

Text

Social Change: Meaning, Factors of Social Change

Introduction:

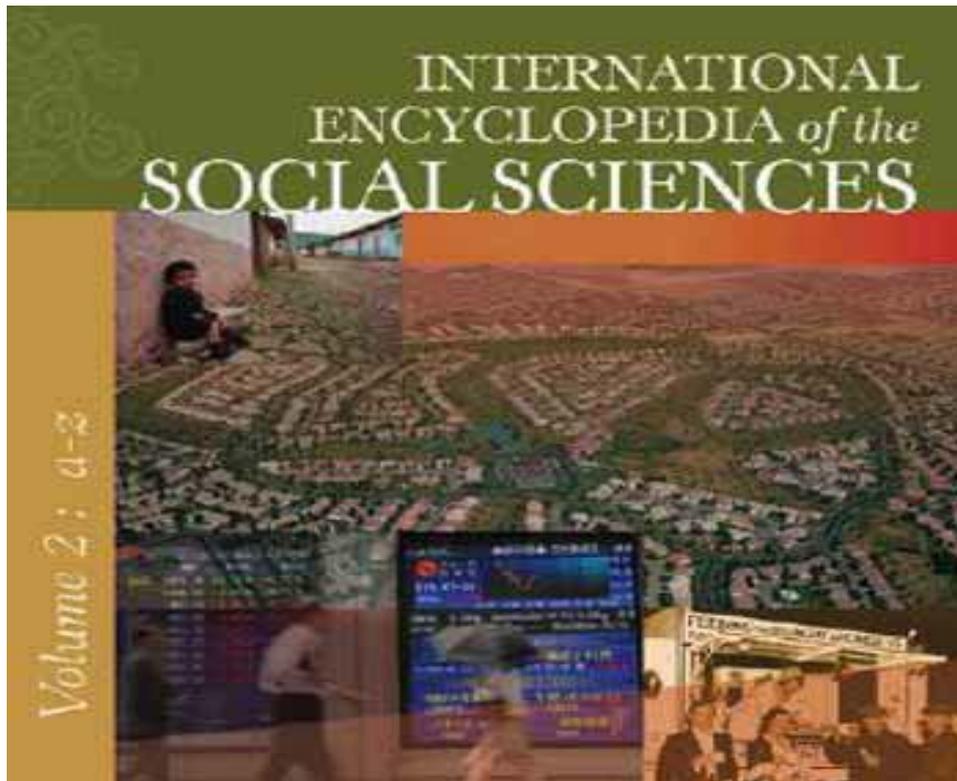
Change is a very broad concept. Though change is all around us, we do not refer to all of it as social change. Thus, physical growth of a person from year to year or change of seasons does not fall under the concept of social change. Here we look at social change as alterations that occur in the social structure and social relationships. We will discuss the meaning of social change and the important factors of social change in this chapter.



Meaning of Social Change:

Social change refers to an alteration in the social structure of a social group or society which, according to, *International Encyclopaedia of Social Science* (IESS. 1972), are the change in the nature, social institutions, social behaviours or social relations of a society.

The alteration may occur in norms, values, cultural products and symbols in a society. This alteration in the structure and function of a social system, institutions and patterns of interaction, work, leisure activities, roles and other aspects of society can be altered over the time as a result of the process of social change.



Characteristics:

Social change is a process of alteration with no reference to the quality of change. And changes in society are related to changes in culture. For instance, growth of modern technology as part of the culture has been closely associated with alterations in the economic structures on important part of the society. Social change can vary in its scope and in speed.

We can talk of small scale or large scale changes. As change varies in scope, it influences many aspects of a society and disrupt the whole social system. The process of industrialisation affected many aspects of society. Some changes occur rapidly but developing nations are trying to do it more quickly. They do this by borrowing or adapting from those nations which have already achieved it.

Today, anthropologists assume that change is natural, inevitable, ever present in every part of life for every society. When we are looking at social change, we are focussing not in changes in the experiences of an individual, but on variations in social structures, institutions and social relationships.

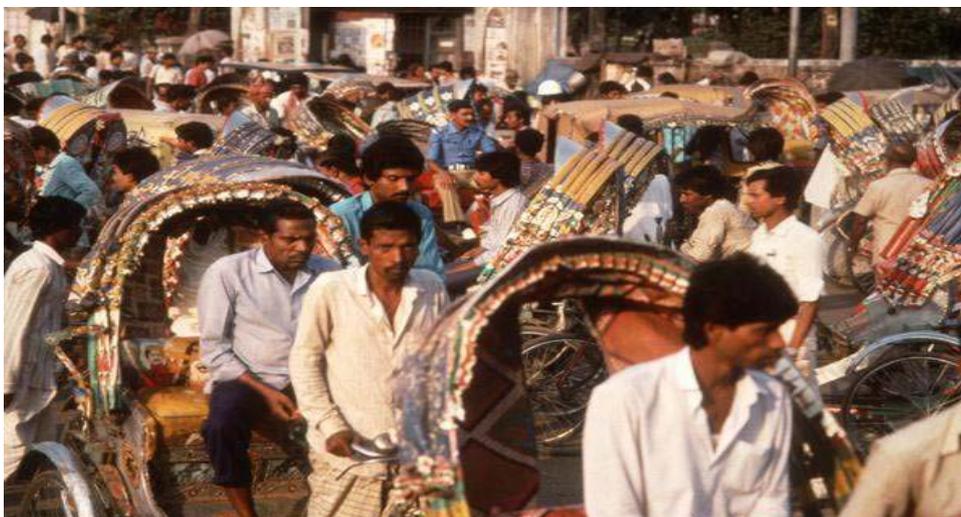


Factors of Social Change:

Social change occurs due to various factors. Some of these factors are:

I. Demographic Factors

Changes in population, both in numbers and composition, have a far-reaching effect on society. Changes in the size of population may bring about a change in the economic life of the people. In the Indian context, we notice that an increase in population has resulted in an increase in unemployment, in poverty, in urbanisation, in the number of slums and an increase in crime rate, social tension and the burden on infrastructural facilities. These, in turn, have resulted in the absence of adequate facilities, rise in nuclear families and over the time have altered social relationships in a perceptible manner.



II. Technological Factors:

Technological progress has often triggered a long lasting change in society. In earlier times, technology was simple and societies were simple too. Traditional society was characterised by manual labour and family was the unit of production. At that time, production was for domestic consumption. There was neither a governing profit motive in economic transactions nor whatever was produced were brought into the market.



Today, modern industrial relationships have given birth to companies, corporations, and share market, multinational companies, banks and the union of industrial workers.

This is to say industrial societies are very complex and distinctly different from the earlier simple societies there is

- i) Importance of capital instead of labour as against the norm in simple societies;
- ii) Rise of factories as units of productions instead of family;
- iii) Use of machines in place of human and animal labour;
- iv) Development of world market instead of local market; and
- v) Improved means of transport and communication and a currency based economy.

III. Cultural Factors:

Social systems are directly or indirectly the creations of cultural values. Any change in values or belief systems on the part of social group affects

social institutions. To illustrate this, we can see that the rise of nuclear families has changed the family system in India in a significant manner. The joint family system has slowly disintegrated and this has altered relationships within the family.

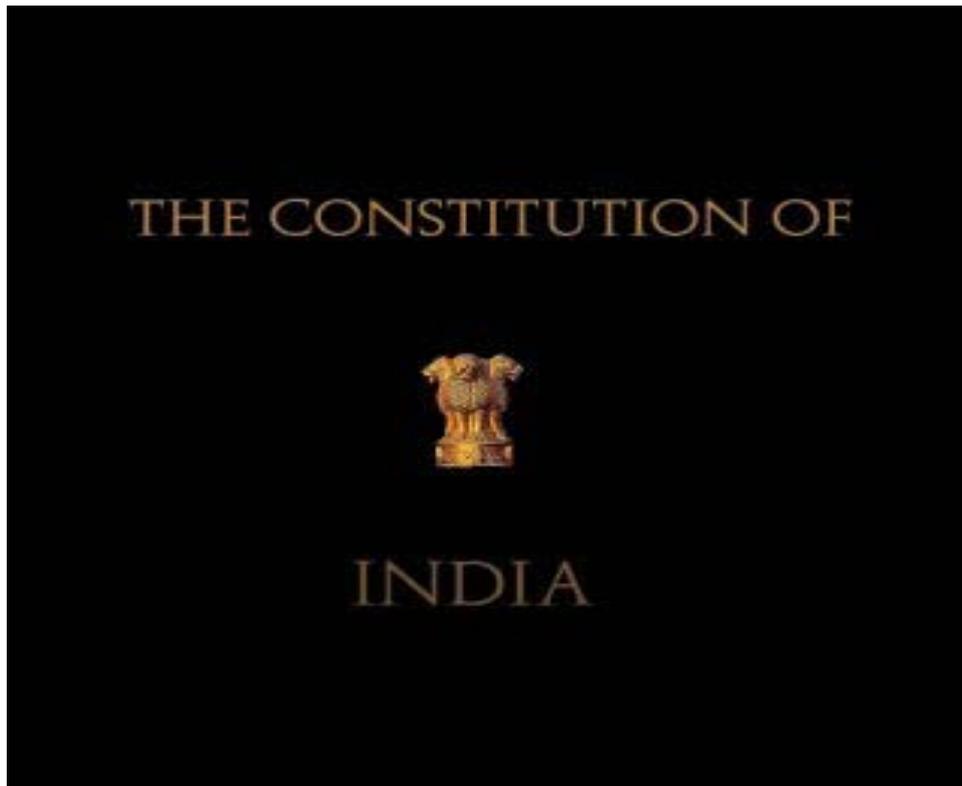


Social change occurs through cultural contact between different societies. Diffusion is an important mechanism of social change through which one society adopts the cultural traits of another through prolonged contact as in travel, trade and commerce as also through sudden events like war where new and hitherto secret technologies reveal themselves.

Diffusion of cultural traits also takes place through personal contacts and interaction between members of the two or more cultures. Diffusion also takes place through mass media as it transmits and diffuses information to a large number of people. It has accelerated the process of change by spreading the elements of individual cultures to people far away and thus resulted in a form of cultural modernisation.

IV. Political Factors:

Law act as an instrument of socio-economic and political change in society. It protects the interests of the weaker sections of society, particularly of those belonging to the scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and other backward castes in India.



Law also protect the interests of women, children and other disadvantaged section of society. In 1829, a law was passed banning *sati*. A century later, another law fixed the minimum age for marriage. Still later, another law has banned the practice of giving and taking of *dowry*. Article 17 of the Indian constitution has abolished untouchability. Thus, the role of law as an instrument of social change finds full expression where law comes in confrontation with social customs.

The role of elections are also important factors of social change. The right to vote stimulates interest in public affairs and is an important means of imparting education to masses. It inculcates a sense of self-respect and responsibility among the citizens.

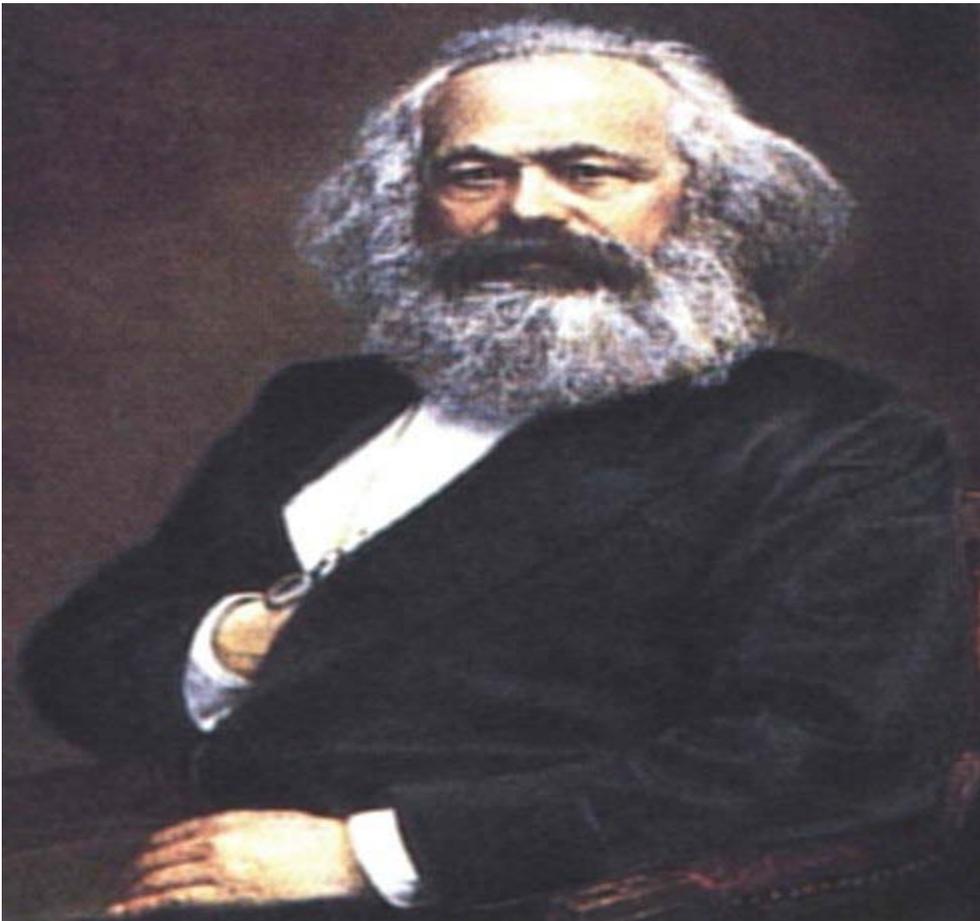
V-Economic Factors:

Economic factors influence the quality and direction of social change. We can explain by studying the following theoretical evidences:



A) Marxian View:

Karl Marx is the chief architect of the economic theory of social change. He believes that social change is basically the result of economic factors. The mode of production determines the social, cultural, religious and political aspect of society.

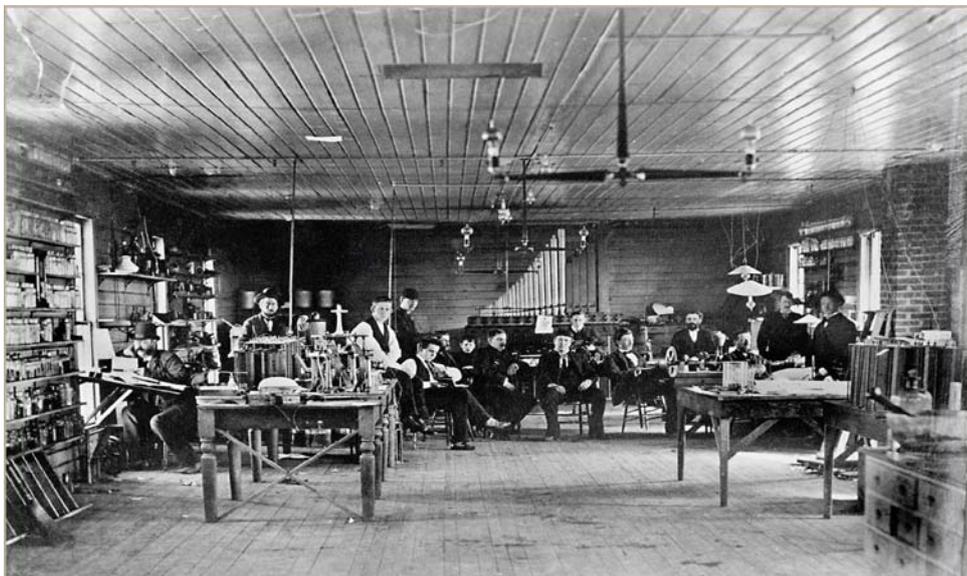


Thus, he traced the development of society from agricultural to feudalism to capitalism and finally, to socialism. A revolution carried out by the workers against the capitalist would end the ills of capitalism and lead to the establishment of a socialist society.

B) Industrial Revolution:

The Industrial Revolution which started in Europe in the late 17th century slowly found its way across the globe bringing about the following changes:

- a) Production moved out of households to factories.
- b) Capital acquired a greater role in the production process.
- c) The occupational structure of the workforce changed from largely agrarian to an increasingly larger industrial workforce.
- d) People from all strata of society took to industrial activity.
- e) Women moved out of homes in large numbers and entered the workforce.
- f) Barriers of religion, belief etc. crumbled as the demand for labour increased.
- g) Urbanisation took place at an accelerated pace.
- h) It triggered changes in other spheres like mass transport and communication too, thus radically altering the existing social structure.



All these changes had a dramatic impact on social relationships and brought about a lasting social change.

- The role of woman changed with their economic independence.
- Similarly, production relationships changed from one amongst kinsmen to a largely impersonal relationship between the “employer” and the “employee” where skills and not royalty became the prime criterion for employment.
- Caste structure weakened in urban centres and workers of different castes and religions became increasingly comfortable working with each other.
- Urbanisation, in its wake, brought about other changes. The provision of facilities like hospitals, schools, smaller houses all meant that the dependence on family decreased. This was also triggered by the revolutionary changes in mass transport system, which enabled people to move to far-flung places where employment opportunities existed.
- Finally, the large influx of wage earners and self-employed to urban centres gave rise to a large and powerful middle class in the society influencing political discourse favouring the ideas of democracy, meritocracy and egalitarianism.

C) Green Revolution

As population rise, consequently the demand for food grew, the situation warranted a close look at increasing agricultural productivity and the answer that finally helped India to become self sufficient in food has been termed the “Green Revolution” which is a name given to the dramatic changes brought about in the field of agriculture since the late 1960s.



This had a great impact on the family relationships as it triggered large-scale seasonal migration from states like Orissa, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh to Punjab and Haryana, the cradle of the Green Revolution. Additionally, another significant outcome was a widening of inequality across states in general and among the “landed and the “landless” in particular.

VI- Education as factors of Social Change:

Education plays an important role in social change. While, on one hand, it is responsible for handing down traditions, culture, knowledge and skills from one generation to another, on the other hand, it acts as an agent of social change. New ideas and values are initiated by it and become the goals for the young generation to pursue and achieve.

The impact of education on different aspects of social life can be examined by studying the following:

a) Socialisation and the Social Control:

Every society has its history, heritage and culture which it strives to preserve. Through school curricula, children learn about their history, culture and philosophy. They are also made aware of developments in science and technology and taught new skills.

Through socialisation, society wants to mould individuals according to its existing structure and hence modern education also lays emphasis on subjects like law, human rights, democracy and tries to inculcate a world view on war, poverty, HIV/AIDS and unemployment.

b) Development of Human Resources:

In simple societies, family was the basic unit of production. The individuals learnt the required skills of the family occupation at home itself. These skills could range from carpentry to craftsmanship, jewellery fabrication, working with metals in agriculture and allied activities.



But as societies grew in diversity and complexity, a wide range of occupations emerged requiring specific skills, such as medicine, public health, engineering, management, law, forensic science, physical, biological, agricultural and social sciences, which are taught in modern educational institution.

Education, thus, ensures the allocation of positions in society suitable to the skills of the individuals. It provides an opportunity for individuals to realise their potential and frees them from being tied down to the occupation of their forefathers. Through education, a person can achieve his own status in the society.

c) Political Education:

Education also brings political awareness. Through education, governments try to communicate their national goals to the citizens in order to ensure cohesiveness and unity. Modern education system tries to popularise the ideals of democracy, liberty and equality while familiarising the students with their unique history and culture.

Conclusion:

Social change is a continuous and unending process in every society. All societies traditional and modern are constantly evolving. Social change is a process of alteration with no reference to the quality of change. And changes in society are related to changes in culture. Several factors trigger social change as for instance demographic, political, social, cultural, economic and

educational factors. Changes are most often gradual and barely perceptible till we attempt an inter-temporal analysis. However, occasionally, there are events which bring about dramatic changes in society.