

Emerging Trends and Changes in Sri Lankan Society: Sociological Perspective

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Introduction

Society is a collection of a people who live together in an organized way and making decisions about how to do things and sharing the work that needs to be done (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/society>, 04.10.2019). Its structures, institutions, norms, ways of life and problems are changeable. As social structures and forces influence on members of the society and reshape their lives, and accordingly they respond and make choices and actions (www.sociologydiscussion.com/sociology/theories-of-social-change-meaning-nature-and-processes/2364, 11.12.2019).

“Change” means a varying in anything. Change is unavoidable and it is the law of nature. According to the Buddhist philosophy, change is the only thing which is not changed in the world. What is appearing now is not actually the same even though it is seemingly the same in the next moment. Likewise, what the shape of the society in tomorrow would be vastly different from how it exists today. This nature of social change is a universal phenomenon which ever present in any society (Form and Nico in <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-change>, 14.11. 2019). The term social change is used to indicate the changes that take place in human interactions and interrelations. Society is a web of social relationships and

hence social change means change in the system of social relationships (www.sociologyguide.com/social-change/index.php, 20.02.2019).

Moreover, the human interactions with the environment increase the natural disasters and when human populations move into more vulnerable areas it is increased the number of people affected by natural disasters (www.courses.lumenlearning.com/sociology/chapter/social-change, 16.08.2019). Accordingly, Social change is any alteration in the cultural, structural, population, and ecological characteristics of a social system. In a sense, attention to social change is inherent in all sociological work because social systems are always in the process of change (Crossman, in www.thoughtco.com/social-change-3026584, 12.12. 2019).

The social structure also is subject to incessant change due to various factors. Another aspect in this change is that it occurs gradually and continuously in certain stages from simple to complex in all social strata (www.sociologydiscussion.com/sociology/theories-of-social-change-meaning-nature-and-processes/2364, 11.12.2019). Among the causes of social change, there are four common causes recognized by social scientists such as technology, social institutions, population, and the environment. All these areas are interrelated and can impact when and how society changes (<https://sites.psu.edu/aspsy/2017/04/social-change-in-the-society>, 14.09.2019).

Accordingly, social changes can be understood as observable differences in any social phenomena throughout any period of time. In the meantime, some phenomenon can be seen stagnating for a long period, for instance, culture motivated particular social behaviors, role of women in conventional societies (<https://www.cram.com/essay/Traditional-Role-Of-Women-In-Modern/PK787T35C>, 22.09, 2019). However, observable

modifications in the society can be noticed in social structures, social patterns, social organizations, social activities, as well as social relationships

(<https://www.britannica.com/topic/modernization/Postmodern-and-postindustrial-society>, 04.09.2019). These changes can mainly be caused due to alteration of geographical conditions, science and technology, market, population structure and functions such as social interactions and social events, way of life and law of the society (Form and Nico in <https://www.britannica.com/topic/social-change>, 14.11. 2019). Sometimes ideologies, norms and values, beliefs, rejections and acceptances take on new components and institutional structures and functions undergo reshaping society (<https://mobilitybehaviour.eu/2017/08/07/the-impact-of-social-change/>, 14.08.2019). Changing society unavoidably develops problems affecting on man and society in various ways.

Social change has always been a field of great interests for the social sciences (<https://www.cliffsnotes.com/study-guides/sociology/social-change-and-ovements/models-of-social-change>. 20.08.2019). Particularly, many prominent sociologists highlight that society is about to change (Sztompka, 2004). Sociologists have attempted to analyse social change according to sociological perspectives. Evolutionary theory (www.mysocietymyworld.com/evolutionary-theories-of-social-change-i.16.08.2019), conflict theory (www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Conflict_theory, 16.08.2019) and functionalism (<https://www.thoughtco.com/functionalist-perspective-3026625>, 16.08.2019) are mostly taken into consideration in this regard.

Describing social change according to evolutionary theory, Auguste comte (1798 - 1857), Herbert spencer (1820—1903) and Vilfredo Pareto (1848-

1923) pointed out that society moves from a simple to a more complex structure (www.mysocietymyworld.com/evolutionary-theories-of-social-change-i.16.08.2019). Based on the functional theoretical approach, Emile Durkheim (1858 -1917) and Talcott Parsons (1902–1979) emphasised that society is in constant state of equilibrium and when changes occurs adjustments are made (Studymoose.com/emile-durkheim-social-change-theory-essay, 16.08.2019). Parsons (1966) further viewed social change as a process of ‘social evolution’. He regards changes as a major driving forces of social evolution and the history of human society from simple hunting and gathering group to a complex industrialized society.

Karl Marks (1818- 1883) explained that human society passes through various stages, each with its own well-defined organizational system. Each successive stage comes into existence as a result of conflict with the one preceding it. Change from one stage to another is due to changes in the economic factors, namely, the methods of production and distribution (www.sociologydiscussion.com/sociology/theories-of-social-change-meaning-nature-and-processes/2364, 11.12. 2019). Marks further emphasized that the class struggle was the impelling cause of social change. Marks and Fredrick Engels (1820 -1895) expressed their ideas radically, pointing out that individuals and their groups fight to maximize their benefits while society is in a constant state of disequilibrium.

According to Engels, “ultimate causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought not in the minds of men, in their increasing insight into the eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the mode of production and exchange.” (www.sociologydiscussion.com/sociology/theories-of-social-change-meaning-nature-and-processes/2364, 11.12. 2019). Hence, continuously

changing production, delivery and consumption processes are evident of the above statement.

Considering world dynamism, contemporary social scientists refer the world as “VUCA world” as the world is always facing Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity (Woodward in www.psychologytoday.com/us/experts/michael-woodward, 18.11.2019). People are social beings. Forming social relationship is people’s nature. Roy Baumeister (<https://roybaumeister.com>, 20.12.2019) mentioned that people born with a drive to seek, form, maintain, and protect strong social relationships and to fulfill this need, people build relationships with those at work, at school, in communities and religious organizations, on sport teams, in online communities, and in other social contexts. Social relationships bring very specific rewards as emotional, material, and physical health as well as cost such as sacrificing time and resources for the friendship. On the other hand, social relationships is an important social determinant of health throughout people’s lives (World Health Organization in https://www.who.int/social_determinants/sdh_definition/en, 12.10.2019).

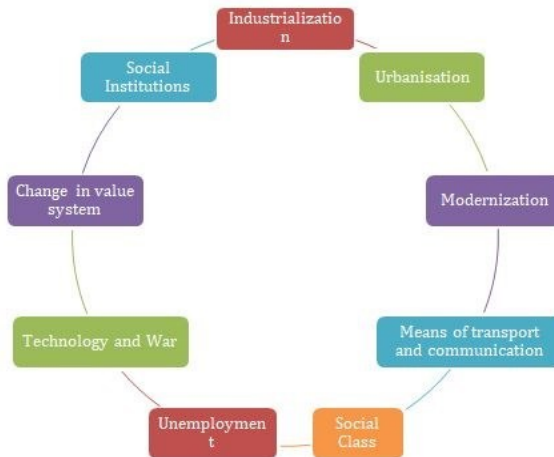
In applying the concept of “social change” to the Sri Lankan society, it can be seen many socio, economic, cultural changes as a result of industrialization, urbanization, modernization, and globalization. It is basically argued that the society and the market maintain interdependent, interconnected and intermingled relationships as Sri Lanka adopts market economy. In this context, public opinion is that social values has been deteriorated by the material development, money and profit orientation. Further, corporate social responsibility, professionalism, ethical behavior, smartness etc are in debate and emphasized business and policy forums in the country. In the meantime, social values, equal rights, child and women

rights, human rights, sustainability including the natural environment etc are serious concerns at present particularly as the country is dreaming to be a rich and prosperous nation. Hence, this paper aims to examine how these changes can be seen in Sri Lankan context, taking into consideration some specific and highlighted features in current society.

Science and Technology

Technology is one of the most influential factors for socio - economic development in current world. In fact, changing has been amplified more and more rapidly due to scientific inventions and technological development. From the invention of the wheel, gunpowder, steam engine, printing press, telephone, radio, TV, internet, airplane, motor car and so many other inventions in medical and other fields have revolutionized the human life (www.sociologyguide.com/social-change/impact-of-technology-change.php, 11.11.2019). Following figure 01 depicts the different impact of technology.

Figure: 01 - Impact of technology on social change



As per the above figure illustrates, all the highlighted social phenomenon are highly influenced by the development of science and technology. Man depends entirely on the technology in current world. The production of goods and services, food, drinking water, house and buildings, parks, airports, transportation, occupations, clothes, medicine, and commodities, etc are heavily affected by the technology. Highly developed transportation systems and communication methods such as e-mail, internet, mobile phones etc, which have contributed to significant changes in social life, are the outcomes of the development of technology. On the other hand, modernization is a typical result of social change. Modernization refers to the process of increased differentiation and specialization within a society, particularly around its industry and infrastructure (<https://sites.psu.edu/aspsy/2017/04/social-change-in-the-society>, 04.09.2019). All in all, currently, the entire world is scrutinized not only as a global village but also as a global family. Within that context, social relationships among people have become more complex evidencing more negative signs than positive in all production, delivery and consumption processes.

As Sri Lanka is now in middle income society, technology based changes are very complex. As middle income families tend to maintain social class, status, comparison with peers, there are many social problems increasing the unrest, stress, health issues etc. All are in a competition in achieving their needs and wants such as education, housing, vehicles, functions such as weddings, parties, festivals etc. Current generation inclines toward technology and market rather than traditional society. Accordingly, having big and modern house, private vehicle, office jobs, outdoor functions etc are the priority in individuals', families' and organizations' needs.

Changes in Family

Family, as the primary and most important social institution in the society, is highly affected by these continuous changes. Changes of socio, cultural, economic, demographic, geographical and political etc directly or indirectly affect the family and its members. As many other countries in the world, family structure has been converted from extended family to nuclear family in Sri Lanka (more than 80%) making complex changes of the role and responsibilities of its members and other related institutions. This reshaping family size and members' role is decisive for the role of market that provides shelter, food, health, education, leisure, security and so on. When there were extended families, many function within the family was managed by the members of the family such as caring children and elders, income generations, functions such as parties and festivals etc. At present, however, market has to organize to cater all such needs and wants. Accordingly, villages and towns should be organized.

Knowledge Economy

Education is the most important phenomena in current Sri Lankan society. Many changes in the society has occurred centering education (Perera, 2009). One of the reasons by which Sri Lanka could reach to the category of middle income is the education. Irrespective of factors such as sex, age, social class, rural or urban or any other factors, people give priority for the education in their personal and family agendas (Perera, 2008). Free education is given from the grade one to first degree level by the government enhancing the opportunities to the upward social mobility to reach higher and higher in social ladder. However, as the opportunities are limited, competition is high and students have to face examinations competitively for score the highest marks to win that "Social race". To address the issue, tuition classes and private educational institutes have been emerged as blooming mushrooms in everywhere in the society from

kindergarten to advanced levels while private schools and universities in national and international level expanding annually throughout each and every cities and towns in the country.

Literacy rate is higher in the country as 92.6 (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/LKA/sri-lanka/literacy-rate>, 22.11.2019). Students attempt to enhance their knowledge through several sources while improving skills to a less extent and without given more attention to improve attitudes positively to maintain social relations. As secondary socialization agents, education institutions play a major role in students' lives. Education has merged with the industries and markets as well. Village based traditional economy around agriculture and rural industries has been changed generating many social changes such as lower supply labor for traditional jobs including agriculture, more demand for housing in urban areas, late marriages etc.

Woman Role

Education is also highly influential cause to change the women's role, responsibilities and status in the society. After entering to the job market, woman has to engage in dual role in the home and working place. Complexity of women role in modern society affect on family, society as well as woman herself in various ways than traditional societies. The highest percentage of the Sri Lankan economy is contributed by the women in lower social class through tea industry, garment factories and Middle East migration. At the same time, taking the advantages of education which help to empower the woman to reach the upward social mobility, many girls in lower middle and middle class are entering to the higher education which may pave the way to complex socio, cultural and demographical issues as well as its positive impacts. For instance, a recent research (Perera, 2015) conducted among female university students, has found that higher

education directly and significantly cause to delay their marriage or singlehood. In many aspects, singlehood as well as the late marriages create multiple issues not only for the women but also to the entire society. Taking into consideration, this rapid trend of female's interest to have higher education qualifications, sociologists predict that "Future world would be administered by women".

In this way, Sri Lankan women and their role significantly change the markets and industries in short and long term. It can be identified several areas as matters to be discussed such as housing location and structures, infrastructures and other facilities, transport, workplace facilities and layouts of industries, work places etc. Woman rights, gender aspect, equal rights, etc should be in serious attention when planning premises and structure as more and more females are holding different roles in everywhere.

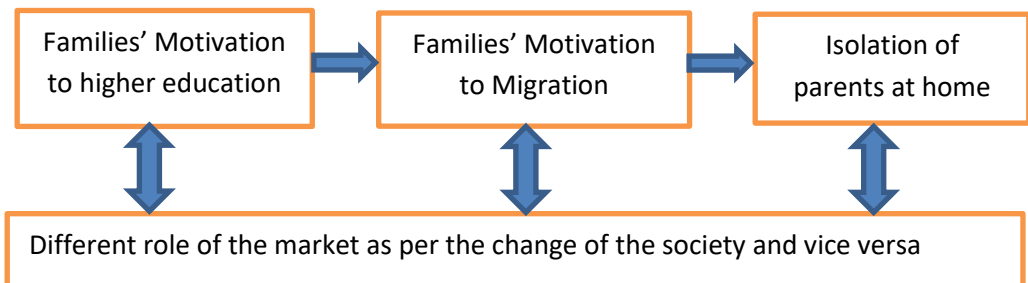
Social Mobility

At the same time it can be seen a rapidly increasing trend of greater mobility of population locally as well as internationally in current society than it was in the past. People who are in rural areas wish to move to suburban areas, while the people in suburban areas are seeking places to settle in main urban areas. Also some people tend to go abroad and settle down in more developed countries. While some are migrating to abroad having placements in higher education institutions, some are migrating seeking job opportunities.

According to the recent statistics of Foreign Ministry of Sri Lanka, higher number of students migrate to foreign countries for higher education annually. (<https://wenr.wes.org/2017/08/education-in-sri-lanka>, 18.11.2019). As Ariyawansa and Perera (2018) revealed, parents wish to

fulfill their children's higher education desires somehow or other, in that effort, they have to sell their properties, mostly the house where they live. This study also revealed that more than 90% of the suppliers (among the sample 100 house sellers in selected suburbs in Colombo) in the secondary lower middle income housing market were planning to sell their houses with the view to raise funds for migration purposes. This clearly proves that different migration motives of the society has direct impact of the housing market. These migrants as well as many other people who had local education particularly from international schools and higher education institutions go abroad seeking higher education and job opportunities, would not return to the country. Sometimes such migrants would transfer foreign currency to the country increasing some investment and development such as houses shops etc. worse case of such migration process would be that looking after the parents of migrants creating some social problems in Sri Lanka society. Market may have to find solution for such social problems through elderly care services and facilities.

Figure 02- Family Motivation Vs Markets



Source: Author constructed

Production, Delivery and Consumption Processes

Impact of above

processes on technology is huge and vice versa. The 'technology' refers to the application of knowledge to making of tools and the utilization of natural resources (Schaefer and Lamm, 1992). Technology in modern society plays a significant role in each and every person's life starting a long and complex process from the mother's womb to the graveyard. Registration of birth, medical reports, getting the information and knowledge of every and each aspect of life, reservations of the tickets from railways, air ports, visa for migration purposes, maintenance of accounts in banks, paying utility bills, and leading businesses, for the relaxation and recreations, maintaining friendship and even the day today consumption needs, man has to depend on technology. Modern technology has made peoples' lives easier and it is difficult to think about the life without the internet, the automobile, or electricity.

As Thomas Friedman (2005) argues that technology is a driving force behind globalization, while the other forces of social change (social institutions, population, environment) play comparatively minor roles (<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/sociology/chapter/social-change>, 16.08.2019). Modern technology and scientific developments have also revolutionized the quality of the systems of production, communication, social organization and peoples' lives in various ways helping to realize life goals with less effort, less cost and with greater efficiency.

Emerging Social Problems

Social changes create various social problems. The norms, values, beliefs, customs, traditions, life styles and law of the society get reshaped as a result of particular change occurring within or outside the society.

Job Engagement and Satisfaction: Eminent Sociologists such as Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx have observed that as far as man close to the technology, more than that closeness he loses the mental happiness in producing as well as consuming the product due to the concept of division of labour. Marx explains this as “alienation” which means separation from the belonging of that production as the production is not done by the man himself and as a result of that he either cannot gain the satisfaction of finishing the work or has the right of ownership for the product. In applying this theory to the current working world it can be seen work related issues such as stress, feeling of monotonous, lack of job satisfaction etc mostly people cannot gain happiness through working because of the alienation from the work. Currently, in Sri Lanka, people tend to work hard from the childhood to achieve higher positions in the society. Question is, whether they are happy after achieving the higher education qualifications and highest positions in the occupation hierarchy with more and more benefits, privileges, resources and what they wanted in their need hierarchy?

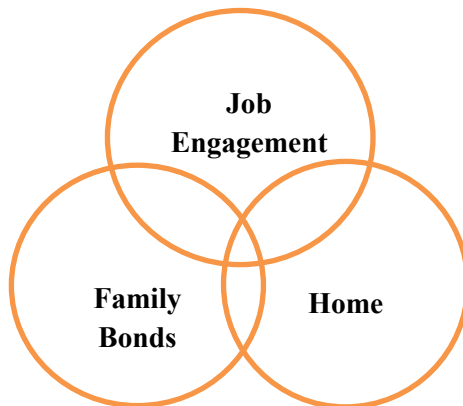
Housing sector is also the same in current Sri Lankan society. For an example; need of a house is a human right. How this right is fulfilled by the people in current society? Home can be simply defined as the most comfortable place which gives the mental relaxation for the person, no matter whether it is a palace, slum, shanty or a hut. House has a symbolic value which helps to show the social status in current Sri Lankan society. Investing all the wealth, person possesses and if there is a monetary gap, filling it through loans with higher interests and bonding to recover it with 15 to 20 years and adding all the modern features, realize the dream of a house. Thereafter, instead of gaining physical and mental comfort from the home, people have to spend their time and labour to maintain the house and to do every effort to re-pay the loan without staying at home. This is the

hidden reality of the current housing sector that emerged due to several social changes as discussed above.

Family Bond: Mostly, current house wife of the family is also very busy with her dual role in the home as well as in outside the home as an income earner for the family economy. Children from very young age have to spend their life in a day care centers and after that school in morning and tuition classes for the rest of the days. There is no time to have recreations or relaxations and also to moving with the family members sharing what they see, hear, feel, experienced within the day improving emotional bonds and close relationship which is the real meaning of family. As a result of that, family members have to isolate within their own home as outsiders, losing the solutions for their problems, helps for their troubles and heartiest bonds which cannot be gain from anywhere else. Within this background they may try to develop relationships with outsiders of the home and as a result they have to be victimized various types of abuses, cheatings and crimes.

All in all, job engagement, home place and family can be recognized as three major variable which maintain triangular relationships as depicted below.

Figure 03: Triangular Relationship among Job, Family Bond and Home



Source: Author Constructed

As per the above figure, most important social phenomenon can be identified in different forms. It is better if the marketers, policy makers and planners or strategists can produce or develop processes ensuring a mix of three phenomenon in an appropriate way to make sure the stable socio-economic development.

Conclusion

Change is an unavoidable phenomenon and due to this globalized world, changes are increased rapidly. As a country which has reached to middle income level, we should expect different type of changes as peoples' life styles are changing accordingly. Within a short period, number of visible features can be observed due to physical development of the country and changing life styles of the people. Development means socio, economic, cultural and moral development not mere physical development. The question is, even if Sri Lanka has reached to the higher income level and life patterns of the people are changing accordingly, are people living happily? Are people satisfied with their wealthy lives? If a person is success he should have happiness. Buddhist philosophy highlights that "happiness is the biggest wealth". Even though people sacrifice their lives to earn physical wealth as far as possible and achieve life goals, can people earn happiness which human beings need more. Many people in current society have neglect social and psychological wellbeing of their life when they plan their lives. Therefore, individuals, policy maker, planners should think about socio cultural, psychological wellbeing of human beings as similar as economic development.

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