

VISUAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: A PSYCHOLOGICAL INQUIRY

Dr. Shalini Dhama

Assistant Professor

Department of Fine Arts

Choudhary Charan Singh

University, Meerut

Email: shalini197615@gmail.com

Renu Tomar

Research Scholar

Department of Fine Arts

Choudhary Charan Singh

University, Meerut

Email: renurathifd@gmail.com

Abstract

“Change—extremely rapid social change—is the most important fact of life today”

Nolan and Lenski

Change in every aspect of life is a global and essential phenomenon. People all over the world have been witnessed of social change from the existence of society. Change is vital and it reflects in society. Psychological inquiries are lacking in this domain while the objective of the sociological inquiries has been to understand the rate of social change only. In the contemporary times Dramatic Social Change is usual and easily perceived across the world. Internet Village, Globalization and Social-media, Liberalization and change in social structure, Global Socio-Political Changes are some examples of contemporary social changes. There are many psychological determinants and psychological consequences of these changes. Nowadays psychological studies are focusing on this domain and contemporary psychologists are willing to investigate the determinants of dramatic social change; however, in the last two decades due to the lack of an intelligible definition of social change, and the failure to adopt a psychological concern about social change, thinkers were not much interested in this domain. For a systematic study of social change, and for the active engagement of social scientists, the most required component is, Psychology.

Keywords

Social change, social structure, stability, Psychology of social change

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Dr. Shalini Dhama

Renu Tomar

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Introduction

Social change may be understood as changes in human connections and relations that change society, culture and other social institutions. Social change happens over time and it affects the society in various ways. Civil Rights Movement, the Women's Rights Movement, and LGBTQ right movement are some examples that changed the society and social structure.

Social change includes the following factors:

Biological or physiological factors- The demographic factors are known as biological factors. Change in population or sex ratio plays an important role in social change.

Natural factors- Sometimes natural disasters and other factors change the social structure.

Technological factors- In the contemporary times technology is the most important factor of social change. Technology itself is ever-changing, and it changes the world and societies on a daily basis.

Cultural Factors- Cultural changes refer to the change in values and customs that change the belief system of the entire society and thus it plays an important role in the process of social change.

The Typology of Social Change

There are four social frameworks in the typology of Social Change:

Stability- Stability refers to the extent to which the social institutions and other components of society remain foreseeable and consistent. It does not cause any kind of interruption.

Inertia- Inertia means a tendency to do nothing or remain unchanged. People don't change their religious views and values. Society prefers a male child rather than a female child. "Wishing for a male child or any gender specific child is not wrong but not valuing what you get surely is."

Incremental Social Change- means gradual changes in society. Nowadays, Society is gradually accepting the new generation's lifestyle, also their career choices as in the context of psychology and for the mental well-being of the person, who chooses their own carrier so he/she takes the responsibility for their own future.

Dramatic Social Change- It refers to the rapid change in society in terms of pace, disagreement with social structure, standardization of structure and various cultural identity threats.

A Russian lady Zoia's life is a very suitable example for us to understand the dramatic social change. She experienced so many dramatic social changes

throughout her life. After her graduation she was expelled from the USSR. She moved to Frunze, a completely different state in all social and environmental conditions. Her Soviet life was very beautiful and secure while later due to the dramatic social changes she witnessed diverse conditions in the various social groups. From a chief engineer to a newspaper-selling job she faced many changes till her death due to the social change.

Process of Social changes

There are two types of processes describing social changes: micro processes and Macro processes. Micro processes focus on the consequences of social change, or, focus on the impact of social change on individuals (e.g., Rogers, 2003). Macro” processes are related with the inception of revolutions, or vital scientific changes. A “macro” theory focuses on basic and drastic changes within entire society.

Contemporary Social Changes

1. The Global Village. The term “global village” was coined by eminent Sociologist Marshall McLuhan, formulated the term to describe the phenomenon of the world’s culture reduction and expansion at the same time due to universal scientific developments. The proclamation of the possibility of a global village is debatable, somehow it leads towards the assumption of an incredible market only.

2. Modernization: It refers to the effect and process of becoming more modern. 19th Century is considered the century of modernization and since the beginning of the 19th century and the origin of the concept of modernization, it has been the centre of study in the domain of Sociology. (Nolan & Lenski, 2009).

There are three characteristics of modernization. First, now in the modern era societies are comparatively much larger and more heterogeneous. Modern societies have a feebler sense of community weaker social bonds and fewer societies. The second characteristic of modernization is a lack of outdated ways of living to be creative and to leave inappropriate traditional ways. The third characteristic of modernization is the acceptance of individuality and sovereignty.

Is modernization good or bad?

There are different viewpoints on this question. Some thinkers have the opinion in support of modernization and some have a negative perception of modernization. Although it is a very complex concept. Modernization can be defined as a paradigm shift from personal bonds to impersonal bonds. (Tönnies, F. 1963)

For this analysis we have to understand the aids of modernization that are usually familiar: Creativity, individuality and autonomy are the chief characteristics of modernization. It is clear that the modern societies generally reject the old beliefs

and adopt the new ones that are more proven and rational. But on the other hand some thinkers state here that traditional societies have more tolerance and more ethical values.

Characteristics of Social Change

Social change is a very complex phenomenon. The following are the characteristics of social change:

1. Social Change happens within Society

Society is meant by social relationships and hence social change clearly means a change in the system of social relationships. These relationships consist of social progressions, social institutions, and social interactions. The change that makes a significant influence upon the entire community is considered as social change

2. Social Change is a Worldwide and Essential Phenomenon

The world is dynamic and all the social institutions are dynamic in nature. Social change occurs in all societies and at all times. Each traditional and conservative society never remains constant. Even each man goes through change throughout his life. Change is the law of nature. Social change is also natural. Change is an inevitable and fixed law of nature. Psychologically by nature, we wish for change. According to Green, "The enthusiastic response to change has become almost a way of life.

3. Social Change Involves No-Value Judgement

Social change is free from judgement. There is no moral or immoral aspect to social change. We can say this is neutral ethically.

4. Pace of Social Change is Uneven

here is no fixed rate, pace, nature and tempo of social change. Sometimes it happens slowly and sometimes rapidly. Sometimes it is visible and sometimes it happens silently. Mostly in the modern and urban societies it is faster and in rural and conservative societies, its speed is slow.

5. Exogenous or Endogenous nature

Social change may be Exogenous or Endogenous. Endogenous social change means the change caused by the social determinants, social community conflict, social communication, racial and religious factors etc while exogenous social change refers to the involuntary change by the external forces, such as war situations, Political changes, technical determinants etc.

6. Social change is directional

Social change always happens in a specific direction. Generally, it happens within three patterns-

Linear Change- in the direction of progress as from bicycles to cars

Fluctuating Change- Upward or downward change, such as census or economic changes

Cyclical Change- as Fashion

Sources of Social Change

Social Change is a result of natural occurrences and many voluntary and involuntary acts of social groups. In the contemporary times there are many identified sources of social change. Some important sources of social change are as follows:

1. Population Growth and Composition

Population growth is considered the main source of the social change. From older societies to modern societies, any kind of change in population, such as change in population density or change in the composition of the population affects other social aspects of the society.

The emergence of new kinds of civil societies is due to the rapid population growth throughout the world. People's migration from small villages to the metro cities, the emergence of housing sector and real estate, nuclear families, women's empowerment, a new economic scenario and several other factors are suitable examples related to the relationship of population growth and social change.

2. Culture and Technology

In the contemporary world, culture and technology have a mutual connection. Technological changes affect culture and growing culture can change technology. There are two recent examples related to the mutual relationship of society, culture and technology. In the 20th century scientific inventions made a rapid and huge change in society. New kinds of job roles came into existence and after the invention of transportation, people moved from one place to another. Family structure and the entire social structure got changed.

In the 21st century, the internet made dramatic social change. Now the whole world is connected instantly and a new kind of virtual society has come into existence. Physical distance has no meaning now. Now people are more connected with each other. We have witnessed this phenomenon in the COVID pandemic situation throughout the world. We have overcome the physical distance barrier with new generation technology and the entire education and banking system is moving smoothly even after the pandemic. It can be understood as a paradigm shift and cultural diversity is changing in the form of global culture

3. Social Conflict

Social change is a very complex phenomenon, and many times conflict in

society causes change in society and change in social structure and change in one's culture causes social conflict. The world has witnessed many civil wars due to the social change since its existence and many wars have completely changed the society and social structure as well. The defeat of Germany in World War -I led to a falling economy during the next decade that in turn helped fuel the rise of Hitler. In a less familiar example, the deaths of so many soldiers during the American Civil War left many wives and mothers without their family's major breadwinner. Many of these women thus had to turn to prostitution to earn an income, helping to fuel a rise in prostitution after the war (Marks, 1990).

African and American countries have been suffering from racial conflict and various social movements have been started and they affected the society in many ways. Civil Rights Movement in American history and the Bhudan Andolan led by Vinoba Bhave in India have changed the entire social structure and social relationships.

4. Natural Conditions

Human habitat plays a pivotal role in forming a social structure and social institutions. Changes in the natural environment can also lead to changes in a society itself. Throughout the existence of the various civilizations, it is clear that all civilizations have grown up in favorable Natural conditions while unfavorable natural conditions, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and floods also lead to social change.

5. Polity and Economy

Polity is the most effective source of social change because as a regulating authority, the state is the most powerful organization that implements various laws and policies which determine the various social changes. For example, the Child Marriage Act, Laws on divorce, Acts on inheritance laws, and untouchability laws have positively changed the Indian society. Political leadership of a state determines the direction of social change.

Economic factors are also responsible for social change. Political and economic factors are reciprocal. Sometimes political leadership determines the economic changes and sometimes economic changes determine the political leadership of a country. The history of India after independence is the best example of Political and Economical determinants of social change. India has witnessed many political changes due to economic changes and many various economic changes due to political changes in the last seven decades.

Visual Culture as an Agent of Social Change

Visual culture refers to the system of images, symbols, artistic productions, media representations, and aesthetic practices through which a society constructs

and communicates meaning. In contemporary society, visual culture includes fine arts, cinema, digital art, advertising, photography, social media imagery, graphic narratives, and public installations.

From a psychological perspective, visual culture functions as:

1. **A Cognitive Framework** – Images shape perception, categorization, and social cognition. Repeated visual exposure constructs schemas about gender, class, race, and identity.
2. **An Emotional Catalyst** – Artworks trigger affective responses that influence attitudes and collective sentiments.
3. **A Tool of Collective Memory** – Visual symbols preserve historical narratives and sustain cultural identity.
4. **An Instrument of Ideological Framing** – Political regimes and social movements use visual forms to mobilize collective action.

In contemporary times, digital platforms have intensified the psychological power of images. Social media has transformed the production and circulation of visual narratives. The “Global Village” phenomenon discussed earlier is not only technological but visual—societies are now connected through shared imagery.

Social Change and Psychological Health

Psychological health affected by the social framework also. There is rapid has globalization, urbanization, scientific advancement, and communications in the twenty-first century. Changes in family structures and patterns, relationship issues, and migration of different communities have given rise to new challenges for assessing new kinds of psychological problems. Although the modern society has much awareness about mental health problems. New policies and care techniques are available with the social change.

Discussion

The present chapter comprises the objectives to understand the notion of social change and to find out the psychological aspects of social change in the contemporary world. Social psychologists have been concerned about social change and we found an ironic theoretical antiquity arising in the field of sociology. But some contemporary psychologists are concerned about the study of dramatic social change. It has three components as Collective actions, Relative deprivation and Bottom-up individual perspective. The present chapter aims to understand social change from a psychological viewpoint. With the addition of visual culture and fine arts, it becomes evident that social transformation is not only structural but symbolic and representational.

Contemporary psychologists studying dramatic social change must therefore include visual culture as a legitimate domain of inquiry. Collective action movements, identity politics, and social resistance are frequently mobilized through powerful imagery. Visual representation strengthens bottom-up psychological processes by shaping shared meanings and emotional solidarity.

Conclusion

Social change must be treated as an interdisciplinary subject where psychology, sociology, and fine arts intersect. Visual culture has emerged as one of the most powerful mediums through which social transformation is experienced, internalized, and reproduced. In contemporary society, rapid technological change has intensified the role of imagery in shaping perception and identity.

Therefore, for a systematic and comprehensive study of social change, psychological inquiry must expand to include visual representation, aesthetic production, and fine arts as central analytical components. Understanding dramatic social change without examining its visual dimension remains incomplete. Psychology, therefore, becomes essential not only in studying structural transformation but also in decoding the symbolic and artistic expressions of the collective mind.

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