

The Process of Social Change in India: Sociological Analysis

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Abstract: *Social change refers to modification of social structures and processes over time. In India, the old caste system-based on the theory of purity and pollution has undergone a slight transformation. The rule of law has largely replaced the caste panchayats which enforced caste-based customs and regulations. The traditional joint family system supported by ancestral property has undergone radical changes. According to F. Abraham (2006: 246) The process of democracy has significantly altered the power structures and led to the empowerment of new power elites drawn from the backward classes.*

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1. Introduction

The emergence of the 'information society' and globalization has created a vast new middle class with the hunger for latest consumer goods. Demographic transition, urbanization, modernization, westernization, and numerous technological changes have significantly changed the nature and functions of most Indian Social Institution.

Social change may be progressive or regressive, permanent, or temporary, planned, or unplanned, unidirectional, or multidirectional, beneficial, or harmful. Social change may be swift and radical as in the case of the French or Russian Revolution, or it may be slow and gradual as in the case of secularization and modernization. All societies evolve over a period, and social change is part of the process of growth. As Robert Lauer (1991:4) points out 'social change is normal and continual. The important question is to ask relate to the direction and rate of change at various levels of social life.' According to him, social change is an inclusive concept that refers to alterations in social phenomena at various levels of human life from individual to the global. Change may be studied at one or more levels, using various units of analysis. Obviously, attitude change in this scheme is as legitimate and important as institutional change. The important point to keep in mind, however, is that changes that are significant at one level may not be significant at other levels. Attitude change may or may not lead to, or reflect, changes in interpersonal relationships, organizations, or institutions. Or there may be a time lag involved, with changes at one level occurring more slowly than changes at another.

2. Sources of Social Change

There are internal and external sources of social change. The internal sources refer to factors which originate within a specific society and are responsible for significant changes within the society. External sources of change are the result of contacts with other cultures, diffusion of innovations, or spread of ideologies from other societies. The diffusion is, of course artificial since most changes are brought about by a combination by a combination of factors. Even the steam engine, automobile, electricity, socialism and the concepts of liberty, fraternity, and equality originated somewhere but

influenced the course of history everywhere. We may identify the sources of change under four main headings: physical environment, technology, cultural contacts and diffusion and values and ideology.

According to F. Abraham (2006) following are the sources of social change: -

Physical Environment

Changes in the natural environment have impacted on the social life of human beings. Loss of forests, desertification, soil erosion, environmental degradation, and climatic changes have significantly influenced the human beings live in groups. Many of these changes have been gradual and slow. But natural disasters such as floods, tsunamis, earthquakes have had disastrous consequences. Many of the ancient civilizations may have been wiped out or forced to relocate because of dramatic changes in the environment. Today, air and water pollution, acid rain, the greenhouse effect and dumping of chemical wastes have led to a worldwide environmental movement. Public awareness has forced national governments and international organizations to act to protect our planet. In many ways it has changed both the individual and social ways of life.

Technology

Rapid changes in technology during the past four to five decades have altered not only social life but also the face of the planet. The planet has been shrunken by the technology of instant communication. Revolution in computer science, Artificial Intelligence (AI), information-technology have transformed social systems and human life in them far beyond what one could have imagined just two decades ago. But developments in technology have introduced not only Artificial Intelligence (AI), satellites, and electronic communication but also weapons of mass destructions and deadly pollutants.

As Alvin Toffler (1980) said: 'never before did any civilization create the means for literally destroying not a city but a planet. Never did whole oceans face toxification, whole species vanish overnight from the earth as a result of human greed or inadvertence'.

But precisely because of such environmental problems, individuals, corporations, and nations have brought about significant changes in the way they do business.

Cultural Contacts and Diffusion

Anthropologist Ralph Linton observed years ago that in any society only about 10 per cent of the innovations originate internally and rest are transmitted through contacts with other cultures. The oldest communication model of social change known as the diffusion model explains that most of the innovations are transmitted through various stages of diffusion and adoption. With the achievement in transport and communication, the planet has become a global village. In general, the more contacts a society has with other cultures, the greater the opportunity for cultural change. Young people learn types of music, dance, and fashions just as soon as they become popular. People adopt new innovations in technology, medicine, and agriculture which are proven to be useful. They resist innovations which are inconsistent with traditional beliefs and values. Sometimes it takes years for new ideas and techniques to be adopted.

Values and Technology

As Ogburn pointed out, changes in technology are faster than changes in ideas and values. People are quick to adopt technologies which make life easier or more comfortable. However, values, beliefs, and ideas are steeped in traditions, yet, the 20th century has witnessed dramatic changes brought about by the most powerful ideas of three great intellectuals: Marx, Freud, and Darwin. The ideas of these stalwarts influenced not only education but also religion, politics, literature, and art. The Marxist ideology of communism led to revolutionary movements in many parts of the world. Darwinism triggered the conservative ideology of the survival of the fittest. Freud's psychoanalysis revolutionized the way people look at themselves and others. The concepts of social justice, human rights, and equality have brought about many legal reforms and social changes. They have also inspired many movements for social and economic reforms, environmental protection, and changes in lifestyle.

3. The process of Social Change

Industrialization, urbanization, and modernization are considered to be the most important processes of social change. Many social scientists have used industrialization as the prime mover of social change.

Wilbert Moore (1965) equates the logic of industrialism with the concept of modernity. According to him, not only does industrialization appear to be 'a major and essential ingredient of substantial economic growth' but it also leads to the creation of 'a common culture'. Although the idea of common culture has been given up, Moore identifies a number of minimum essential organizational conditions required by the commercial-industrial system. These conditions include resource utilization, commercial and financial organization, a network of transportation and communication, internal diversification, rational and secular orientation, and impersonal markets. Since an industrial population requires agricultural surplus, continued industrialization will lead to further technification and rational organization of agriculture. Industrialization

involves the gradual shift from subsistence production to commercialized production, establishment of monetary exchange, and the transfer of many workers away from food production into manufacturing and services. Industrialization causes migration which disrupts the large kinship organization leads to more nuclear family units. Industrialization also fosters education and science, bureaucratization of labor force and gross changes in the occupational structure.

Urbanization is another process that significantly alters traditional social systems. Eisenstadt (1973: 24) observed: 'in the sphere of social organization the most important single "external" manifestation of these changes has been the process of urbanization, the growing conglomeration of continuously growing parts of population in urban centers in which the more specialized types of economic, professional, and civic activities and enterprises became concentrated and expanded continuously.'

The city serves as a window on the world facilitating a cultural mix and the diffusion of innovations- technological, organizational, and ideological- in the social system. The city has greater potential and greater variety of modernization. As cities attract large numbers rural migrants, they expose them to mass media, organize them for political action, motivate them to attain higher levels of education, and provide for better health and educational facilities. Greater occupational differentiation modifies the traditional stratification system and encourages traditional stratification system and encourages social mobility (F. Abraham2006:251)

According to Miner (Gugler and Flangan 1978: 110), the city provides a social milieu in which economic success may be achieved with less regard for activities which are not primarily economic in nature. In the folk community, because of the close-knit functional organization of its culture, religious and family behaviors have definite economic implications. In fact, it is exceedingly difficult, if not possible, to say what is economic behaviour and what is familial.

Although recent scholarship on modernization has produced an abundant crop of literature, scholars are not unanimous on their approach to, or definition of , the concept of modernization. Economists interpret modernization in terms of growth models comprising indices such as economic indicators, standard of living, per capita income, and the like. Political scientists analyze modernization in terms of political participation, social upheavals, and institutional alternations. Sociologists have defined modernization variously but within the framework of an evolutionary perspective which involves a multilinear transition of developing societies from tradition to modernity. According to Rogers (1969:14), 'Modernization is the process by which individuals change from a traditional way of life to a more complex, technologically advanced and rapidly changing style of life.' Many social scientists use advanced, industrialized societies of the West as a standard of reference to which developing societies are compared in an attempt to delineate the processes of change that tend to transform traditional institutions and values in a way that

they approximate the model of modernity. For instance, according to Eisenstadt (1966: 1), 'Historically, modernization is the process of change towards those types of social, economic, and political systems that have developed in Western Europe and North America from the 17th century to the 19th and have then spread to other European countries and in the 19th and 20th centuries to the South American, Asian, and African continents. It is essentially a evolutionary perspective which explains stages in transition through which societies pass, although all societies do not necessarily go through the same stages or in a given sequence.'

Modernization is a many layered developmental process which involves economic, social, and psychological dimensions. Economic development is evidenced by higher levels of consumption and standard of living, greater capital intensity, monetary system of exchange, rational bureaucratic organization, upgrading of required skills through technocracy and rational cost accounting. It also involves mechanization and automation resulting in labour displacement, greater occupational specialization, means of rapid transportation and communication facilitating market participation and labour mobility (F. Abraham2006:253). Economic modernization also means a large proportional shift into secondary production and corresponding increases in tertiary production. Such a shift is made possible by movement from traditional and subsistence farming towards mechanization and commercialization of various segments of the economy and effective role in a rational world market. It must, however, be remembered that economic growth is not necessarily synonymous with social development or modernization.

The principal elements of social modernization include planned social change, secularism, heavy public expenditure on education, knowledge revolution through expanding means of communication, and shift toward instrumental social relationships and contractual obligations. As people move away from well-knit rural communities to urban centers, traditional obligations give way to formal contractual relationships. Families tend to become smaller, nuclear, and egalitarian. Greater social and political participation leads to empowerment. Political modernization consists in development of bureaucratic infrastructure, greater political participation by the masses, greater mass media exposure, revolution of rising expectations, relative demographic stability, and greater awareness of the concepts of social justice and human rights.

Psychological approaches to modernization emphasize attitudinal and behavioural changes that initiate as well as sustain socio-economic development. The attitudinal facet implies transformation of traditional attitudes based on customs and religious belief system into some form of secular rationality based on science and organized skepticism. Other elements include greater achievement motivation, entrepreneurial spirit, higher educational aspirations, emergence of equalitarian attitudes, openness to new experiences, revolt against paternalism and authoritarianism, positive attitude towards life and nature, and above all, a rational world view.

With the emergence of information technology, industrial societies 'have entered a new phase of post industrialism. A society based upon services rather than manufacturing. According to Daniel Bell (1976), industrial societies 'are goods-producing societies. Life is game against fabricated nature. Post-industrial society is based on services. Life becomes a and urbanised, game between persons. What counts is not raw muscle power, or energy, what counts is information. 'It is estimated that in another two decades the majority of the world labour force will be working in jobs related to information management, design, computer, mass media, and high technology. In a similar vein, Alvin Toffler identifies three waves or eras. The First Wave was launched by the agricultural revolution around 8000 BC and ended around 1750. The Second Wave, set off by the Industrial Revolution, shaped the world until 1955. Then the electronic revolution or miraculous achievements in technology ushered in a new civilization based on jets, computers, space exploration, electronic mass media, genetic engineering, and other advances in high technology. While the industrial era centered around the machine and the manufacturing of goods, the Third Wave revolves around production of information and services. Advances in high technology will continue to generate information and services in education, health, mass media, finances, management, and even social movements.

4. Conclusion

In summary we may say that modern societies are more industrialized and urbanized, more literate, and open, more secular, and rational, and more cosmopolitan than local. However, it must be pointed out that the distinction between traditional and modern societies is for analytical purposes only and that the difference between the two types of systems is one of degree and that many elements of tradition and modernity are to be found in all societies.

Finally, there is the question of convergence. Do the processes of modernization and globalization lead to the establishment of a new world order, a common culture? The convergence theorists believed that modernization will break down cultural barriers and most of the Third World will acquire the social and cultural characteristics of the West. The reality is, however, different. In the first place, people in the Third World refuse to equate modernization and Westernization. Second, countries in the developing world have chosen different paths to modernization. India, China, Iran, Brazil, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia are all for modernization, but they all tend to follow different political ideologies, economic systems, and cultural ethos. Third, nationalism has become the new 'secular religion' of emerging nations in search of a cultural identity (F. Abraham2006:254). It fosters a new cultural identity based on traditional culture and local values. Indeed, in many developing countries, there is a widespread movement to reassert traditional values, to reinforce old cultural patterns, and to strengthen ethnic traditions.

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