause change as in the biological process of ageing. Change takes place within a geographic or physical or cultural context. Social changes never take place in vacuum. The direction and tempo of social change are often conditioned by human engineering. Social changes result from interaction of a number of factors. The physical, biological, technological, cultural and other factors may, together bring about a social change. The tempo or the rate of change varies considerably from time to time and society to society depending upon its nature and character. No single cause produces a single effect in the social world. There is always the plurality of causation. One change may lead to a series of changes. The component parts of the social system are so interrelated that any change in one causes adjustive changes in the other.<sup>9</sup>

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