Social Action and Social Change

A P Barnabas

lt is difficult to explain social change in terms of a single cause.

An attempt is made here to explain social change in terms of the theory of directive factors in social action. It is suggested that Several factors taken together give a more adequate explanation of human behaviour than just one or two.

Some of the factors induce change; others inhibit change. Opportunity and ability tend to induce change. The factor that restricts change is habit.

The other factors in the theory—support, force, expectations, goals and values, self-commitment and the desire to live comfortably with oneself in the face of conflicts—act either as agents of change or retarders of change.

THE understanding of the phenomenon of social change has been a constant challenge to man. In spite of all the progress, both in technology and social theory, one is still unable to answer the why and the how of social change. The idea of "social change" and the effort to find an explanation to it are challenging but elusive. Parsons says: "A general theory of the process of change of social system is not possible in the present state of knowledge".

Why is the understanding of social change so difficult? In the first place, the definition of the social change poses a problem. A generally accepted definition is: "Significant alterations in the patterns of social action". The difficulty with this definition is that what is significant to one person may not be significant for another. The question is: "For whom is it significant and by whom is it considered so?" While most studies on social change accept the idea of "significant alterations", few of them define the term clearly.

The second difficulty with regard to the study of social change is that of measurement. "Social change refers to a pattern of social relationships in a given social setting which exhibits change over some defined period of time". It is almost impossible to get a real measure of change unless there are studies at two different points in time. This is not always possible. The problem is often handled in a single study (which most attempts usually are) by asking individuals about the changes they have made over a given period of time. Another way out is to fall back on available literature, both impressionistic and systematic to indicate the change.

A further difficulty with regard to measurement is the "unit" of study in social change. Does social change refer to the change of behaviour in the individual or in a group or in a community or in a society? In a totalitarian system the change of behaviour of an individual may be significant for the whole society while in other societies this may not be so. Individuals, of course, must change if society is to change, but then what part of society must change before it can be called "Social" change? If social change refers to change in community of society, the problem of measurement is all the greater.

Multiple Causation

The causative factors of social change are many. For a time there was a search for a single cause to explain social change resulting in various schools of determinism. However, there is now a greater acceptance of the idea of multiple causation. Some of these causes are manifest and others are latent. It is not always possible to discern all the manifest factors, let alone the latent factors. Naturally the understanding and the explanation of the phenomenon of the social change is complex. Under these circumstances, the prediction of social change and particularly the direction of social change is all the more difficult.

Another factor that makes it difficult to explain social change is that most of the theories that have tried to explain social change tend to be partial explanations of the phenomenon. The following theories could be listed as attempting to explain social change: The theory of economic materialism (Marx), economic theory of socialisation (Veblen), division of labour theory and

"Anomie" Durkhieml, social differentiation theory (Maciever and Page), socio-cultural theory of social change (Tylor Sumner and Ogburn). functional theory (Malinowski) multilinear theory (Steward), and folk-urban continuum theory (Redfield). The concept of Sanskritisation as developed by M N Srinivas could also be considered as a theory which attempts to explain social change. Among the theories propounded to indicate the direction of change in society are linear, stage and cyclical concepts. As has been said above, these theories tend to be only partial explanations of social change.

A further difficulty in the explanation of social change is the confusion with regard to the difference between "social change" and "cultural change". "Culture signifies the social heritage — all that a given people have created or preserved including artifacts. customs, the technological system, social institutions, art, ideas and weapons. Cultural forms often have a long history and exhibit persistence and continuity". 'Social' usually refers to the pattern of social relationship in a given social setting. Thar there is an inter-relationship between the two is obvious. The extent to which one is affected by change in the other is not a known phenomenon. Actually, for the situation in India (both urban and rural) the term "socio-cultural" change may be better fitted than just "social change".

Theory of Directive Factors

It has been pointed out that it is difficult to explain social change in terms of a single cause. It has been further stated that most theories are partial explanations. The

attempt in this paper is to indicate an explanation of social change based on the "theory of directive factors in social action".* The theory states that several factors give a more adequate explanation than one or two as to why people behave the way they do. The factors included are: opportunity, ability, expectation, goals and values living comfortably with oneself in the face of conflict, support, self-commitment, force, unusual shared-experience. and habit, custom, and institutionalised behaviour.

The theory does not explain specifically the phenomenon of social change. It attempts to explain social action. Social action is any behaviour of an individual influenced by or directed toward other individuals groups, or objects. Social change is composed of the cumulative actions of the individuals and groups and hence the theory should apply to social change. In describing social change, the characteristics of the people who adopt changes are often described and these characteristics are imputed as causes. The directive factor theory suggests that these characteristics are to be understood in terms of the factors listed in the theory.

Some of the factors induce change. Others restrict change. Some of the factors can act either as inducers of change or retarders of change. Opportunity and ability tend to induce change. The factor that restricts change is habit (also called custom or institutinalised behaviour). The remaining factors; support, force, expectations, goals and values, living with oneself in the face of conflicts and self-commitment can act either as agents of change or retarders of change. Support may be directed towards making a change or maintaining the *status quo.* Expectation may work either way. Individuals may be forced to change or may be forced to continue in set ways. In analysing social change, it is necessary not only to explain change, but also to explain why change does not occur. Each of the concepts in the theory is discussed in detail.

* As developed by Dr W W Reeder of Cornell University, U S A, in " Leadership Development in the Morman Community ," a paper read at the Rural Sociological Conference, Ithaca, New York, in September 1959.

Concepts and Their Dimensions

Opportunity

Individuals and groups will participate in a particular form of social action in relation to the number and kind of opportunities which the social structure provides to participate in that activity. The dimensions of the concept implied in the definition relevant to social change are:

> Opportunity to observe;
> Opportunity to learn or acquire knowledge;
> Opportunity to act;
> Number of opportunities:
> Easy access to opportune-
> Distribution of opportunity:
> Perception of opportunity: and
> Affective opportunities.

The structure of the society in which an individual exists deteimines the number of opportunities that a person has for making changes. In a highly-structured society such as a totalitarian or feudal society, the opportunities for change will be few. In societies that have the ge*meinschajt* characteristics, the opportunities will 'not be as many as in a *gesellschaft* type of society. The *gesellschaft* society provides anonymity for individuals which, in turn gives the individuals more opportunity to act the way they desire, but in a bureaucratic structure the opportunities for change are minimised.

A person is impelled to change when he has opportunities to observe new things. It is not sufficient for a person to be able to observe, He should have the opportunity of learning more about the aspect that he has observed so as to acquire confidence in the things that he has seen. Seeing and learning can result in action only when a person has the opportunity to act. Opportunity is a factor that lends always to be positive in bringing about change.

Ability

Individuals and groups will tend to participate in a particular activity when they are able to perceive themselves as being able to do what the situation requires. They will tend not to participate when they are not able or perceive themselves as not being able to do what the situation requires. This is suggestive of several dimensions which include:

Physical health as ability;
General intelligence as ability;
Economic wealth as ability;
Special skills as ability;
Special knowledge as ability;
Two other dimensions may be added which help in explaining change:
> Status of an Individual as ability; and,
> Possession of land and other material resources as ability.

The family in India tends to be patriarchal. The father, because of his status, has greater ability than the others to make change. The lowest castes are often made to conform to traditional patterns of behaviour by the upper castes. The upper castes have the higher status and hence, the ability to dominate the lower castes.

Resource's can be either of a material or intellectual nature. Material resources can consist of possession of land, house, or car. Intellectual resources would be knowledge and skills. An individual may be aware that good seeds give better yield, but if he does 'not have land , he does not have the ability to use that knowledge.

Expectations

Individuals and groups tend to behave the way they feel that they are expected to behave in a situation, They tend to also act towards others in terms of their expectations of them. The following kinds of expectations may be derived as the dimensions :

> Self expectation;
> Self-other expectation;
> Group expectations;
> Expectation of others;
> Position expectations;
> Situational expectations; and,
> Social category expectations

Expectation can act either as an inducer of change or retarder of change. In certain positions such as that of the president of the Panchayat, a person is expected to make changes. The head of a caste is expected to conform to the caste rules and regulations. The very expectations prevent the head of a caste from trying to make changes, at least in certain areas in his life- The lower castes are expected to behave with deference to the upper castes. They are not expected to make changes which the upper castes have not made. The members of the upper tastes are expected to behave

in such a way as to maintain the *status quo* and to keep the lower castes in their positions. In a village a person is expected to conform to the values of the rural society which tend to be traditional. Thus, expectations tend to prevent the individual from making changes. If an individual goes to the city or frains higher education, he would be expected to make changes. Expectation can act positively or negatively with regard to change.

Goals and Values

"Individuals and groups tend to promote, protect, and maintain their primary goals and valued".

"Sociologists, social psychologists, anthropologists have done a great deal of work on these factors under the headings of drives, wishes, nerds. goals, values, interests and beliefs. The term 'goals' is used here to refer to the ends toward which the individual or group is striving, whether they be those of un ultimate nature or those which are instrumental in achieving a larger end. 'Values' refer to the beliefs which the individual has which influence him in his choice of goals. The beliefs may be those of the culture or may be gained from personal experience" (*lbid*).

The above description suggests many dimensions. Some of these are:

Drives;
Wishes;
Needs Goals;
Values;
Interests; and.
Beliefs.

The values and the beliefs which an individual holds guide and direct his behaviour. These beliefs and values are not easily changed. The values and beliefs are usually such that they protect and maintain their interests They often determine the needs.

To bring about change it is necessary to change the values. Unless a person believes in the change that he has made, he is not likely to continue the new pattern of behaviour. Often the lag between the new pattern of behaviour and, the existing values results in conflict leading to maladjustment. An attempt to adjust might result either in reversion to the old behaviour, or in changes of the values, or in further changes,

Change in any one of the dimensions is likely to bring about changes in other dimensions. The dimensions are closely related. In some societies conformity may be considered the best way to protect and maintain the goals and values. In such societies change is likely to be slow.

Living with Oneself in the Face of Conflict

individuals and groups tend to behave in such a way that they can live comfortably with themselves and their close associates. The dimensions involved in living with oneself are the following :

Rationalisation;
Projection;
Regression;
Sublimation;
Aggression;
Substitution; and.
Fantasy,

"Adjustment mechanisms" indicate a change in behaviour. In discussing values, the possibility of conflict and maladjustment were indicated. Before the maladjustment reaches serious proportions, it becomes necessary to adopt one of the mechanisms which are listed. While these adjustments may not Incomplete solutions to the problem, vet they will provide a basis, for living comfortably with oneself. The adoption of some of these mechanisms can result in change, e g. aggression, regression, substitution and sublimation. The other mechanisms arc not likely to result in further change, Rationalisation may he for continuing an existing situation. Projection and fantasy may prevent any change in overt behaviour.

Support

"The concept of support is used in many different fields of human relations with meaning similar to that herein used. A fattier support, his family, or supports a son or daughter in a college; a legislator indicates his willingness to support and vote for a particular bill, the government and the courts support and back the officers of the law ; air force and artillery units support an infantry unit in an attack; and a foundation gives financial support to help initiate a new programme. Agricultural price support is still another example. All of these supports have a common factor: some-

thing is contributed which increases the possibility for the individual or group to cope with the situation. The support involves an input of resources, money, manpower, votes or some other factor. With the support, participation is deemed possible, without it the activity may not be attempted" (*lbid*). The description of the concept given is in terms of participation. The relevance of this factor to change will be discussed below. The support factor suggests mam dimensions:

Self confidence;
Confidence in belief;
Conformity to belief;
Support of the family;
Support of the caste;
Support of the community; and,
Confidence in the aspect changed (beliefs or material aspects).

Support in terms of social change refers to backing for a particular pattern of behaviour. The new pattern may be purchasing of a new thing or doing something differently. Irian Indian village the individual is not entirely free to act on his own, Whenever he wants to act in a new way. in which he may have full con fidence. be still has to assure himself of the support of his family, his caste, and the community (village). The support from any of these may be either for making a change or not making a change. One of the villagers, hati bought an improved plough. He was not using it. When questioned, he said that none in the village was using such a plough. Although he was convinced of the advantages of the. improved plough, he did not want to behave differently from the other villagers. He felt that he would not have support from the other villagers if he behaved differently. Support can be for making changes or for maintaining the *status quo.*

Self-Commitment

Individuals and groups tend to do those things which they feel they have committed themselves to do. Self-commitment in its most obvious form consists of a statement or act in which the individual or group involved intentionally indicates that they will or will not do some particular thing. This act of self-commitment engenders a whole series of expectations for the parties concerned.

Several of the dimensions of this factor, which may motivate the indi-

vidual to behave in a particular way, are:

Contracts;

Agreements:

Acceptance of membership in an organisation :

Acceptance of office in an organisation :

Expressed intentions:

Expressed opinion and ideas; and.

Providing ideas. efforts, and financial aid.

In the nature of the contract or agreement there might be implicit the conditions for change or for continuing in an established pattera. Acceptance of membership in an organisation may automatically commit ii person either to change or not to change, depending on the objectives of the organisation. When a person expresses an opinion in public regarding a particular situation, be may be held to this opinion. By expressing- an opinion he would have committed himself to behave in a particular manner. Self-commitment can act either as inducer of change or retarder of change.

Force

Individuals and groups do those things which they are forced to do and for which they see no alternative. The dimensions suggested by this concept are:

Physical force:

Law or social prohibition:

The only acceptable alternative: and.

Force of circumstances. e g sickness, accident, or election to an office

Force can be a negative factor, retarding change. Many forms of social control can be considered as; force. Pressures from family, group, caste or religious institution can prevent a person from behaving the way he wants to. A law can prohibit a particular form of behaviour.

Force can also act as a positive agent in bringing about change. Persons who accept certain kind of occupations have no alternative but to conform to the expected pattern of behaviour of all who are engaged in that occupation. A law can also force people to change their behaviour.

Habits and Institutionalised Behaviour

While an individual or group may adopt a particular form of behaviour

for any one or a combination of the reasons given above, the behaviour pattern may soon become habitual for the individual or institutionalised for the group. Once established as a habit or institutionalised pattern, it may continue even though the values, expectations, and supports which brought it into existence change,

This is the only factor that acts in a negative manner alone, i e it acts as a preventative to social change. Rural ways tend to be traditional and customary. Such behaviour is not easily changed for it provides a sense of security. Any change that is in conflict with the institutionalised patterns of behaviour with regard to the family or caste or religion is generally resisted.

Unusual Shared-Experiences

When people share in some unusual events, such as floods and cyclones. these experiences will tend to make them behave in a different way. A village in U P was almost completely destroyed by fire. The village had to be rebuilt. II was possible to rebuild the village as a model village with the consent *of* the villagers. Under catastrophic circumstances, it is easier to bring about change.

The factors have been explained above as though they are independent variables. The author of the theory points out that "in most situations, not one but several factors are operative and tend to produce a cumulative effect". It was indicated earlier that the tendency at present is to explain social change

in terms of many factors. An individual may have opportunity, but not ability. He may have opportunity and ability but might feel that he might not have support. Que must not lose sight of the interdependence of the factors in understanding: or analysing any aspect of human behaviour. particularly change in behaviour.

The phenomenon of social change is difficult to understand due to various reasons. The idea of multiple causation in social change is now generally accepted. The present paper has tried to indicate a theory of social change based on the theory of directive factors in social action. The theory of directive factors suggests that several factors give a more adequate explanation of human behaviour rather than one or two. Social change is one aspect of human behaviour. The suggestion is that an individual or a group will tend to change or not to change depending on whether, opportunities, abilities, support expectations, force self-commitment, goals and values, and the desire to live comfortably with oneself, act as inducers of change or not. Habits or institutionalised behaviour always tend to prevent change in the behaviour of people. The various factors mentioned could be independent variables in individual or group behaviour however, more often than 'not, several of the factors together would be responsible for making people behave in a particular way. The interdependence of the factors must be taken into consideration in analysing change or lack of change in the behaviour of the people.

Britain at Indian Industries Fair

"B R I T A I N as India's industrial partner'" will be the theme of the British exhibit at the Second Indian Industries Fair to be held in Delhi from November 14, 1961 to January 1, 1962. The exhibit, which will be the most ambitious Britain has ever had in India so far, is designed to give an overall picture of the extent and variety of the British contribution to the industrial development of India.

The British pavilion will be in two major sections. The first section will be devoted to the official exhibit, "Britain : India's industrial partner" and will cover about

11,000 square feet. The object of this exhibit will be to outline Britain's continuing contribution to the industrialisation of India and it will include sections on finance, transport, communications, power, industrial production, health and scientific research. This will lead into the second section — the commercial display — in which British firms as well as Indian firms with British connections will stage individual display of their products. This section will cover about 26,000 square feet and accommodate 50 firms in all. Ten other firms with British connections will exhibit independently in their pavilions on adjacent sites.