

THE COURSE OF SOCIAL CHANGE:

A HYPOTHESIS

During the last five years or so there has been a happy revival of interest in social change and evolution. The remark by Talcott Parsons: "Slowly and somewhat inarticulately, emphasis in both sociological and anthropological quarters is shifting from a studied disinterest in problems of social and cultural evolution to a 'new relativity' that relates its universals to an evolutionary framework,"¹ epitomises the direction of the trend. Of course such recognition has not altogether banished the emphasis on static studies that has reigned in the fields of sociology and anthropology for the last four decades. Under the influence of this insistence on the study of societies as they are at a point in time, all serious endeavor to understand the broad course of social change has been at a discount. Attempts in that direction have been looked upon

¹ Talcott Parsons, "Evolutionary Universals in Society," *American Sociological Review*, 29:3 (June 1964), p. 339.

with suspicion and discarded as “unscientific,” “metaphysical,” or “architectonic.”

This has been the position at least within the professional confines of sociology and anthropology. Much of the research work in these disciplines, therefore, consists of the meticulous collection of data from a society or culture at a particular time. This data may be verifiable, but often it is scarcely significant or meaningful. The sociologist usually collects data from modern urban communities employing sophisticated “instruments” and statistical techniques, and the anthropologist stays in a tribal locality for some time and makes detailed ethnographic records. Even when an attempt is made at a serious analysis of data, the concern is more with the interrelationships within a structure than with the forces that bring about change of structure and the course that such change takes. Before the recent reawakening of interest in social evolution, whatever attention was paid to change pertained mostly to short-term changes in strictly limited aspects of society and culture. Such studies obviously are unable to provide a basis for the understanding of the broad patterns of change.

Frequently the span of time taken into account by research work is too narrow to serve even the limited purposes for which it is conducted. An interesting illustration of this is provided by the progress of public opinion research. There has been a tremendous volume of work in this field particularly since the middle of the 1930s, but it is well known that the predictions made on the basis of public opinion surveys are far from dependable. Even in the United States, where this type of work has been done on a large scale, predictions made on this basis regarding success in Presidential elections have too often failed to come true. The usual explanation for such failures is that opinion registered a quick shift in the time intervening between the prediction and the actual voting. Now, if we accept this explanation, our natural reaction is to demand a theory which provides necessary generalizations regarding such shifts. But this would necessarily require a framework that takes care not only of cross-sectional elements at a particular time but also of the dynamics of the situation. In this case, the change involved is not a long range one, but it is typical

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of the empirical and analytical models which have been in vogue in sociology not to bother about even these short-term changes.

In social anthropology, since the early 1920s, with the publication of *The Andaman Islanders* by A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* by Bronislaw Malinowski, detailed descriptions of life in a relatively small, isolated and homogeneous tribal community at a particular point in time, came to be regarded as the only legitimate pursuit for the professional. The preoccupation with describing the details of a culture was such that even considerations of the relative significance of different facts were ignored. Malinowski records in his famous work on crime in primitive society that at the time of Kima'i's suicide (which he considers significant evidence regarding the working of law in savage society), he was so busy recording the details of death rites that he forgot to find out how the death had occurred.² Under the influence of the structural-functional approach in social anthropology, even comparisons of corresponding elements in different cultures were looked upon with suspicion. Under these circumstances no quarter could be granted to any generalizations regarding the course of sociocultural change.

It is not only those who lay stress on empirical studies who neglect change. Much theory building is also marked by the absence of the time dimension. Thus while some exacting efforts were made to build an intricate and at times obscure theory of social systems, no comparable heed was paid to theorizing about the mechanics and pattern of social change. However, it is a welcome sign that some of the most outstanding theorists of structure and system have now begun to emphasize the need of paying attention to change and evolution.

There is no denying the fact that the extravagant claims made by the 19th century evolutionists, and the unalterable schemes of unilineal evolution put forward by them contributed substantially to the apathy and disdain towards the study of change later felt by

² Malinowski writes: "In my concern with the ethnographical aspects of the ceremonial, I forgot the circumstances of the tragedy even though one or two singular facts occurred at the same time in the village which should have aroused my suspicions... Only much later was I able to discover the real meaning of these events: the boy had committed suicide." Bronislaw Malinowski, *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951), p. 77.

sociologists and anthropologists. The evidence available to them was too scanty and unreliable to justify the confident claims. It would nevertheless be a pity if for this reason alone we continued to disparage all attempts to outline certain uniformities which social change in different civilizations (and types of civilizations) may show. These attempts may at times vitally modify earlier evolutionary theories and may provide models which further our understanding of the fascinating drama of social change going on around us. To the extent such theories are verifiable they may help us to anticipate trends of social change in different types of society, and thus may provide certain guidelines for action. It is with this end in view that we put forward a hypothesis on the broad course of social change. Of course, it is only a hypothesis and it will stand or fall according to the evidence which is marshalled for or against it. It may also be modified in the light of new data and critical analysis.

THE HYPOTHESIS

Against a background of renewed interest in social evolution, this paper attempts to draw attention to a tendency of social change which has not only been neglected but also denied, albeit implicitly, by most theorists of social evolution.

Most classical sociocultural evolutionists asserted or assumed certain stages through which each society or culture must pass in a set order. Sometimes these schemes pertain to the sociocultural system as a whole and sometimes to specific cultural or institutional elements such as religion or art or marriage. In both kinds of schemes the assumption is that that society which has reached a high stage is likely to move on to the next higher stage earlier than its less advanced neighbors. The hypothesis put forward in this paper is that not only is this not necessary but the reverse is likely to be true, provided we take a sufficiently large perspective. A culture which has attained stability at a high stage feels no need or compulsion to move to the next stage. On the other hand a culture that has remained a step lower may have greater impetus than the more advanced culture to move to the higher stage. The society which has lagged behind does not usually have

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favorable conditions for arriving at the stage already reached by the advanced society, but it may have features which make it more suitable for the next higher stage. The transition becomes easier when it has at its disposal the accumulated fund of knowledge and ideas developed by the advanced society. While the vested interests and norms that have taken root in the stable, advanced society resist transition to the next stage, the underdeveloped society can move to it without these hurdles to overcome. Insofar as the assertions made by the rhythmic theories of social evolution are correct, underdeveloped societies may also be favorably placed to reach the next higher stage because their spirit and values correspond to the ones required.³ Thus in the course of socio-cultural evolution it is not that a particular civilization continues to be first in reaching the successive stages of development once it has gone ahead in the race. On the contrary, once it has attained stability at a high stage of sociocultural development, it is not this civilization but the civilization at a lower stage which has a greater chance of passing to the next higher stage, leaving the former behind.

Before we discuss the reasons for this or analyze the value and limitations of the hypothesis, let us make the point clear through an illustration. Karl Marx prophesied that those societies where capitalism had advanced most would reach the socialist or the communist stage first. This prophesy is in consonance with a view of the course of sociocultural development common to evolutionist thinkers. Of course, it was based on Marx's belief that capitalism will be overthrown when its internal contradictions have reached their peak and that the contradictions grow with the growth of the system.

However, what we see is that communist revolutions have

³ There are numerous rhythmic theories of social change which can be variously classified according to the different criteria that we choose. Sorokin has also classified them according to the number of their "phases:" two-phase rhythms, three-phase rhythms, four-phase rhythms, and five-phase rhythms and still more complex rhythms. (P. A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics*, New York, Bedminster Press, 1962, vol. IV, pp. 398-421).

From the viewpoint of our hypothesis, a society which is only one step lower than the most advanced society is in an advantageous position for moving a stage beyond it, showing a two-phase rhythm. This argument can obviously be extended further.

succeeded not in societies where capitalism is advanced but in countries like Czarist Russia and China which were predominantly precapitalistic. As everyone knows, today's socialist ideology and movements are likely to bring about revolutions not so much in the advanced capitalist countries as in those nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America which have not developed industrialization and capitalism to any great extent.

We shall consider in some detail how this happens. A scrutiny of the tempo, direction and quality of social change in the developing countries of today would, in my opinion, greatly support and amplify the hypothesis stated above. Though the hypothesis is intended to be of a general nature, it is being developed here primarily in the context of the processes of contemporary social change. This has two major advantages. Firstly it is for the social transitions of modern times that we have the maximum volume of reliable evidence (even though this evidence is necessarily partial, as the process remains incomplete); and secondly if the hypothesis is found adequate in some measure, it may be of use in prediction and policy orientation.

It has to be stated at the outset that this hypothesis does not pretend to provide a comprehensive explanation of sociocultural growth and transition in all their aspects. It only attempts to bring out an aspect which has not only been ignored but implicitly denied by the specious assumption that the society which has reached the highest stage of civilization is sure to arrive at the next, higher stage earlier than other societies. The wide currency of this assumption blurs the clear vision of events and leads to distortion of data. It is a hurdle in the way of more adequate interpretations of the process of social change, particularly "discontinuities in social change." The hypothesis is admittedly partial, but as Wilbert E. Moore says: "For the moment, partial theories appear to be the best that can be expected, whether in terms of the sources of changes or the directions of their course through time."⁴

As regards the reference to "higher" and "lower" and to "stages" of sociocultural evolution in the hypothesis, it may be

⁴ Wilbert E. Moore, *Social Change* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J., Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 44.

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pointed out that while these terms were generally looked upon with disdain by anthropologists and sociologists during the four decades after 1920, they are now creeping back into the arena of academic discussions of social dynamics. It is being realized that despite the absence of a theory which would adequately explain all aspects of the whole course of social change, it is neither necessary nor helpful to declare that social change evinces no pattern at all. The use of these terms by the classical evolutionists of the nineteenth century suffered from certain unscientific biases, such as the belief in perennial and universal progress. The attempt now is to divest these concepts of such notions but not to reject them altogether; for despite their shortcomings they have continued to be valuable aids to the sizing up of specific reality.

While social change has gone on all along, there are certain periods in the course of a civilization's growth which are marked by relative stability in its elements and pattern of integration. Similarly there are epochs which are marked by the radical upsetting of old sociocultural patterns and the setting up of new ones. The way various aspects and elements of a culture or civilization cohere together has been interpreted variously: as functional systems satisfying man's basic, instrumental and integrative needs (B. Malinowski); as aesthetic patterns (Ruth Benedict); as styles of life (Robert Redfield); as the consistency between "basic personality structure" and various elements of culture (Ralph Linton and Abraham Kardiner); and as logico-meaningful systems depending upon certain basic ontological and epistemological postulates (Pitirim A. Sorokin). There have been other viewpoints as well regarding the integration of a culture. But whatever view we accept, we implicitly acknowledge the existence of sociocultural wholes as systems. That is, we cannot regard particular cultures or civilizations as random agglomerations of culture traits. When different societies show similarities in their overall pattern and in their technological, economic, political, legal and aesthetic aspects, we give them a common label. Of course, a number of alternative classifications are possible according to the varying importance given to different criteria. Thus

insofar as “stages” refer to different types this may not necessarily be repugnant to science.

However, the designating of civilizations as “higher” and “lower” appears more objectionable from a scientific point of view. The use of such words in the prevalent meanings of these terms implies the judgement of superior and inferior; and the social scientist would like to avoid making value judgements. It is interesting to note that the biologist too talks of “higher” and “lower” stages of evolution. However, it may be argued that the evidence for evolution is largely archaeological. The record of stratified rocks reveals the chronological order in which various phyla, orders, and genera actually appeared.⁵ When we call a stage “lower” or “higher,” we do not intend to make a value judgement—our reference is merely to the lower or higher layers on which different types are available. Whether this defense for the explicit or implicit use of the terms higher and lower is convincing or not, we have to be clear in our minds that we are making use of these terms in a value-free sense; and the most they refer to is a discernible chronological sequence.

DIRECTION AND TEMPO OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The spectacle of social change in the newly developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America presents a baffling multitude of problems for the social theorist. No single theory can take care of the whole variety of forces working in these vastly different societies with their particular traditions. Yet one does look for some uniformities and regularities and there do seem to be a number of these.

One remarkable feature of social change in these countries is its fast pace. In the course of some one hundred years some of them have passed through sociocultural forms which took the west about four centuries to cover. For instance, movements comparable to the Renaissance and Reformation started in most parts of India only about a hundred years ago. Today India has

⁵ Cf. V. Gordon Childe, *Social Evolution* (New York, Henry Schuman, 1951), p. 15.

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a republican constitution based on adult franchise (with equal rights for women); it has completed three Five Year Plans of development; it has scores of universities and institutions of higher learning, where research workers in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities grapple with almost the same problems which engage the scholar in the advanced countries of the West, and with almost similar equipment. True, much of this progress remains confined to a section of the population, and some of it may lack substance. Nevertheless, there are individuals (in fact there exists a whole generation of such individuals) who have witnessed in their very lifetime a succession of sociocultural movements each of which had taken centuries to grow and mature in the lands which ushered in the modern age. It is not difficult to find in India a man who was born in a traditional home which stuck steadfastly to medieval norms and rituals; who revolted against medieval customs and beliefs in early young age and joined a reformist sect such as the Arya Samaj, accepting the renaissance slogans regarding India's ancient glory; and who later joined the nationalist movement, swearing by the ideals of equality, fraternity and liberty. Today the same person may be enthusiastically talking about welfare and planning, or even be inspired by the idea of building a classless, casteless, socialist society.

Such quick transition is discernible in many crucial aspects of social life. The case of technology is too well known to need elaboration. A peasant or a traditional craftsman making use of some of the most modern techniques and instruments together with those as old as the sixth century B.C. is not uncommon. Even in the field of fine arts, the transition is sharp enough. We know of Hindi poets who started writing poetry in *Brajbhasha* in the correct medieval style but have since participated in a number of literary movements which flared up and then declined. It is remarkable that in newly developing countries like India, instead of sociocultural movements that spread over a number of generations, it is individuals of a single generation who live through a number of eras. Indeed, the rate of social change in some of the newly developing countries may well be higher than anything that history has known so far. The rate of

social change in the countries of the West after the industrial revolution is often regarded as unprecedented; but the contemporary pace of social change in the newly developing countries seems to have far outstripped it in some of its aspects.

One of the most obvious reasons for this fast rate of social change is the accumulated fund of techniques, knowledge and ideas made available to these societies as a result of earlier developments in the West. As these accumulated forces have had a relatively sudden and concentrated impact on premodern sociocultural systems, the activation of social processes at an incomparable velocity was only to be expected.

This process has great significance from the viewpoint of our hypothesis. The tremendous rate of social change creates a momentum that takes these societies even beyond the point reached by the society which has provided the initial push. To take an example, it was the British influence which directly or indirectly brought about a change in the ideas regarding woman's proper status and role in India and Ceylon. But while both Ceylon and India have had by now women Prime Ministers, England holds out little hope of having one in the near future. This example is admittedly a convenient one, but the point underlying it is of wider relevance and validity. Due to the tremendous speed of change, compromise situations which give stability to normative and institutional patterns by offering some concessions to new forces, do not crystallize easily in the developing countries. A generation which has seen the virtual demolition of a whole social order which had existed for millennia is not very hesitant to carry the process of change a little further. The long strides of change permit the skipping of some intermediate steps and, in certain respects, the passing beyond the point which the advanced countries are presently at.

The vast store of scientific knowledge and technology which took the western countries centuries of trial and error to acquire, is available (at least potentially and within sight) to an underdeveloped society, almost from the start of its journey towards modernism. It can, therefore, possibly avoid courses which have been proven to be fruitless and attitudes which have led to blind alleys.

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But this also creates serious problems. Not only are scientific knowledge and technology transmitted from the advanced societies to the developing ones, but there is also the constant communication of ideas, values and cherished goals. Consequently, the latest ideas about public welfare and desirable standards of health and living in the western countries are transmitted to the elite and even to the common people of the underdeveloped countries. This creates an explosive situation in the widely recognized form of a chasm between aspirations and resources. It is to be noted that it is not only a question of divergence between the ideas held by individuals about a decent standard of living and the material means which are available to them. The problem exists for whole communities and states which try to secure a kind of life for their people, for the realization of which they lack the resources. The underdeveloped countries have not been able to carry through the industrial revolution and create a capital base on which a self-generating economy can thrive. In terms of economic development this situation corresponds to the early stage of capitalism in Western Europe, which was marked by almost unrestricted exploitation of labor and accumulation of capital. But in today's underdeveloped countries, the laborers demand working hours and conditions (if not wages) which are comparable to those enjoyed in the highly advanced societies.

The situation appears to be just the opposite of that summed up by W. F. Ogburn in his well-known theory of "Cultural Lag." According to that theory the material aspect of culture changes more quickly than the non-material aspect. Thus a lag is caused which creates tensions and ultimately social disorganization. In contemporary underdeveloped societies, it is the non-material culture, particularly social ideas and ideals, that has been changing more rapidly than the material culture. These lags cause tensions which are no less consequential.

In fact the newly developing countries of today are facing a gigantic challenge. They have to satisfy mid-twentieth century aspirations with resources that remain largely medieval. It is not impossible for this great challenge to evoke a magnificent response in the shape of building up a civilization which is altogether new.

This becomes all the more probable when the path to mo-

dernization taken by countries of the West is found to be riddled with serious obstacles. Many advantages that were available to capitalism in its early days no longer exist for countries which embark on the path of modernization now. No longer are there vast virgin lands to occupy; no longer are there colonies to exploit. The competition from the products of the more advanced countries is so strong that the *entrepreneur* in the underdeveloped countries can hardly stand up against it without systematic and concerted support from the state. But once a crucial role is conceded to the state in economic enterprise, the *raison d'être* for private capitalism becomes doubtful.

Perhaps no less important than the material obstacles that hinder the growth of capitalism in the underdeveloped countries is an attitudinal factor. Capitalism today, even in countries where it originated and in societies which it has provided with a fabulous standard of living, has lost much of the self-confidence which it had in its early days. The *entrepreneurs* and leaders who built the edifice of capitalism in the West were confident of its magnificence. Leaders of opinion in those days believed that the system was salvaging humanity from medieval darkness and leading it to progress. Those generations, therefore, did not hesitate to pay the price of its growth even if it caused misery. Today, capitalism lacks this confidence. Indeed, Joseph A. Schumpeter thinks that the downfall of capitalism will come not because of any of its supposed shortcomings but primarily due to "the increasing hostility of environment and by the legislative, administrative and judicial practice born of that hostility."⁶ Today when capitalism does not evoke confidence enough to sustain itself in the countries to which it has given so much, how difficult it would be to arouse the confidence to build it afresh in the underdeveloped countries. In concrete terms this means that not many states in the newly developing parts of the world are prepared today to give capitalism sufficient scope and freedom to develop.

In fact, the problems in most of these underdeveloped countries are such that almost no government would leave matters to in-

⁶ Cf. Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1947), pp. 63-156.

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dividual enterprise. The state has to assume leadership not only for economic development but also in domains social and cultural. Because of the rapid social change and inflated aspirations, the lags and tensions are of such magnitude and complexity, and the problems are so pressing, that without centralized coordination, there seems to be no way out. Even the imperial and colonial powers had to play this role of leadership in the territories that they governed.

Naturally, the ideas of overall socio-economic planning and directed change have greater appeal to the elite and common people of the underdeveloped countries than in the lands of their origin. With conditions not very favorable to the unhindered growth of capitalism and with little time to wait for the development of private initiative, these countries are turning to socio-economic ideologies that promise planned and rapid development.

The underdeveloped countries, paradoxically, do not have many of the resistances which their more advanced counterparts have against such transition. In the advanced countries of the West, during the period of ample growth of capitalism, many institutional and valuational patterns which have developed and gathered strength strongly resist attempts towards any form of collectivism or overall planning. Individualistic notions and values have struck deep roots in the minds of the people of the West. Individualistic conceptions with regard to property, justice, freedom and personality development provide strong resistance to collectivist programs and practice. The spirit of activism, competition, and unlimited acquisitiveness make the prospects of a system promising overall security not too fascinating for an average member of western society.

On the contrary, the values commonly prevalent among peasant and feudal societies are not wholly contradictory to the values propagated by collectivist ideologies of various kinds. In some of its features the value system prevalent among traditional peasant societies appears to be collectivist. Of course this collectivism is not of the type espoused by the modern ideologies of socialism, communism or large-scale planning. Life in these communities has been marked by the *gestalt* of familism. Not

only does family play a most important part in life in peasant society, all other institutions and relationships too bear the impress of familistic forms. In such societies, it is the "family ego" that predominates.⁷ Individual achievement occupies only a subsidiary place. Whatever the individual achieves or gains does not accrue to his personal status or purse, but adds to the family funds of prestige and wealth. And each member of the family gets from the common funds not so much according to what he earns but according to what he needs. Even though, due to modern pressures, it is becoming increasingly difficult to follow all the traditional norms of peasant familism, on an ideal plane they are still supposed to be superior to individualistic attitudes and relationships.

Because status in traditional pre-modern societies is typically ascribed rather than achieved, the emphasis on competition is weak. The remnants of the traditional village community present a pattern of economic exchange which is based not on principles of the marketplace but on a system of cooperation among professional groups. For instance, in many Indian villages where the famous *Jejmani* or *Jajmani* system still thrives, the barber, the potter, the washerman, the carpenter and the ironsmith do not get cash payment for their services. They render service throughout the year and at the time of harvest get traditionally fixed amounts of grain from those families of farmers who are their clients from generation to generation. In this there is no competition of goods and services, nor a fixation of exchange value on that basis. Many scholars hold that before the Indian village community declined under the impact of British rule, cultivable land in each village was owned communally.⁸ There may be some difference of opinion in this regard, but there is hardly any doubt that before British domination land was not a marketable commodity which could be freely sold and purchased. It is well

⁷ Cf. P. A. Sorokin, C. C. Zimmerman and C. J. Galpin, *Systematic Source-book in Rural Sociology* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1930-32), vol. II.

⁸ For a relatively recent discussion in favor of the village community's rights over cultivable land, see Ramkrishna Mukerjee, *Dynamics of a Rural Society* (Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1957), p. 15 ff.

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known that the *Weltanschauung* of most peasant societies emphasizes the craving for security rather than that for an ever-rising standard of living. The conception of king and state too is traditionally paternalistic. Even though, for obvious reasons, in pre-modern societies the state could not render in practice any wide range of services to its citizens, there have been no ideals restricting the scope of state activity comparable to that of *laissez-faire*.

All this does not mean that underdeveloped societies already had in the past (or possess now) institutions and values comparable to programs or ideologies of communism, socialism or any other system of planned collectivist society proposed in modern times. What I mean simply is that in underdeveloped societies there may not be such resistance to overall planning and similar programs as is found in highly developed capitalist societies. Even when a section of the people in the newly developing societies appears already to have adopted attitudes favoring individualism, free competition, etc., often it is found that such acceptance is only skin-deep. Under a little stress, these attitudes may be relinquished.

Many writers have assumed that traditional values are absolutely inimical to all forms of modernism. This may not be true. Some traditional values do resist attitudes and forms that developed in the earlier part of the modern era, but they may be favorable to values and institutional patterns that emerged later on. Excessive emphasis on individualism, competitive spirit, activism and unlimited acquisitiveness is certainly repugnant to the traditional values of most of the pre-modern societies in underdeveloped countries; but the more recent emphasis on social security and cooperation may not be antagonistic to traditional, familistic values. Societies which have remained traditional so far are therefore more likely to be attracted to these values, which have emerged during a later phase.

Interestingly enough this is true in certain respects even for the technology that the newly developing countries may possibly adopt. Lewis Mumford has distinguished between the eotechnic, the paleotechnic, and the neotechnic phases of development of technology. The eotechnic phase extends roughly from 1000 A.D.

to 1750, and the paleotechnic phase, which gathered strength in England in the middle of the eighteenth century, began to decline after 1900. Since then the neotechnic phase has been developing. In the paleotechnic phase great emphasis was laid on the large size of machines and factories. These were usually concentrated in congested industrial centers. This was also necessary because coal was the chief source of power in this era, and because it is difficult to transport coal, industries had to develop around coal mines. In the paleotechnic era, aesthetic considerations were sacrificed in the name of utility. However, in the era that has succeeded it, with the development of new sources of power—electricity and petroleum—industries have been dispersed. Machines become smaller and are not the monsters they were in the paleotechnic era.⁹ The underdeveloped countries, which are taking to the path of industrialization only now when the neotechnic technology has already developed, need not adopt the route taken by the more advanced societies earlier. They can take power to all parts of the country and disperse industry. Sticking to the values of the traditional craftsman to a certain extent, they can continue to combine beauty with utility.

Thus the underdeveloped countries of today have access to the later phase of modernism and in certain respects are in an advantageous position to skip the earlier one. When the underdeveloped countries adopt the newer ways created by advanced societies, be they new socio-economic systems or new technology, they certainly cannot be expected to give these the same shape that they would have acquired had they had full opportunity to develop in the advanced countries.¹⁰ Yet, in the sense that these

⁹ From the viewpoint of our hypothesis the following incidental remark made by Mumford is interesting: "The neotechnic phase represents a third definite development in the machine during the last thousand years. It is a true mutation: it differs from the paleotechnic phase almost as white differs from black. But on the other hand, it bears the same relation to the eotechnic phase as the adult form to the baby." Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (London, George Routledge & Sons, 1947), p. 212.

¹⁰ Apart from the important differences in circumstances, the reshaping of borrowed institutions and traits may be due to a conscious attempt on the part of the elite in these countries to preserve the identity of their traditional cultures, while accepting modernization and change. Cf. Daya Krishna, *Considerations Towards a Theory of Social Change* (Bombay, Manaktalas, 1965), pp. 172-173.

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forms are products of a later phase, they may be considered to constitute a stage later than that so far existing.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The foregoing discussion of the characteristic features of contemporary social change in the underdeveloped countries indicates that these countries are not likely to follow, in their broad socio-cultural patterns, the initial course taken by the countries of the West which were first to usher in the modern age. On the other hand these countries show an inclination to put into practice ideas about socioeconomic and cultural forms that have developed in the advanced countries at a later stage. It seems rather paradoxical that the backward countries should give a serious trial to newer plans and programs while the countries which conceived them show no serious inclination to put them into practice. The explanation is provided by the nature of problems facing the contemporary underdeveloped countries.

The newly developing countries are in a state of turmoil. In some sociocultural aspects they have experienced changes of such tremendous velocity that the idea of further change does not frighten them. Due to a variety of reasons their problems are such that unless they move forward resolutely, there is no hope even of providing bare sustenance for their masses. Change of a radical kind is imperative for them. But they find the path taken by the countries of the West after their breakaway from feudalism blocked by new hurdles, material and attitudinal. On the other hand certain newer programs and ideologies, originally conceived in countries of the West, attract them more. While the countries of the West feel no pressing necessity to put these newer programs into practice on a large scale, the newly developing countries appear eager to adopt them. In this the operative values also play a part. While the values of individualism and private property which have gained strength in the West since the early phases of capitalism provide strong resistance to adoption of collectivist systems, the traditional value patterns of the underdeveloped societies do not appear to be so contradictory to newer

forms. Consequently, it is the developing societies that are trying out first the newer ideas regarding social reconstruction.

This analysis of the tendencies of social change in the contemporary world seems to support the hypothesis stated above. This hypothesis may perhaps be applicable in some measure to similar transitions of civilization in other periods as well. For instance, it can be argued that even capitalism did not develop in those parts of the world which had reached the peak of precapitalistic civilization. It developed first in societies that lacked the sophistication and stability of the flourishing peasant and feudal civilizations of the East. It was perhaps such circumstances that made it possible for the countries of Western Europe to develop an utterly new civilization. Of course, in this task the knowledge derived from the more developed civilizations was a great help in the initial stages. Thus it is not the civilization which has already forged ahead that moves to the ground still to be covered. It is a society which has lagged behind that has greater chances of attaining the next higher stage.

Various rhythmic theories of social change have marshalled material to show that the same cultural tendencies do not continue their growth in a straight line. Two civilizations which are consecutively placed in time may not necessarily have more in common, therefore, than one of them may have with another civilization which is farther from it. From this angle the present hypothesis may derive strength from the rhythmic theories. But in itself it is not a mere rhythmic theory; for rhythmic theories of social change have confined their attention to the rhythmic course of social change within a civilization. This hypothesis, however, refers to the passing on of initiative from the more highly developed civilization to a less highly developed one. This passing on of initiative, however, would usually imply communication between these civilizations and the utilization by the less advanced civilization of knowledge and ideas developed in the more advanced one.