

SOCIAL CHANGE — ITS PROBLEMS AND REWARDS

By

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Thank you for your kind introduction. I wish to express my appreciation for the high honour bestowed on me by your invitation to visit Qatar and your University. It is a great privilege to have this opportunity to lecture to you on a topic of major interest not only to you but to the whole world. I hope the remarks I share with you tonight will serve as an incentive for us to engage in a stimulating and meaningful discussion. I apologize for my inability to address you in the Arabic language and to subject you to the problem of trying to follow my thoughts in English. I am happy that some of you are very fluent in English and will be able to interpret my remarks to those who may be less fluent. This has been a very happy visit to the State of Qatar and I am very much impressed by all the signs of constructive activity I witness wherever I go.

The subject of my address tonight is Social Change: Its Problems and Rewards. I chose this topic because of the interest all of us have in the phenomenon of social change. I selected it also so that we can reassure ourselves that change has both negative and rewarding aspects, all change is not good; neither is change all bad. With living as you are surrounded by evidences of social change which seems to be taking place in such a rapid rate, it is understandable that you will want to discuss this phenomenon over and over. This is necessary to try to clarify the major issues associated with rapid social change. This is essential to provide a base for making decisions that will be constructive and will further the development of Qatar.

Social change has so many different meanings that it would not be possible nor desirable in such a short address to try to analyze it thoroughly and give attention to all of its meanings and aspects. Thus, I do not expect you to agree with all I shall say, but I hope you will bear with me in what will seem to some of you a very superficial handling of a many faceted subject.

Let me proceed by making some general comments about social change. Change takes place not only in all societies but in the various parts of each society. Not only is change inevitable but the rates of change among societies, and within the various parts of each society, proceed at different rates of speed. Thus, while change may be more rapid in one society than in another, we must recognize that change within a society varies in rate of change also.

In the past when societies and nations lived in relative isolation from some other societies, some nations which were the most isolated changed very slowly. Change in the isolated societies was slow because there was no urgent need for change and the people continued primarily in the well known and secure life styles to which they are accustomed.

With the advent of industrialization, however, those nations which became industrialized first began to witness very rapid change in their life styles and changes are continuing in the present time. Industrialization has brought not only higher standards of living but also deep problems for which these societies are continuing to try to find mechanisms for their solutions.

Today there are no longer societies isolated from other societies except in very rare situations. The concerns of social change are facing all of us. We must, therefore, accept the fact of change. Acceptance of this fact results in the necessity of both understanding and experiencing the feelings associated with change. Basically, we both want and do not want change to take place. Moving from the familiar to the unknown creates strong feelings of fear, anxiety, confusion, a sense of being overwhelmed, and loss as well as feelings of anticipation, exhilaration, excitement and hope. We may feel as if we were standing on one side of a chasm wanting to get to the other side but no bridge is provided. Pertinent questions come to mind. Shall we try to build a bridge? Can we fly across? What are the problems and hazards we will encounter and must overcome to reach the other side safely. What if the method we select is not workable and we fall into the chasm? How would we accept this probable defeat? Other questions will be in relation to what resources we possess to solve the problems and to what sources can we turn for help or assistance.

In spite of the uncertainties, in spite of the difficulties in our path, the hope and excitement of attaining our goal, of reaching the other side of the chasm provides the strength and motivation for us to try. As we seek to find the needed answers, we discover that others have learned to cross chasms and that it is appropriate to turn to them for assistance. We learn that the assistance they can provide can be both technological and ideological. In other words it consists of both material and non-material aspects. Do we have to take both? Is the assistance available consonant with what we want for ourselves. Thus, we must pause prior to, and many times during, our taking of assistance to assess its worth and to evaluate its probable effects upon our life styles.

We know it is not possible to have everything we want. We know that there must be trade-offs. We know a price must be paid whenever changes are made.

The question before us becomes one of deciding how much of the security of the present safety we are willing to risk to bridge the chasm to the unknown.

As we ponder the probable effects of our actions, we realize that no society can duplicate another and I hope we accept that there is no reason for one society to try to duplicate another. There are matters of the cultures of societies to be considered since the culture provides the values and norms (standards of behaving) for the culture. We become aware that changes in any part of the society stimulates changes in every other part.

More questions are before us for answers such as "How do we face the situation of changing one part of the society and retain those values we wish to keep?" How do we meet this dilemma and attain the positive awards of the desired change while minimizing the possible negative aspects. Even though sociologists and other academicians interested in this phenomenon have attempted to explore it deeply and have written volumes of material, there are no set rules as to how societies will change and no accurate methods for predicting the effects of change. Theories have been developed, modified, discarded and modifications of old theories have been reintroduced and new theories developed. Thus, while we possess considerable knowledge about social change we are still faced with a sea of uncertainty as how to deal with it.

Regardless of our present state of knowledge, change is continuous and inevitable; we cannot stop it nor should we permit it to occur in a haphazard manner. It seems to me the more appropriate way of behaving would be to plan the change we desire in our societies and attempt to develop mechanisms to give some direction to the course we desire it to take. In our planning efforts we must direct our attention in depth to studies and evaluations of the experiences of other societies in an attempt to avoid some of their pitfalls while benefiting from their successes. As we plan we must develop some measures to predict the probable effects of planned change on the other aspects of our society and even the probable effects of the effects.

Constructive planning requires that we set goals. Goal setting is an essential ingredient in planning. In goal setting clarification of goals must be made which can then lead to the selection of more realistic goals possible of attainment. With clear goals strategies can be chosen to bring about the desired change. Goals must be consonant with the important values in the society. Since I will not attempt to be a one week expert on Qatar society, I hope you will bear with me as I draw illustrations from American society to try to clarify what I have said.

As you perhaps know, the United States long considered itself the haven for the peoples of the world who for whatever non criminal reason desired to settle there. You know also of the ideal of the United States as a "melting pot" with equal opportunity and justice for all as its motto. Assimilation was assumed to be the process by which this goal would be achieved. You know also that the ideal and reality have always been far apart. However, with the idealistic goal present and clear, the basis has been there to provide impetus to changes which have been made to attempt to implement the goal. As a result of these changes many disadvantaged groups who were excluded from the opportunity to participate in the main stream of American society are moving closer to that achievement. In this process of social change many problems are present for which there are no known solutions. Even the ideal of the "melting pot" has been modified. The diverse groups which make up American society are no longer in favour of assimilation as the way to achieve full participation in American society but perceive of that society as pluralistic or one which provides equality of opportunity while permitting groups to retain some of the values and norms relevant to their distinctive life styles.

Let us examine briefly how one technological change sparked the creation of other changes with their rewards and problems. As an American black, I am a member of a minority group which for three hundred years has been deprived of optimum enjoyment of the American dream. Slavery was introduced into America because it was considered an economic asset. It would probably have been discontinued if it had not been for the invention of the cotton gin. With cotton as "king" there was need for labour and slave-labour filled this need. As it flourished, a life style became entrenched in the United States which flagrantly violated its Constitution and its first ten amendments known as the "Bill of Right." This was possible because the masters justified the continuation of slavery on moral grounds insisting that it was within their religious beliefs to raise the level of functioning from savagery to civilization. Even after the legal emancipation of slavery, mechanisms were utilized and condoned by the very government which outlawed slavery to keep blacks in a state of subjugation. Black codes were written in the statute books of some states and municipal governments and thus were enforced by law. In other areas subjugation of blacks was enforced by custom.

However, the idealized value of justice and equal opportunity for all pricked the consciences of many Americans who saw the treatment of blacks and other minorities as contrary to this stated ideal. Without the assistance of such persons, the process of change would have been slower even than it has been. Dissatisfaction with the status quo had always been present among blacks but feeling powerless to bring about the desired change, major efforts were directed to an accommodation to the situation. By the middle of the present century,

dissatisfaction with the rate of change gave impetus to blacks to assert themselves to achieve freedom. The civil rights struggle of the sixties was supported by many sympathetic caucasians who joined in the struggle with the blacks. Sparked by university students and given guidance by persons like the late Dr. Martin Luther King and the former Ambassador to the United Nations, the Reverend Andrew Young, change was achieved and Civil Rights Legislation was passed by the Federal Government outlawing discrimination. It is interesting to note that in the selection of possible strategies to try to achieve its goal, the leaders of the struggle turned to the non violent strategies of Mahatma Gandhi. Non violent behaviour was studied and in practice sessions the participants learned how to handle insults and attacks on their persons in a non violent manner.

It would be naive to believe that the passage of legislation would immediately resolve the issues in the struggle. The struggle continues and will be present for some time but legislation provides the base for these continued activities to achieve the goal. Implementation has been forestalled by the strong resistance of some members of the society who view the inclusion of minority groups in the American Dream as an infringement on their rights. Lately as the economy of the United States is experiencing a difficult time, resistance to the implementation of civil rights legislation has stiffened to the point where many are fearful that some of the advances achieved in the sixties will be nullified.

In addition to the fact that many blacks have benefitted as a result of the civil rights struggle and avenues to fuller participation in the mainstream of American society are more available, an additional reward is that the black struggle inspired other disadvantaged groups to marshall their forces to achieve their rights as guaranteed by the United States Constitution. Among these groups are the Spanish Americans, the native Americans (American Indians) and women. Pressures from persons suffering from other handicapping conditions have also come to the forefront.

I use this lengthy illustration to point out that the fact of change brings with it problems as well as rewards. I use it to demonstrate that regardless of the conditions surrounding change, the process of change is one of continued struggle. I use this illustration also to point out that change is always met with resistance to the change, and I use it to show that there is always present in the elements of the society desiring change a relation to the values and ways of behaving of the indigenous culture. Societies devoid of problems of racism with its resultant problems of prejudice and discrimination must confront other major issues where there are pressures for change. Whatever the situation, the commonalities I have listed are among the issues which must be faced and for which solutions must be found.

In the civil rights illustration cited above I should mention that another reward growing out of the passage of the legislation is that it gave those persons who regarded racial segregation as morally wrong the opportunity to function in keeping with their value stand openly.

Since the problem of racism has been one of the pervasive ones in American society let me cite another approach to change other than legislation. The supreme court of the United States in a judicial decision in 1954 found that segregation in public education was contrary to the constitution of the United States. This decision which reversed an earlier 1898 decision which had established the doctrine of separate but equal education as permissible under the constitution was met with strong and in some situations violent resistance by some caucasians who believed the decision would cause extreme disruption in their families and way of life.

In addition to the violent reaction of some caucasian groups other problems seemed unresolvable in implementation of the decision. Blacks for many generations have for the most part lived in special areas and except in the south where busing to schools was a way of life to maintain segregation, the concept of the neighbourhood school was the prevalent one. Thus, in many areas where by location of residence the schools were racially segregated, busing was viewed as a reasonable device to assure integrated education. As you probably know, more than a quarter of a century has passed since the 1954 Supreme Court Decision and communities within the American Society are still struggling to resolve the problems related to its implementation.

This illustration gives support to the complexity of social change in today's societies. In this situation a decision by the highest court in America initiated a series of other complex situations requiring change. If we consider both of these illustrations together, I think we will note they have such items in common. Among these commonalities the positive ones include :

- (1) The society was stimulated to function more in keeping with its accepted ideals.
- (2) The self image of members of minority groups was strengthened.
- (3) By Law and by Judicial decision the legal base for discrimination was outlawed.
- (4) The possibility of full participation in the main stream of American society became realistic for members of disadvantaged groups.

On the negative side, the ledger changes created such disruption of the status quo that some members of the society resisted the changes even to the point of use of violence. The problems of implementing social change even with the support of legislative and judicial action are multiple and complex. Prediction of the effects of change has not been solved.

I indicated earlier in this address that continual assessment and clarification of goals are necessary ingredients in maximizing the optimum effects of change efforts. I pointed out also that every change effort is accompanied by problems and negative aspects which hopefully can be minimized by planning.

To continue with our discussion of social change we must consider that as a result of desirable technological advances changes can be expected in the non material elements of a society. While technological change may be more easily understood and accepted, changes in the non material aspects of a society are often met with more resistance. We find ourselves at the point of questioning ourselves as to whether technological advances and subsequent changes in the material aspects of society and non material or humanistic values must be in conflict. It is a challenge to every society to develop strategies to develop technologically and ideally at the same rates of speed. Whether this challenge can be met successfully is unknown but there is the possibility that man with his great wisdom to solve technological problems may find methods to deal with humanitarian problems more successfully.

My major interest is in the realm of humanistic values and I will limit the rest of my address to consideration of social change as affecting these values. Every society to survive must have methods for caring for the welfare of its members. All human societies share universally basic needs for provision of shelter, food, clothing and protection, satisfaction of these needs, however, results in a wide myriad of life styles as each society makes these provisions in ways which are consonant with its values and ways of behaving. Prior to the technological changes which made all of us neighbours, life styles were developed that were functional for a specific society in light of the environment in which the society was located. The types of clothing we wore, the types of food we ate, the types of shelters we devised and methods for protection were relevant to what the environment provided. We know, however, that all types of basic human behaviour are known in all societies. What is permitted in one society may be vastly different from what is permitted in other societies. Children are socialized into a particular society and through this process are expected to learn and practice the ways of behaving associated with that society. In present times, however, societies no longer have the option of living in isolation from others and in maintaining their life styles unscathed by contact with other life styles.

Fear and anxiety become prominent especially among the older members of the society as they see their youths begin to adopt ways of alien cultures. Some of the fear is understandable both because of the unknown effects upon these adoptions on the stability of the society but also because the adopted ways may be viewed as incongruent with the values of the indigenous culture.

The process of diffusion or borrowing from one society for possible adoption by another has been practiced ever since human societies have had contact with each other. Diffusion has had positive results on the life styles of societies. What is new about borrowing is the rapidity with which changes are made or expected to be made and the resulting lack of time for the adopting society to test the consonance of the possible adoption within its existing life style.

The potential, therefore, is real, that disruption will occur in established institutions such as the family, education, religion with too rapid adoption of borrowed items from other cultures and societies. Industrialization by way of illustration brings about changes not only in the economic structure of a society but also in family structure. As more family members become involved in the work world for money wages, changes in role performances can be predicted and expected. While role performances may change conflict arises when role expectations do not change harmoniously with role performance. In addition some families in the society may inaugurate changes in the expected behaviour more rapidly than what may occur in more conservative families. I am certain all of you are aware of some of the problems and rewards in this situation.

Please permit me to use an example again from American society to illustrate this point. Less than two hundred years ago the United States was an agrarian society. Large families with several generations living in the same structure or nearby were economic and social assets. Many hands were needed to provide the family with the basic needs of food, shelter, clothing and protection. Large families were assets also to assure that some would survive to care for the elder family members when they could no longer care for themselves.

With the advent of industrialization and urbanization, large families were no longer an asset but became an economic liability. Family members moved away from the family home to be closer to places of employment. Many of the functions formerly performed by the family were assigned to other institutions. In addition more technological advances decreased the need for many hands to perform the tasks essential to the well being of the family. Mobility required that only the nucleus family be established as the preferred family structure. Removal from the protective environment of the home and the support of family members created the soil in which family problems nourished. Some of the

problems which would formerly have been the concern of the family had to be handled by persons unrelated to the family. While several sources have at times tried to meet these needs, I will identify one structure which has become a permanent part of our society and that is a bureaucratic welfare system.

The present system while organized to meet many of the needs of individuals, families and communities is felt to be unresponsive to these needs by many. Problems created by industrialization with its growth of cities, secularization and changes of family structure have left many people feeling isolated and rootless. I know that many of you have been following **Roots** by Alex Hayley and are conscious of what the meaning of roots meant to that family. It is interesting to note that many of my non black friends who viewed **Roots** were aroused to anxiety because of the rootlessness of their immediate families. With an increasing number of families living at great distances from their families of orientation, their children are growing to adulthood with little or no association or contact with their kinsmen. By the same process many elderly people are lonely and not in contact with their families in a physical sense. In trying to respond to the needs of many elderly people, the welfare systems in some parts of the country has sponsored a program where elderly people serve as substitute grandparents for children without contact with older adults in their own families. These situations in which families lose contact with their members and where intergenerational interaction is not possible have a direct relationship to the changes in human values. Realizing that changes in family patterns may have negative effects on maintenance of desirable human values, a society must make plans to cope with such changes. The special challenge to societies such as Qatar which are just beginning to experience the effects of industrialization is how to set priorities in the human area as well as in the technological. The challenge is how to preserve, maintain and strengthen those values which are conducive to life in an industrial society, how to modify values that lack some congruence with the changes in society and how to discard those which are no longer meaningful. The challenge is how to make such selections, how to establish priorities and how to develop measures to prevent more accurately the effects of change. While each society must actually solve its own value conflicts in light of its own culture, I have suggested that a structure of a system of social welfare responsive to the human needs of the society can contribute to the prevention and solution of some problems associated with social change. Such a system can help assure the members of the society the attainment of a decent standard of living consonant with the advances in the world. For successful work the structure must make certain that the practitioners providing social welfare services have the knowledge, attitudes and skills essential for such practice. The profession of social work has developed methodology based on knowledge and appropriate attitudes to educate social workers.

I am happy that Qatar has recognized the importance of attention to the area of human living as well as technological advance by making available to its university students education in disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, social work and sociology. I cannot over emphasize the importance of planned attention to what is happening to humanity in periods of rapid social change and the necessity to conserve essential human values. Let us remember that what we borrow from other cultures for adoption needs to be examined in the light of the probable effects on the existing culture. There is a saying that "the grass looks greener on the other side." Let us examine the grass carefully and test it to see whether it will thrive in our society before we buy it, plant it and hope it will take on the characteristics we desired and expected. Cultures and societies like individuals and like grasses are of many varieties. Each has its own aspects of strength and problem. In a world which has grown so small, our dream may be for a world of complementary societies and cultures where each culture might add to the richness of the others while maintaining those elements essential to its uniqueness as a culture. It is my belief that with a strong sense of value, love and acceptance of ourselves, we can make meaningful and wise utilizations of experiences of other cultures.

In conclusion let me reiterate. Change is inevitable, we cannot stop it but we can make constructive use of knowledge and develop new knowledge to try to shape the course of change. We are all neighbours. Neighbours in the most constructive sense care about each other and share with each other. For the relationship to flourish, the sharing must be one of mutual respect for each other and the unique contributions each can make for the good of all. Coping with social change is, therefore, a world problem as well as one for each society. It is a challenge but human beings have constantly been able to respond positively to challenges. As we meet this challenge, let us give special priority to human values and the conservation of those that contribute to healthy and fruitful living.

It has been a great pleasure to address this audience. Again let me express my appreciation for this opportunity to lecture to you. I will risk my limited knowledge of the Arabic language by saying "Shukran wa assalam alaykum."