UNIT 13: PROCESSES OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN INDIAN SOCIETY

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Social Change : Meaning and Characteristics

13.4 The process of social change in Indian society

13.5 Sanskritisation

13.5.1 Criticism of Sanskritisation

13.6 Westernisation

13.6.1 Criticism of Westernisation

13.7 Modernisation

13.7.1 Criticism of modernisation

13.8 Industrialisation

13.8.1 Criticism of industrialisation

13.9 Globalisation

13.9.1 Criticism of globalisation

13.10 Let Us Sum Up

13.11 Further Reading

13.12 Answer to Check Your Progress

13.13 Model questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to -

- understand the meaning of social change
- identify the processes of Social Change
- explain how sanskritisation, westernisation, modernisation, globalisation and industrialisation are important to study change in the society.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

Change is the universal process of the world. Every living thing has evolved from the Stone Age to the present modern stage. Nothing is static. Change is the only constant phenomenon in the Universe. In this unit, we shall try to understand the meaning and characteristics of social change and also the various processes which has brought changes to the Indian society.

13.3 SOCIAL CHANGE : MEANING AND CHARACTERISTICS

The term 'social change' is very much significant in sociology. Various sociologists have theories that are based on social change of the society. August Comte who is known as the father of sociology divided sociology into the study of 'social dynamics' and 'social statics'. Here, social dynamics studies the changes in the social system while social statics studies the social structure of the society. Therefore, social change is a part of social dynamics that studies how social institutions, norms, values, roles and status change in a society. For example—the study of how the institution of family is changing from joint to nuclear family. Let us now try to understand the characteristics of Social Change.

- Social change does not happen immediately. Rather, it is a continuous process that might take months or years or even decades. It is a process that goes on step by step in a very slow manner. Even in India, the society has shown very slow trends in changes in social structure.
- These changing processes may vary from culture to culture or society to society. It depends on geographical or physical context.
- Social change may take place through interaction of various factors like biological, technological, climatic, physical etc.
- Social change can also bring about human change. Any change in the society, although may be a slow process will impact the behaviour of people.
- Social change can be planned or unplanned. Change can come through plans and programmes initiated by the governments or the

state. However change can also come through unplanned situations. For example—recent earthquakes in Nepal impacted the life style of the people.

13.4 THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN INDIAN SOCIETY

It is very difficult to study social change in a society like India where there are multiple and diverse traditions and cultural history. The history of India is engulfed with diverse stories and ideologies under which concepts of change needs to be understood. Indian society is very much different from its Western counterparts. It has grown from monarchy to feudalism to colonialism and finally to democracy. Within its journey to democracy, Indian society has evolved through various ideologies, values and traditions. During the time of princely states, feudalism prevailed all over the country. The feudal landlords exploited the whole country under the zamindari system. Extra labour and taxes were taken away from the poor villagers. Similarly with colonialism, there was further control over the country by the colonial British rulers. There was not only political control of the country but the economy was also handled by the British. The British brought heavy machines from the West thus destroying the country's traditional handmade factories. All these brought a different scenario to the country. Again the post independence period saw the rise of urban cities. People began to migrate from the villages in search of proper food and lifestyle. All these changes from one stage to another brought changes in the family, marriage, caste, kinship etc. For example—with evolution of society, child marriages were banned in the country. The government has taken strict action against child marriages in the country. Although it is still found in some parts of the country, they are very few in number.

Thus, social thinkers of India or Indian sociologists must be able to study social change and reveal the truth by properly referring to the background of the country. One of the social thinkers in India

who tried to understand the various processes of social change was M.N Srinivas. Srinivas (1966) attempted to study these processes through his field work study in India. Now, there are various approaches through which one can understand social change in India. Some of the concepts and approaches to study social changes that will be discussed in the next section are: Sanskritisation, Westernisation, Modernization, Industrialisation and Globalisation. It is through these approaches that one can understand the changes that are taking place in villages, tribes, agriculture, industry, cities etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1 : What is Social Change?

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2 : What are the various processes of social change?

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13.5 SANSKRITISATION

In India it is known that caste system is an important institution, especially for the Hindus. Every caste member in India is given a rank in the hierarchy. This is done on the basis of purity and impurity. For example- A Brahmin is given the job of practising religious activities in temples. He is considered to be in the top position of caste hierarchy. However a person from lower caste is not allowed to enter the temple premises. This is because people from lower castes are considered to be impure. Now, in his study in Mysore, Srinivas found that some caste tries to change their position either from lower to upper rank. Thus, he tried to study these changes in caste rank through the concept of Sanskritisation. Srinivas found that even though Indian society which is based on the caste system is considered to be

'closed society', it is not altogether changeless. Mobility from one position to another is observed by Srinivas.



LET US KNOW

M.N Srinivas (1916-1999): Mysore Narsimhacharya Srinivas was born in a Brahmin family in the year 1916. He obtained MA, LLB and Phd from Bombay and Dphil from Oxford. Srinivas who was a student of G.S Ghurye was an internationally renowned scholar at the department of Sociology, Bombay University. He studied caste and religion and tried to define the dynamics of caste system in India. While studying social change, he looked into concepts like 'dominant caste', 'sanskritisation', 'westernisation' and 'secularization'. Moreover, he also looked into concepts like 'book view' and 'field view' to understand society in a better way.

The concept of 'Sanskritisation' has been used by M.N Srinivas in his study of the Coorgs of South India. In his book *Social Change in Modern India* (1966), Srinivas defined the term 'sanskritisation' as a process where a person or a larger group from low/high caste adopts the customs, rituals, beliefs and practices of the daily life of a higher caste person. This is especially done by the lower caste groups so that they can improve their position in a caste hierarchy. The process essentially involves practices like change in dietary practices i.e. from non vegetarianism to vegetarianism and also changes in occupation. Usually a low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism (abstaining from alcoholic drinks) and by practising rituals in temples. It took over as far as possible the customs, rites and beliefs of the Brahmins and gave up some of their own practices considered impure by the Brahmins. Besides, the non Brahmanical castes also adopted Brahmanical institutions and values in terms of marriage, kinship and conjugal relations. The process of Sanskritisation exposed the non Brahmanical castes to new ideas and values through various Brahmanical literature and Sanskritic stories.

However, it is important to note that mobility that is involved in the process of sanskritisation results only in 'positional change' and not in

'structural change'. It means the position of a lower caste person may move upward but the structure of his caste will remain the same. Moreover, the process of sanskritisation serves as a 'reference group'. For example— a lower caste man can refer to the habits and norms of a higher caste group. Nevertheless, the concept of "Sanskritisation" is critiqued by various other sociologists like Yogendra Singh, Mckim Marriot and D.N Majumdar etc.

13.5.1 Criticism of Sanskritisation

- According to Yogendra Singh the concept fails to explain the theory of cultural change. The concept lacks any hypothesis and fails to account for many cultural and social changes in India as it neglects non-sanskritic traditions.
- Even Mckim Marriot believes that Indian tradition rests in other traditions too. Srinivas emphasised only on Sanskritic practices thus ignoring Islamic and other practices.
- D.N Majumdar elaborates that it will be wrong to believe that sanskritisation is a universal process in India. He notes that there are villages where lower caste people do not want to change their position by imitating the ideas of the upper caste. For example— Mohan village in Uttar Pradesh



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3 : Who gave the term 'Sanskritisation'?

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Q4 : Where did M.N Srinivas do his fieldwork?

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Q5 : In which book did M.N Srinivas wrote about 'Sanskritisation'?

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13.6 WESTERNISATION

The term 'Westernisation' is very important to study social change in India. The three hundred years of British rule in India brought drastic changes in the lifestyle of the people of India. It not only brought economic and political changes but also cultural and social changes. Unlike the other traders, the British brought with them technology, institutions, values and ideas of the Western counterpart. This became one of the major sources of mobility for various groups and communities.

According to M.N Srinivas westernisation a is process that emerged due to the changes brought about by the 150 years of British rule thus leading to various changes in technology, institution, ideology etc.

During the 19th century, the British slowly laid the foundation stone of a modern state by settling themselves in India. They started building factories, companies, spreading English education, missionary ideologies, western laws etc with the help of the Indian rulers. Slowly, they destroyed the Indian tradition and art and culture by dominating the people. The British brought the printing press, railway, built roads and canals thus leading to diverse changes in Indian sub continent. Books and journals were published which began to spread western education among the Indians. English medium schools and colleges were established. All these brought drastic changes in the lifestyle of the people. They adopted western lifestyle and eating habits, dressing styles etc.

According to Srinivas, westernisation defines not only structural changes but also ideological changes. The mindset of the people also changed. For example—The Sati system and child marriage were abolished with the British rule. Efforts and various reforms were taken to spread women education, widow remarriage, untouchability etc. Even though the form and pace of westernisation took place at different time periods in different regions, but it did affect in one form or the other.

13.6.1 Criticism of Westernisation

- The concept of Westernisation analyses social change in 'cultural' and not in 'structural' terms. Thus, it is a limited application.

- The concept is of little use in explaining the nature of social change taking place in post independence India.
- Although Srinivas argues that the concept is 'ethically neutral', it has its own value preferences.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q6 : Fill in the blanks:

a) Westernisation is important to study _____ in India.

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b) Westernisation started in India because of _____ rule for 150 years.

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13.7 MODERNISATION

Modernisation is not a philosophy or a movement. Rather, it is a process of change that takes place due to adoption of some modern values, ideas and knowledge. Earlier it was used only to depict the economic development and progress. However, the term has broadened thus explaining the changes in society from agriculture to industrial society. These changes brought progress not only in the economy or political field but also social and cultural spheres.

Earlier people were very conservative regarding religious and societal and cultural values. They were very custom bound thus declining to accept the modern technology and inventions. However, with time people are now changing their values and ideas to situate themselves in the modern society. People are leaving their conservative and superstitious values and trying to adopt themselves to the present time, condition and styles etc. Thus, they are inculcating new forms of food habits, dressing style, education, speaking style, ideas, values etc. Here, the contribution made

by scientific technologies, new forms of communication, internet etc have to be mentioned.

M.N Srinivas criticises the term 'Modernisation' and prefers to use 'Westernisation' instead of 'modernisation'. However, Yogendra Singh defends the concept of modernisation. For Singh, the term 'modernisation' has a broader meaning as compared to westernisation and sanskritisation. Just as science and scientific rules can be applied to each and every corner of the society, modernisation can also be used everywhere. It belongs to every human being on the universe, although the pattern of modernisation may be different everywhere. Thus, it can be considered that the process of modernisation as a set of changes is applicable to the whole society. These changes may be simple or complex and each process will determine the history of the country, region etc.

Nevertheless, one can say that modernisation in India started as a result of British rule in India. The contact of the British with the Indian culture brought various changes in the values and ideas in the belief system of the people of the country. After independence, India transformed itself and began to look into development and progress, thus moving through the route of modernisation. However, this does not mean that they abandoned the traditional values and ideas. People began to take the route of modernisation while keeping the traditional ones intact.

13.7.1 Criticisms of Modernisation

Professor Ram Ahuja depicts that modernisation as a process has various problems:

- It demands changes in every society. But that is not possible as social change cannot be planned all together in every society.
- Although there might be changes in ideas, values and technologies, some institutions will keep their traditions alive. For example—religious institutions, family, caste system etc.
- Thus, although people's ideas may change, there will remain a contradiction between values, their tradition and modernity. They will be willing to remain as the way they are socialised.

- Again, even though modernisation can raise the aspiration of the people, the system might not accept them to be modernised. For example a dalit, even though he might have western education or high degrees will always be considered as a dalit in his own society. This results in conflict or frustration.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q7 : What is modernisation?

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Q8 : Who criticised the term modernisation and who defended it?

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13.8 INDUSTRIALISATION

During the 18th and the early 19th centuries, various inventions happened in the Western part of the world, especially Europe. Along with scientific theories, industries, tools and machines came to be used. This transformed the whole of Europe from agricultural society to industrial society. The tools and machines were invented to achieve the material needs. Thus, human being's labour was substituted by tools and machines. This whole process is called industrialism or industrialisation. The term denotes how there was a transition of society from traditional agricultural to an industrialised one. However, in Europe the first occurrence of industrialisation is known as industrial revolution. This was historic event that changed every aspect of human life. It changed and destroyed the age old life style of the small scale home and cottage industries.

Now, with the advent of industrialisation, everything began to be dominated by machines. Along with cheap production of goods, different goods became standardised and were produced only to incur profit from

them. The process of industrialisation, that started in Europe, very soon spread to different parts of the world.

13.8.1 Industrialisation in India

Industrialisation in India can be marked under two different time periods:

(i) Pre British (ii) Beginning of modern industry

During the pre British period, India was rich in handicrafts and other artisanal and craft, guild organisations. Even during the Mughal period, Indian handmade artefacts were appreciated. Most of the handmade products were exported to outside the country. India was also famous for gold and ivory jewellery makings and other metal works. None of the handmade goods were imported from outside; instead they were exported at very high prices to European countries.

However, the advent of machines, tools and the rise of the British Empire led to the downfall of these handmade industries. Industrialisation process entered India thus creating a competition for the handmade products. Indian goods were no more able to compete with the machine made product. Thus, slowly Indian markets were filled with cheaper British products. Many artisans had to leave their jobs of making handmade products and join the factories for their livelihood. Later in the beginning of the nineteenth century, various industrial enterprises were developed which brought a huge social change in India.

13.8.2 Criticism of Industrialisation

- The process of industrialisation destroyed home-made industries, thus leading to economic problems of various rural artisans.
- The industrialisation process widened the gap between the rich and the poor. The rich or the capitalists exploited the poor class.
- Even though it brought development of technology, man power was substituted by machines thus creating many unemployed workers.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q9 : In which Part of the world did industrialisation begin?

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Q10 : How did industrialisation affect the Indian artisans?

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13.9 GLOBALISATION

Today the whole world is coming closer as geographical distances are becoming less constraining. This is because information, technology, products and people from across the boundaries are getting inter connected. While the physical distance between different countries may exist, the inhabitants may experience the distance in different ways unlike those living hundreds of years ago. With advancement in technology, the whole world is becoming a 'global village'. Today, with the growth of transportation and communication, people from two nations can travel, chat and exchange goods with the help of a click of the mouse. Thus, with the help of internet and television one can easily know what is happening in the other parts of the world.

Globalisation has become the buzz word over the last decade. There are many definitions of globalisation. The **Human Development Report of South Asia 2001** has defined globalisation as "the free movement of goods, services, people and information across national boundaries..." Thus with globalisation relations are no longer bound within a territory or a community. One can reach any part of the globe at the a click of a mouse. or social world. For example— One can enjoy Indian food in any part of the world and vice versa. A person staying in Europe can talk to his family member in India at any time of the day.

13.9.1 Criticism of globalisation

- Globalisation has been criticised for creating an environment of develop countries control over all the under develop and developing countries.
- It has also exploited workers of the developing countries.
- Because of establishment of multinational companies, the local companies had to compete with them. Thus, there is a negative impact on the product and also the worker of the developing countries.
- Because of globalisation, the Western countries are growing stronger and are thus able to spread their cultural practices all over the world. This is leading to the breakdown of local cultures and practices of that region.



13.10 LET US SUM UP

- The term 'social change' is very much significant in sociology. According to Auguste Comte, social change is a part of social dynamics that studies how social institutions, norms, values, roles and status changes in a society.
- One of the social thinkers in India who tried to understand the various processes of social change was M.N Srinivas. Srinivas (1966) attempted to study these processes through his field work study in India.
- Some of the concepts and approaches to study social changes are: Sanskritisation, Westernisation, Modernization, Industrialisation and Globalisation. It is through these approaches that one can understand the changes that are taking place in villages, tribes, agriculture, industry, cities etc.
- The concept of 'Sanskritisation' has been used by M.N Srinivas in his study of the Coorgs of South India.
- In his book *Social Change in Modern India* (1966), Srinivas defined the term 'sanskritisation' as a process where a person or a larger

group from low/high caste adopt the customs, rituals, beliefs and practices of the daily life of a higher/lower caste person.

- However, it is important to note that mobility that is involved in the process of sanskritisation results only in 'positional change' and not in 'structural change'.
- The term 'Westernisation' is very important to study social change in India because of the British rule in the country. The three hundred years of British rule in India brought drastic changes in the lifestyle of the people of India. It not only brought economic and political changes but also cultural and social changes.
- According to Srinivas, westernisation defines not only structural changes but also ideological changes.
- Modernisation is not a philosophy or a movement. Rather, it a process of change that takes place due to adoption of some modern values, ideas and knowledge.
- With time and situation, people prefer leaving their old ideas to learn new ones. This form is called modernisation. The process is a continuous one and these changes might take years and generations.
- During the 19th century, Europe experienced various inventions and developments of machines and tools. This whole process can be called as the beginning of the industrialisation phase.
- With the advent of industrialisation, everything was dominated by machines. Along with cheap production of goods, different goods became standardised and were produced only to incur profit from them.
- Industrialisation in India can be marked under two different time periods:

  (i) Pre British (ii) Beginning of modern industry
- The advent of machines, tools and the rise of the British Empire led to the downfall of these handmade industries in India.

- Globalisation has become the buzz word over the last decade. With advancement in technology, the whole world is becoming a 'global village'.
- The **Human Development Report of South Asia 2001** has defined globalisation as "the free movement of goods, services, people and information across national boundaries...".



13.11 FURTHER READING

1) Nagla, B.K. (2011). *Indian Sociological Thought*. New Delhi: Rawat Publication.

2) Rao, C.N. (2009). *Sociology: Principles of Sociology with an introduction to Social Thought*. New Delhi: S.Chand Publications.



13.12 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No.1 : Social change is a part of social dynamics that studies how social institutions, norms, values, roles and status changes in a society.

Ans to Q No.2 : Sanskritisation, Westernisation, Modernization, Industrialisation and Globalisation are some of the processes of social change

Ans to Q No.3 : M.N Srinivas gave the term Sanskritisation

Ans to Q No.4 : Srinivas did his fieldwork in Coorgs in South India.

Ans to Q No.5 : *Social Change in Modern India* (1966)

Ans to Q No.6 : a) Social change

b) The British

Ans to Q No.7 : Modernisation is a process of change that takes place due to adoption of some modern values, ideas and knowledge.

Ans to Q No.8 : Srinivas criticised it and Yogendra Singh defended it.

Ans to Q No.9 : Europe

Ans to Q No.10 : It affected the artisans as industrialisation process broke down the traditional hand-made industries.