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اسم المحاضرة الثالثة باللغة العربية: التغير والمفاهيم الاخرى

اسم المحاضرة الثالثة باللغة الإنكليزية: Social Change: Historical background:

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SOCIOLOGY

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- **Social Change:Historical background**

Social change, in sociology, the alteration of mechanisms within the social structure, characterized by changes in cultural symbols, rules of behaviour, social organizations, or value systems. Throughout the historical development of their discipline, sociologists have borrowed models of social change from other academic fields. In the late 19th century, when evolution became the predominant model for understanding biological change, ideas of social change took on an evolutionary cast, and, though other models have refined modern notions of social change, evolution persists as an underlying principle.

Other sociological models created analogies between social change and the West's technological progress. In the mid-20th century, anthropologists borrowed from the linguistic theory of structuralism to elaborate an approach to social change called structural functionalism. This theory postulated the existence of certain basic institutions (including kinship relations and division of labour) that determine social behaviour. Because of their interrelated nature, a change in one institution will affect other institutions.

Various theoretical schools emphasize different aspects of change. Marxist theory suggests that changes in modes of production can lead to changes in class systems, which can prompt other new forms of change or incite class conflict. A different view is conflict theory, which operates on a broad base that includes all institutions. The focus is not only on the purely divisive aspects of conflict, because conflict, while inevitable, also brings about changes that promote social integration. Taking yet another approach, structural-functional theory emphasizes the integrating forces in society that ultimately minimize instability.

Social change can evolve from a number of different sources, including contact with other societies (diffusion), changes in the ecosystem (which can cause the loss of natural resources or widespread disease), technological change (epitomized by the Industrial Revolution, which created a new social group, the urban proletariat), and population growth and other demographic variables. Social change is also spurred by ideological, economic, and political movements.

Social change in the broadest sense is any change in social relations. Viewed this way, social change is an ever-present phenomenon in any society. A distinction is sometimes made then between processes of change within the social structure, which serve in part to maintain the structure, and processes that modify the structure (societal change).

The specific meaning of social change depends first on the social entity considered. Changes in a small group may be important on the level of that group itself but negligible on the level of the larger society. Similarly, the observation of social change depends on the time span studied; most short-term changes are negligible when examined in the long run. Small-scale and short-term changes are characteristic of human societies, because customs and norms change, new techniques and technologies are invented, environmental changes spur new adaptations, and conflicts result in redistributions of power.

This universal human potential for social change has a biological basis. It is rooted in the flexibility and adaptability of the human species—the near absence of biologically fixed action patterns (instincts) on the one hand and the enormous capacity for learning, symbolizing, and creating on the other hand. The human constitution makes possible changes that are not biologically (that is to say, genetically) determined. Social change, in other words, is possible only by virtue of biological characteristics of the human species, but the nature of the actual changes cannot be reduced to these species traits.

Several ideas of social change have been developed in various cultures and historical periods. Three may be distinguished as the most basic: (1) the idea of decline or degeneration, or, in religious terms, the fall from an original state of grace, (2) the idea of cyclic change, a pattern of subsequent and recurring phases of growth and decline, and (3) the idea of continuous progress. These three ideas were already prominent in Greek and Roman antiquity and have characterized Western social thought since that time. The concept of progress, however, has become the most influential idea, especially since the Enlightenment movement of the 17th and 18th centuries. Social thinkers such as Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot and the marquis de Condorcet in France and Adam Smith and John Millar in Scotland advanced theories on the progress of human knowledge and technology.

Following a different approach, French philosopher Auguste Comte advanced a “law of three stages,” according to which human societies progress from a theological stage, which is dominated by religion, through a metaphysical stage, in which abstract speculative thinking is most prominent, and onward toward a positivist stage, in which empirically based scientific theories prevail.

The most encompassing theory of social evolution was developed by Herbert Spencer, who, unlike Comte, linked social evolution to biological evolution. According to Spencer, biological organisms and human societies follow the same universal, natural evolutionary law: “a change from a state of relatively indefinite, incoherent, homogeneity to a state of relatively definite, coherent, heterogeneity.” In other words, as societies grow in size, they become more complex; their parts differentiate, specialize into different functions, and become, consequently, more interdependent.