Social Change

Social change, refers to modifications which occur in the life pattern of the people. The term social always refers to society and the system of interaction which sustains the society. Social change is, therefore, essentially the study of system of interaction, of the institutional system and of the social process which are responsible for the change through time. It is a process which responds to many types of changes and to all the fundamental relations of man to man which are governed by cultural values of the society.

Social Change Versus Cultural Change

If the fundamental relations are governed by the cultural values then one may ask, is social change a second name for cultural change? Or is not the study of social change fundamentally a study of cultural change? It is not easy to answer the questions unless we refer to the culture.

Culture signifies the social heritage - all that a given people has created or preserved, including artifacts, customs, their technological system, social institutions, arts, ideas and weapons. Kluckhohn has pointed out that culture refers to: "All the historically created designs for living, explicit or implicit, rational or irrational, and non-rational, which exist at any given time as potential guides for the behaviour of men". Cultural forms thus often have a long history and exhibit persistence and continuity. Social on the other hand refers to system of relationships. Political, economic or social revolutions may bring great changes in social relationships yet culture may remain but little changed. New elites appear, social
classes change, populations die or are killed off — these are the kind of social changes which are of large magnitude and are readily observed.

Maclver observing society as a web of social relationship proceeds to differentiate the study of society (embodied in the web of social relationship) from the study of culture or of civilization. "The latter embody themselves in products which persist and exercise an influence by their continued presence, while the society in which they arose lives on only as a changing equilibrium of present relationships. Social is, therefore, a distinct thing from cultural or civilizational change, entering in a different way into the time process." However, the change in one affects the other and sometimes it is difficult to differentiate between the social change and cultural change. It is because values affect the social relations where change in social relations have their bearing upon values.

Social Change and Progress

To the earlier students of the society social change was analogous to progress. A number of social scientists subscribed to such a thinking. They maintained that human society was gradually but constantly and inevitably changing towards ever greater heights even though the progress may be interrupted at times. Progress, therefore, was "social growth of social life in respect to those qualities to which human beings attach or can rationally attach values."

Inability to differentiate between social change and progress raises certain basic questions viz. Is any one perfectly sure where, when and how progress on the whole has taken place or if it has actually occurred? How are we to know that it constitutes human good? Answers to these questions have qualitative and subjective aspects which exist only in the mind of the observer. Also we may believe in progress, but we cannot demonstrate it to
others unless they first accept our valuations.

It has thus a different significance for different individuals, for different times, and for different social groups. Materialist, for example, may view progress in terms of "the biggest", "the greatest" or the most modern; a statistician may view it in terms of population increase, in the percentage of literacy, increase in life expectancy etc. Ideologist may view it in terms of enlightenment or adherence to group solidarity, order and harmony, and more happiness.

The difficulty to accept the progress as an objective and scientific concept is well realized when we ask a question: Progress in terms of what? Without some adjective we attach it conditional standard of value. For example, when we speak of technical progress we refer to no more than the increase in the technical means to progress. These means may be measured quantitatively but we cannot measure the degree in which measurable increase in means contributes to the ill-defined and unmeasured and, which is progress itself. Therefore, technical progress or welfare is a condition and not a part of total welfare. By referring to increase in welfare we enter not only the realm of ultimate values but also of ultimate ethical values.

Without the qualifying adjective we tend to evaluate not only factors in the scheme of things, but the whole scheme itself which is still harder to evaluate. It is because the whole scheme may involve a series of diverse elements. In the great movement of social change there are both losses as well as gains, because every achievement has its cost and men often differ as to whether the costs out-weigh the values occurred. Social change, therefore, is ethically neutral having nothing to do with values or subjectivity of the individual. Secondly change may both be for the betterment, as well as for the deterioration. We can well think of social change caused by modern technology. It has led humanity to progress but it has
created many problems too.

**Typology of Social Change**

One of the important problems to which sociologists have given minor attention is, whether we can devise some typology of social change even though such a typology may not be an exclusive one? Maciver talks of biological factors, technological factors, and cultural factors in social change. Can we, therefore, on the basis of causality of change devise some typology? If we follow this line of action then we will have series of typologies depending upon the importance of causal factors in social change.

Wilson has attempted to answer the question in terms of "opposition" and degree of "disequilibrium". Depending upon the opposition he talks of primary change and secondary change. The change that arises on account of change in the external environment or cultural forces of society he called primary change. And the change that arises from pressure of disequilibrium is called secondary change. Primary changes Wilson calls development as it involves no opposition. He also talks of uneven change and "rapid change" i.e., relatively great change in short time.

The typology given by Wilson, however, does not hold good as to him change comes only through radical opposition. But in the social structure we find even organized efforts to bring about change without any radical opposition or disequilibrium. Secondly because of the scientific advancement and technological developments social organization is rapidly changing and with it are changing the system of relationships and values without disturbing the social organization itself. In the political spheres we find democratic means to bring about a change in the political set up. Wilson's line of argument does not exhaust these all changes.
Another line of argument may be to name the change after the major social institutions. Thus depending upon the emphasis of causality we may talk of political change, economic change, religious change, educational change and so on and so forth. But to name change after a particular institution is more a description of the social change rather than an explanation of the fact. Pertinent question in this regard, therefore, is: are these types of changes, social change in strict sense or are these only causes which lead to social change through their effective nature? In our opinion it is more advisable to talk about these as casual factors rather than change itself.

Depending upon the nature of the social change we can bring it under two broad typologies. Under the first type may include those changes which are caused by radical opposition such as through revolutions, sudden and spasmodic changes, catastrophe like an inundation or other such forces which bring about sudden disequilibrium and maladjustments in the social organization—its structure and function. Such changes may be called unplanned change. It also includes gradual changes in the social system. In the second typology we can include those changes which are caused by conscious efforts and purposeful decisions to effect improvements in the social organization. Such changes may be named planned social change.

The agencies responsible for the planned changes may be government working through its professional agents or social associations working at their own initiative or with cooperation of the government. Our concern in this study is with type of change, caused by community development, named as planned change or purposive change.

Planned Change

Planned change originates in a decision to make a deliberate effort;
to modify the existing social system through the help of outside agents or through voluntary efforts of the people. The decision to make a change may be made by human components itself after experiencing malfunctioning or discovering the possibility of modification, or by outside change agents who observe the need for change in a particular system and take the initiative in establishing a helping relationship with that system. It is to be kept in mind that when examined closely all dynamic systems reveal a continuous process of change—adaptation, adjustment, and reorganization. Since the social organism is often unable to alter the stabilized but inappropriate pattern of structure and function itself, therefore, it needs the help of a change agent or agents. This has led to the development of a great variety of professional roles.

Planned changes in communities require training of different kinds of professionals such as public administrators, community council organizers, intergroup relation specialists, community survey consultants and adult educators specializing in community development fields. We shall call these helpers, no matter with what kind of roles they normally work as "change agents". Even when assistance is given by a team of helpers, each contributing a different skill we shall call them change agents.

Theories of Social Change,

Since eighteen century social scientists belonging to different disciplines had tried to explain the phenomena of social change. Earlier attempts explained social change as evolution and social progress. It was advocated that change occurs in "levels or stages" one unfolding itself to the next. Each stage is an improvement upon the other. An other trend in explanation of social change was cyclical theories which emphasized trendless fluctuations. The basis of these theories was the historical
record of empires. Sorokin referring to this trend indicates that: "The central content was conceived as an unfolding and ever fuller realization of this trend of progress and evolution of steady historical tendencies and of the law of sociocultural development. Some delineated these trends as unilinear, others as spiral still others as oscillating and branching, with minor deviations and temporary regression, nevertheless in all these varieties the conception of a linear direction of the central sociocultural process remained intact."

As the society changed and the process of industrialisation, mechanization and functional differentiation became complex it was felt that societies do not pass through evolutionary changes. It was recognised that linear type of change may be one of the many types and linear approach was possible only if forces of social change were not interfered from external forces or other things remained the same. The approach was based upon certain assumptions which have been found self-contradictory and invalid.

The linear theories led to the development of many approaches for the explanation of social change. Sorokin categorised four dominant approaches which are presently prevalent in the analysis of social change:

1) The first emphasises on the study of constant forces or factors of sociocultural change and their constant effect in socio-cultural life and organization. These constant variables have been physiological, biopsychological or socio-cultural conditions. All such studies try to elucidate the constant role of each of these factor-variables in the behaviour of men, in social structure and cultural life, the constant functions of these factors and finally how and why these constant factors themselves fluctuate and change.
ii) Second approach concentrates on ever repeated processes on the one hand, and investigation of such repeated processes as they bear on the problems of how social groups emerge, how they recruit and lose their members, how they die and so on, the other.

iii) Third emphasis has been on the intensive study of the constant and repeated meaningful - casual functional relationships between various cosmo-social, bio-social and sociocultural variables as they appear in the ever-changing socio-cultural world. This approach is being applied intensively and has resulted in a large number of formulas of casual - functional or meaningful casual uniformities repeated in the dynamics of various societies and the same society at different times.

iv) The fourth manifestation of this concentration, has been the study of ever repeated rhythms, oscillations, fluctuations, cycles and periodicities in the flow of sociocultural processes.

In addition to what social change is, social scientists correspondingly has offered explanation of how social change occurs and why societies change. Three dominant trends in this regard are: i) Sociocultural variable are responsible or are dominantly responsible for social change. In other words social system bears within itself the seeds of its own change and disintegration. ii) In the second trend it is espoused that both immanent or internal forces and external forces bring about change. But dominant role in bringing about change is of the internal factors. The growing trend is to look for basic reasons for the main changes in the life history of a given social system in totality of its actual and potential properties and in its connection with other socio-cultural phenomena. iii) In the third place role of specific factors (Variable) in specific sociocultural changes, especially the role of sociocultural factors, has been studied.
Structural - Functional Approach and Community Development in India,

In the present study the social change is analysed in terms of repeated meaningful casual functional relationships. This specific approach is named as Structural-Functional. Community Development aims as an integrated Social change. That is to say, it aims at achieving economic, social and psychological change and thus maximizing the welfare of the people. The Problem of community Development is to find effective ways of stimulating, helping and teaching people to adopt new methods and to learn new skills which are better than the traditional. As change occurs it must be ensured that the feelings or spirit of community is not destroyed. In other words, change should not be initiated without affecting the integration of the social system.

Suitability of Structural-Functional approach in the study of community development lies in the fact that introduction of the new pattern of life, value systems and institutional framework usher in some "form of selectivity... with... irrelevant patterns being dropped and useful patterns persisting. Since such selectivity could only take place over a considerable span of time, system must change through time. Thus a seemingly static theory became, in fact a dynamic one." Disequilibrium in the system will offer insight into factors determining resistance to change or factors emerging in disequilibrium itself. This will provide reliable basis of planning change programmes. Structural-Functional approach will help us to: 1) study the interactional pattern with the external system which will enable the traditional community system to maintain its boundaries and at the same time achieve the desired goals. 2) study the influence of these patterns on the processes which contribute to the stability of the social system. 3) study the impact of these processes of social and technological change upon the community.
Thus in this scheme the stability of the inner system becomes a function of the interaction with the outer system.

Since community development aims at introducing change both in the internal system "(Pattern)" and the external system, the change as such may start in any part of the system. Analysis, therefore, both of immanent and external factors is important in analyzing organizational changes which are paralleled in social system. Since the focus of observation in this study is the social change over a period of time as such the problem of ignoring the dynamic aspects of the relations does not arise.

Time has been used for the analysis of social change in different ways in different theories of social change. Evolutionists use it as temporal sequence and as a resource 15 diffusionists use it qualitatively to explain cultural contacts, while social historians use it as a setting 17 while function- alists use time as a social factor in change 18.

Time in the present study has meaningful sequence and affects change in four distinct ways. a) Time is a social factor and it influences social interaction both as resource which affects activity and as social meaning which specific moments of time acquire, b) Time provides casual links which help us to interpret events in terms of their relations to larger pattern, c) Time also serves as a measure of quantitative relationships i.e., it helps us to interpret changes in different variables at various points on the scale, d) Time as a qualitative measure refers to a new structure of relationships and new perception of relationships.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


9. Ibid.


13. For an exhaustive study of social change the reader is referred to following works:

(13 contd.)


