

SOCIAL CHANGES IN INDIA

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The author discusses in the following article the philosophy of social change in India. He avers that change is in accordance with the law of life. It is necessary for survival as well as for progress. In the opinion of the writer, state enterprises tend to create a pauper mentality and rob people of initiative and self-respect. Concluding the general survey of social changes in India, he says that no change can last longer if it is not accompanied by necessary moral change—a change of heart. "It is a truism to say that social change and moral change act and react upon each other. . . . Without corresponding civic and moral change, legislative and administrative changes will turn into ashes in our hands. The socialistic pattern of society is an excellent ideal. . . neither the people of India as a whole nor their leaders by and large today are good enough for it." He emphasises that social changes for their fulfilment depend upon strong character.

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A sound discussion of social problems in any country necessitates a preliminary treatment of the philosophy of social change. The moment such a term is used, there are those who are apt to shrug their shoulders and say that all of it is empty theorizing. They argue that there is no such thing as a philosophy of social change any more than there is a philosophy of love. For ourselves we believe that such a philosophy is indispensable to a proper understanding of social change. It gives us a direction towards which to move. Without such a direction or goal social change may result in chaos. It is a truism to say that man is a planning animal. "He looks before and after and pines for what is not". Therefore, he always constructs a theory or philosophy of life. This is true of the social part of his life as well.

Change is in accordance with the law of life. Man goes through the stages of embryo, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, old age and death. Much of the change which we find in life is spontaneous, imperceptible and unconscious. A great philosopher like Hegel believed that change is in the nature of a dialectic, the result of an interaction between

opposites. It is a negation of negation. It is not necessary for us to subscribe to this philosophy of change in explaining social phenomena.

' Social change is both conscious and unconscious. It is more conscious than unconscious because man has the capacity for reasoning and forethought. No other animal plans for the future as minutely and comprehensively as does man. Man is also distinct from the lower animals because of his reasoning, consciousness, fellow-feeling and sympathy, the last of which terms is described by psychologists today as empathy.

Social change is necessary for survival. The law which operates through the whole of life is "adapt or perish". This is emphatically true of the competitive world in which we live today. Social change is necessary because conditions around us change all the time. Our social climate does not remain the same. Any species which does not adjust itself to the changing environment soon perishes. The dinosaur is extinct today. We only see skeletons of it in museums. In the course of evolution some sea creatures took to land; some land creatures took to sea; and some alternated between the

sea and land. Those which could not do any of these naturally perished.

*The Law of Life.*—Survival in the case of man means individual biological survival, group survival, national survival, and we may add international survival in the closely-knit world of today. The law of life is that once you are alive, you want to live on for ever in some form or other. This partially accounts for the almost universally felt belief in the immortality of the soul.

Social change is necessary for progress. Yet we need to remind ourselves that not every change is progressive. Some changes are regressive. The monkey has been hopping from branch to branch for centuries. Yet in historical times at least it has not become a man, but has remained a monkey. Changes which emulate the monkey in its restlessness are generally not progressive. Writers of an earlier day wrote as though progress was inevitable. Herbert Spencer, for example, assumed that man was bound to add a cubit to his stature whether he liked it or not. We no longer accept such a naive view of progress. The twentieth century man is not as optimistic as was the nineteenth century man. With the coming of the atomic age we realise that a few wrong calculations made by politicians and military men may result in the destruction of practically the whole of life.

What man wants is planned social change, and not change brought about by mere accident or by the method of trial and error. Planned social change calls for a teleological view of life. Such a view, however, in the very nature of the case can only be stated in broad terms. The utilitarians defined progress in terms of the promotion of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Their goal was the securing of the largest number of pleasurable sensations for the largest number of people in the world. This

philosophy undoubtedly brought about many social changes in the nineteenth century, but today it has lost its force. The idealists who have held the ground for a fairly long period define their goal in terms of good life, freedom, fulfilment of personality, attainment of a state of blessedness, etc. Idealism is on the discount today among social and political thinkers in general. Yet one sees so much good in it that it cannot be wiped off the face of the earth permanently. For ourselves we like to see a combination of utilitarianism and idealism in our search for a sound philosophy of social change. Such a philosophy may be stated in terms of a promotion of a life of happiness in its higher reaches as well as a life of nobility. This was the view of Aristotle centuries ago.

*The Role and Techniques of Social Change.*—Any sound social change should enable us to live in large numbers and live well. Yet the multiplication of numbers to astronomical figures is nothing short of a crime. It is estimated that in seven years' time, the population of India is likely to reach 480 millions. Unless effective measures are adopted to prevent such a reckless multiplication of population, the future of India is bound to be dark.

All over the civilised world longevity has been on the increase for some time. India, however, still has a low expectancy of life. From twenty-four years of age which was the expectancy until a few years ago, the expectancy has now gone up to thirty-three. In several of the western countries the expectancy is between sixty-eight and seventy-two. A vexing social problem in the West today is how to take care of a great number of old people. We in India are not anywhere within sight of that situation. Longevity in itself is not a blessing unless it means a life of usefulness to oneself as well as to others. Man is not to become a mere satisfied pig.

Along with longevity we need to have economic decency for everyone in the community. If man is to live well, he needs a certain amount of the material things of life. Years ago, the famous French philosopher Augustus Comte said: "The noble things of life rest on the less noble". In working out a plan of economic decency for everybody, the provision of a civic minimum as well as a civic maximum deserves consideration. Plato was not a fool when he wrote in his *Laws* that no one was to be more than five times as rich as the average. Gandhiji laid down that in the new India of his dream five hundred rupees was to be the maximum salary for any Government servant but that ideal has been quietly forgotten since the attainment of independence. Social justice requires that the mountains should be brought low and the valleys raised so long as individual initiative and enterprise are not thrown to the winds. One of the problems attending the introduction of large-scale state enterprises into a backward country like India is that it tends to create a pauper mentality and rob people of initiative and self-respect. No social change is justifiable if it emphasises material things for their own sake. Matter is only a means for the cultivation of the human spirit.

Equality and justice are undoubtedly some of the goals at which to aim in the moulding of a society. Equality does not mean a dead mechanical equality, giving everybody an equal share in the material things of life. To give equal educational opportunities to the dunce and the genius is not justice. In a sound society, it is necessary to provide equality of opportunity for all those who can benefit by it including the equality to strive. Aristotle aptly summed up this idea in his well-known phrase "equality among equals and inequality among unequals". Hastings Rashdall speaks

of it as equality of consideration according to which, "other things being equal, my good is of the same intrinsic value as the good of anybody else." Demand for justice today means among other things that a man should enjoy the fruits of his labour within limits. Yet there is no justification for colossal inequality between man and man. This is the burden of John Ruskin's book *Unto This Last*.

We may further state the goal of social change in terms of freedom. A person should have the freedom to express himself, his initiative and his ingenuity. In a sound society there should be ample opportunity for complete self-expression and the utilization of individual talent. Yet it needs to be borne in mind that in the name of talent no one has a right to levy a toll on the less fortunate members of society. Until recently the educated people of India were guilty of that. Today the nemesis is at work when the tables are being turned round.

A further goal of social change may be stated in terms of mutual aid. Some of the lower order of creation like the ants and bees have developed it to perfection. Man who is a social animal should develop mutual aid far more than he has done so far. In the words of St. Paul: "No one lives to himself nor does he die to himself". This means that a practical goal for every one going society is "each for all and all for each".

This idea of mutual aid should in time to come lead to the vivid realisation of awareness of humanity and the international community. We are not only denizens of our own country, but also of the world as a whole. Therefore, we need to be good nationalists but better internationalists.

A question of practical importance to social workers is, should social change follow or precede public opinion and community

conscience? Without appearing to be dogmatic, we may say that it should be both ways. Generally speaking, social change should express the felt needs of a community if it is to be effective and not become a mere mockery, as in the case of prohibition in several countries which have tried it. But yet legislation or planned social change can become a lever in changing public opinion.

*Tests of Good Social Change.*—Sidgwick has put forward three tests of a good social change. First of all, it should be in the common interest. The only trouble with this test is that in many cases only the sequel can tell whether or not a change was in the common interest. In the second place, a desirable social change should do more good than harm. Lastly, it should be administratively effective. These tests proposed by Sidgwick primarily from a utilitarian point of view, are as valuable today as they were when first propounded.

In effecting a social change, the individual, state and society as a whole have their particular responsibilities. In a free democratic society, the preliminary spade work should be undertaken by enlightened individuals and groups of individuals. To quote the words of Bosanquet: "Voluntary organizations are the laboratories of social experimentation". Voluntary effort is more important than state legislation. But in a society where people have been lethargic over a long period, where initiative and traditions of self-help are lacking, and where custom reigns supreme, state direction may serve as a lever by means of which public opinion can be raised to high levels. A sound principle to follow is that a social change should be at least one or two steps in advance of the prevailing public opinion, but not too far in advance. When social change of this limited character is enforced, it becomes an effective agency in the raising and strengthening of public opinion.

*Social Changes in India and their Evaluation.*—The last twelve years in Indian history have seen greater social changes than the last two or three thousand years have done. Among these changes, the pride of place should be given to respect for man as man. Whatever the merits of caste may have been in the past, as a cohesive factor and as an agent of social discipline, it militated against respect for man as man. As a result of the impact of men like Mahatma Gandhi and the Western influence in general, revolutionary changes are taking place.

Legally at least untouchability has been abolished. There are laws against the practice of untouchability from the point of view of Government employment, in public eating places, in hotels and as regards temple entry. Educational opportunity is thrown open to all and sundry. Inter-marriages are still rare.

What we need to stress today is to make people inter-marriageable, socially and educationally. When this has been brought about, inter-marriage becomes a matter of course. There are today many dirty people in India because they are obliged to do such dirty jobs as scavenging and the skinning of dead animals. The remedy is to abolish dirty occupations by mechanizing them.

*Danger of a New Class.*—There is today a danger of creating a new privileged class made up of former untouchables or out-caste and backward classes. If India is to progress on all sides, it is necessary that artificial props should be withdrawn as soon as expedient. Beyond a certain point, special scholarships and the waiving of rules regarding recruitment to public services do more harm than good.

In every aspect of life we need a growing equality between men and women. Our world for a long time has been a man's world. We often go poetic over the virtues

of women, but that is often a subterfuge to keep them in a subordinate position permanently. Today rapid changes have taken place in our treatment of women. Accordingly educational opportunities are being provided. The value of girls in the market place goes up according to their educational attainments. The Hindu Marriage Bill makes monogamy the general rule for the entire Hindu Community in the country and provides for divorce at the instance of either party in certain specified circumstances.

The raising of the age of marriage is certainly a step in the right direction. The Sarda Marriage Act which has been on the statute books for many years is being observed a little more fully now than before. There is more freedom among educated girls to exercise some preference at least for "the men they are to marry. Bigamy and polygamy among Hindus are banned. "One man one wife" is becoming more and more universal, primarily because of economic reasons. Divorcing a wife because of her failure to produce a son and heir, as was done by the Shah of Persia, is becoming unthinkable in India today. Government officers, barring some exceptional cases, are dismissed from service if they take a second wife while the first is still alive. Steps are being taken to ban dowry which is becoming a growing menace in India especially among the middle-class people. It is necessary to abolish it by educating public opinion, if possible, and by legislation, if necessary. Women are not mere chattels but are living personalities made in the image of God. It is significant that the Hindu religion rightly regards many of its objects of worship as goddesses rather than as gods.

As a result of the Hindu Succession Act, daughters today have an equal share with sons in the father's property. The Immoral Traffic Act has been enacted by several state

legislatures. Trade in human flesh has been increasingly brought under control.

Children's Acts have been enacted with a view to preventing the exploitation of children. Children under twelve and women are prohibited from working in mines. Sweated labour of children in such small industries as *beedi* manufacture is being checked. Attempts are being made to enact a Domestic Servants' Act. *Begar* or forced labour has been abolished.

Sumptuary laws of various kinds have been enacted from time to time. The principal one among them is prohibition. Indian opinion is not yet uniform on the benefits of prohibition. Even though prohibition has brought in its trail such abuses as bootlegging, a general disrespect for law, and increasing laxity in administration, there is more to be said for prohibition than against it. The fact that bootleggers are said to be warm supporters of prohibition is an argument in favour of the prohibition of liquor. Traffic in opium and other deleterious articles is being brought under control. It is right that addicts should be given licence but not those who are well.

India still struggles along with her millions of useless cattle. To slaughter the cow is looked upon as a heinous crime. Yet a free India will increasingly look upon such prohibition as an unwarranted interference with people's food habits. No one wants to have a "tyranny of the majority".

*Growing Economic Equality.*—There is growing economic equality in the country. Efforts are being made to give the underdog a break. Dearness allowance and special dearness allowance are the order of the day. In some industries at least there is the Minimum Wage Act in operation. Tenancy legislation has been passed all over the country. Proposals have been made for placing a ceiling on land holdings. The Bhoodan Yagna

Movement has five million acres of land given to it as donation. Even though it may not have much direct economic value, it has a great deal of moral value. It has made people realise their responsibility to the less fortunate as well as awaken in them the consciousness that material possessions are evanescent.

Some efforts are being made in slum clearance but because of people's ways even newly built sections of towns soon become slums. Legislation has been enacted for the compulsory acquisition of property for public purposes with or without compensation.

The most recent measure to be taken up is co-operative or joint farming, the details of which have not yet been fully worked out. There is a fear on the part of some that this may lead to some form of Communism and the coercion which accompanies it. But men like Nehru are confident that a *via media* solution can be worked out. In India there is room for a variety of social experimentation. No experiment, however, can succeed unless people have the requisite character. As Jai Prakash Narain has said, co-operative farming would not be successful unless there was an army of persons who are sincere in the service of the public without any selfish motive.

When property is acquired for public purposes, the general rule should be to pay a fair compensation. In the case of large estates, however, the compensation may have to be scaled down.

The abolition of *begar* or forced labour is a welcome step. Labour today is practically free to move about as it pleases or to accept or reject work on its own terms. There are still, however, pockets in remote areas where conditions are still far from satisfactory.

One of the most serious problems facing India today is that of over-population. Some

of our politicians are misleading the public by arguing that with improved economic conditions, population will not be a serious problem. As said above, while people should live in large numbers, it is equally necessary that every human being who comes into the world should have a fair chance for the full development and utilization of his talents. This is not possible under present-day conditions. What agricultural and industrial improvement is being brought about is more than undone by the reckless way in which we allow the population to be multiplied. Voluntary sterilization is a measure which can well be popularised besides dissemination of knowledge relating to birth-control. Any one who can devise simple and inexpensive methods of promoting birth-control will be doing immense good to India.

The new taxes which the Government has been imposing have come in for much criticism. But the advantage is that these new taxes will help to equalize opportunities and bridge the gulf between the rich and the poor. Taxes such as excess profits tax, gift tax, inheritance tax, wealth and expenditure tax, if honestly collected and properly administered, can go a long way in creating an egalitarian society for India. What we need is not so much of nationalisation as of socialisation.

Since Independence many far-reaching reforms have been enacted in the field of land legislation. Tenancy reforms have been enacted although not faithfully administered. In some quarters there is a proposal for a ceiling on land. This is probably a right step, yet it needs to be constantly borne in mind that there is no single legal remedy for mass economic needs.

Health reforms have received much attention since Independence. Much money is being spent upon medical colleges and

hospitals. Dispensaries and clinics are being set up in remote areas. The service rendered, however, is not always up to the mark. Inexperienced and incompetent doctors and nurses can do more harm than good. In general, there is a lack of missionary spirit in the administration of medical and health services.

More drugs are being manufactured in India than before the attainment of Independence. But the prices are still high and are not within the easy reach of the common man. A limited amount of compulsory health insurance is being tried in Delhi. As time goes on, it is possible that this experiment will be extended to include other parts of the country. Life insurance has been nationalised. The social consequence of it still remains to be seen.

Concluding this general survey of social changes in India, it may be said that most of them are from above. People's initiative and enthusiasm are lacking. There is a general apathy everywhere. Under these conditions our services appear very well on paper but not equally well in practice. It may further be said that there is today over-legislation and under-administration. It is far better to pass few laws and administer them honestly and efficiently than to pass a whole gamut of laws which are poorly administered.

No social change can be of a lasting character unless it is accompanied by necessary moral change or, to use Mahatma Gandhiji's language, a change of heart. Without elementary honesty, truthfulness, dependability, faithfulness in the fulfilment of the terms of a contract and desire for service, no social change can bring about the desired result. Sound social change should be initiated in the home, at the school and in the neighbourhood and community organisations—all of which remain virgin fields in India today. It is a truism to say that social change and moral change act and react upon each other. They go together *pari passu*. They condition and recondition each other. Without corresponding civic and moral change, legislative and administrative changes will turn into ashes in our hands. The socialist pattern of society is an excellent ideal, but it must be admitted that neither the people of India as a whole nor their leaders by and large today are good enough for it. Therefore, the daily prayer and earnest endeavour of every Indian should be that we make ourselves equal to the ever-increasing challenges of our day. In the end, it may rightly be said that social changes for their fulfilment depend upon strong and sterling qualities of individual and national character.