

## Social Change: Its Major Theories

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### **Abstract**

*Society is complex and at times it is really tough to comprehend given how vastly the functioning of it varies from time to time. Throughout the historical development of sociology as a subject, Its scholars have borrowed models of social change from other academic fields. By the end of the 19th century evolution became the predominant model for comprehending and understanding of ideas of social change. By the mid-twentieth century anthropologists borrowed from the linguistic theory of structuralism to elaborate an approach to study social change called structural functionalism. Social change in its broadest sense is any change in social relations that way it is an inevitable and ever-present phenomenon in any society. Theories of social change both old and new commonly presume that the course of social change is not arbitrary but to a great extent it is regular or patterned.*

### **Keywords**

*Social structure, Linear, Cyclical, Equilibrium.*

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

**Received: 25.05.2023**  
**Approved: 14.06.2023**

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Vol. XIV, No.1  
Article No.21,  
pp. 165-171

Similarity Check: 15%

**Online available at**  
<https://anubooks.com/journal/journal-global-values>

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.31995/jgv.2023.v14i01.021>

‘Change’ is defined as the difference between two situations i.e., existing and previous one. When this difference is in relation to social structure it is called as ‘social change’. In social change culture, values, norms or other artifacts may or may not change but change in the structure of relations eg family, Kinship, class etc is inevitable in social change. This is an accepted view of many sociologists.

There are two types of structural changes (a) complete structural change (b) Partial structural change. By partial structural change we mean change in some aspects of society for eg : A joint family breaking up into a nuclear family. When the totality of society changes it is called complete structural change. Parson calls ‘change in the system’ as partial change and change of system as complete change’.

MacIver and Page classify social change into two categories (i) Linear social change and (ii) Cyclical social change, Linear changes occur in a row it refers to those changes which consider that History does not repeat itself. It is an evolutionistic & Progressive view. On the contrary cyclical theorists believe that changes occur in a cycling society and come back to the original position from where it had started the progress cycle. MacIver believes that the concept of cyclical theory is just the opposite concept when viewed about linear theory.

In short we can say that linear theory believes in progress and evolution while cyclical theorists hold the view that structural contents may change the form but after a period of time due to internal contradictions it comes back to the original form i.e. ‘Progress’ and ‘decline’. In logical reality cyclical theories do not talk of change as they come back to originality it is just ‘mobility’.

Sociology itself is an outcome of social change. It was an intellectual product of the Industrial and French Revolutions. It originated with the objective to explain social change in after the myths of these two revolutions.

Theories of social change have been produced in sociology from the very beginning i.e. the times of Auguste Comte. Various linear theories have been propounded by eminent sociologists namely (i) the Law of Three Stages given by Auguste Comte (ii) Marx’s Social change or Historical Materialism (iii) Herbert Spencer’s- Evolutionism (iv) Emile Durkheim’s theory of social change (v) Weber’s Theory of S.Change (vi) Veblin’s Theory of S.Change (vii) Ogburn’s Theory of cultural lag (viii) Parson’s Theory of Social Change.

These sociologists have given different causes of social change : Comte emphasized intellectual factors of social change, Marx sees the class struggle and economic conditions of living as causes of social change Herbert Spencer viewed differentiation as the reason for social change. According to Durkheim proliferation of occupational differentiation can be called a cause of social change. He believed

that demographic factors are also the cause of social change, if this would have been true then by now India would have changed a lot.

### **Auguste Comte's Law of Three Stages**

Comte said in 'Politique' positive that every branch of knowledge passes through three different theoretical conditions which he named as (i) The theological or fictitious (ii) The metaphysical or abstract (iii) and the final stage is that of scientific or positive.

As is with knowledge so is with human beings Individuals develop from Childhood superstitions and fears of supernatural powers to adolescent belief in cosmic principles and then finally to adulthood's practical positivism.

A similar process of evolution is in societies from primitive religion to more advanced philosophical idealism to modern scientific mentalities.

Thus Comte's Theory of Progress is rightly referred to as the unilinear Theory of Evolution.

#### **2. Herbert Spencer's theory of Evolution**

Herbert Spencer a thoroughgoing 'functionalist', a radical individualist as well as an Evolutionist produced a dual theory of Progress applicable at all stages of Human progress and Human history. He believed that all universal phenomenon-inorganic, organic, supra organic are subject to the Natural Law of Evolution.

Spencer's theory of Evolution involves two discernible but interrelated strains of thought which are (i) The movement from simple societies to various levels of compound societies in which each society is differentiated based on social structure and its functions. There is a tendency for Homogeneous to become heterogeneous & uniform to become multiform. Different stages of society are Simple Societies, Compound societies, doubly compound societies, and Triple compound societies leading to the formation of a Nation-State (ii) Change from Military or Militant society to Industrial society this classification is based on the type of internal regulation within the society.

#### **3. Marx's theory of social change**

Marx's theory of class is not a theory of stratification but a comprehensive theory of social change it is a tool for the explanation of change in total societies.

According to Marx all social institutions are determined and conditioned by the mode of production or the material forces of production. These material forces are subject to change and change with the development of techniques inventions and discoveries. While Economic relationships and other social institutions

do not readily respond to such changes because the older order had created its ideologies and the vested interests and tries to suppress the new order.

This results in conflict between new and older orders. When the suppression becomes increasingly severe. Ultimately the suppressed order rises and revolts and tries to overthrow the older order. Such a revolution brings about social change or attends the birth of a new stage of society.

#### 4. Emile Durkheim

Durkheim in his doctoral thesis on Division of Labour took a very systematic and lucid form and concentrated his thesis to the answer of four questions which were what is Division of Labour, causes, consequences and abnormal forms of Division of Labour.

While analyzing the division of labor the discusses theory of social change indirectly. Division of Labour results in organic solidarity a new kind of society that has evolved from a society having mechanical solidarity ie unity based on resemblances among members of society. Primitive society is characterized by Repressive laws while present modern society based on organic solidarity reflects a new kind of consciousness this can be observed in a new kind of Law ie : Restitutive Law eg : Civil Law, contractual Law and Cooperative Law.

Durkheim also pointed to demographic factors (increasing population and density) of social change. He believed that in primitive society density of the population was less, demands were limited each family was sufficient in itself. But as the volume of society increases- material density also increases-followed by increase in Moral and Dynamic density which is the number of interactions and communications in a given area.

With the increase in material and moral density there arises a need for management giving rise to new structural forms.

#### 5. Technological theory of S.Change Veblen

He emphasized on technological causes of social change. Social change is an outcome of technological changes. Development in the field of technology gives rise to new habits, patterns of behavior, values and norms that are adjusted, adapted in accordance with the technological changes. Progress in technology also affects social relationships and class structure change. this technological development gives rise to a new 'leisure class' This has been mentioned in his book titled 'Leisure Class'

#### 6. Ogburn' Theory of 'Cultural lag'

Ogburn sees two types of culture (i) material culture which includes technological appliances, dresses, food habits, articles of day-to-day use and

everything related to the material world. (ii) Non-material culture comprised of values, norms, beliefs, customs traditions etc.

Ogburn believed that material culture develops faster than non-material culture which is relatively stable in comparison to material culture as it is never easy to change the beliefs and ideas of the members of a society. But due to rapid changes in material culture ultimately non-material culture also responds to changes giving rise to new societal norms and values.

#### 7. Parson's Theory of social change

Parson's cybernetic hierarchy of control has a conceptual scheme for classifying the locus of social change. One source of change may be excesses in either information or energy the second source of change may be an insufficient supply of either energy or information. In both the situations there occur external and internal readjustments in a social system for eg : Value conflict will cause normative conflict or 'Anomie' which in terms would affect person and the organismic system.

Parson talks of two types of changes (i) change in system (Partial) (ii) Change of system (complete revolutionary social change). The analysis of social change can be done in two ways :-

(i) Long-term S.C. (ii) Short-term S.C. Parson's analysis of social change was a synthesis of Spencer's Evolutionism and Durkheim's theory of Differentiation leading to integration in social settings. He believed that society evolved from primitive to traditional, traditional to intermediary, and intermediate society to present modern form.

Parson said that the medium of evolution from primitive to intermediary was script and writing and the evolution of Modern society is marked by the mention of Law.

#### 8. Max Weber

He proposes a theory of social change just the opposite of the Marxian theory of social change. In his work 'Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism' he has tried to demonstrate that economic factors do not represent constant and independent variables to which all others stand in dependence as believed by Marx. Weber noticed that the Protestants particularly of some sects (Kelvin) were the Chiefs, captains of industries and had more wealth and economic means than other religious groups notably Catholics. Thus he ascertained that there is an essential harmony between the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. He also tried to find out whether and to what extent a cluster of values in the religions of India, China & the Middle East facilitated or hindered the development of capitalism.

Weber believed that Humanity is going through the process of rationalization. Rationalisation gets reflected in Kelvin's ethics of Protestant Religion. He saw Bureaucratization also as a type of rationalization it produces such an economic rationalistic attitude that ultimately leads to the development of capitalism.

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Weber saw Ideological or Ethical changes as the cause of social change. He believed that Religion has an important role to play in social change.

### **Cyclical Theories of Social Change**

These theories begin with the conception that History repeats itself. These theorists believe in social change which emphasises in societal transformation. It is an unscientific view. Now scientific theories which explain changes in terms of eras : Satvug, Traitu Yug, Draupadyug & again Satyug. This cycle continues. The number of cyclical theories is less in comparison to linear theories.

### **Pareto's Theory of Circulation of Elites**

For Pareto belief in social evolution or progress was nonsense. Human society he believed was bound to eternally repeat the cycle from rule of lions to rule by foxes. Nothing new exists under the sun all human effort is vanity.

Pareto divided the society into Elites & masses & defined elites as those who are the most capable in any particular group. Successful businessman, artist, writers, and professors all are elites. Further the elite class into two categories governing elite and non-governing elite who are directly or indirectly play some considerable part in government. Elites can control and manipulate the masses by fraud & force it corresponds to Machiavelli's anti thesis lions and foxes.

Pareto cautioned that when governing elites attempt to lose themselves to the inflow of new & capable elements from social strata below i.e. when the circumstances of elites are inhibited the social equilibrium is altered & social order experiences decay.

An imbalance results from the situation either by rapid social change or violent revolution the old elite is replaced by a new one capable of governing.

Corresponding to Lions and Foxes among political elites there are Reutiers & speculators in the Economic realm. Pareto believed that a judicious combination of lions & foxes in the political realm and of speculators & Reutiers in the Economic realm would maintain social system in equilibrium by providing necessary checks and balances.

It was a political deterministic theory ie change in the political field change in economics and other fields.

### **Spengler Proposes a Life Cycle Process of Social Change**

At the time of the First World War he wrote the book “Decline of the West” in which he predicted that due to the conditions of world war the West will degenerate & wither away.

Spengler compared a society with a living organism(man) he believed that as a baby is born & goes through the stages of development childhood, adolescence & reaches the stage of maturity but after a few years a phase of degeneration & decay starts and becomes old and ultimately dies off.

### **Conclusion**

The causes of social change are diverse, and the processes of social change can be identified as either long-term or short-term development. Change can either be linear or cyclical. Looking at the degree to which the processes are regular and interconnected, it seems social change is itself a structured process. Social change is a gradual unfolding of different ways of life or can imply sudden fundamental transformation of social economic and political institutions.

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