

## NEO EVOLUTIONISM

Classical or unilinear evolutionists had to face rough criticism by 20<sup>th</sup> century diffusionists and relativists, on the ground of empirical data. **Diffusionists** emphasized on the need of cultural diffusion which brought about similarities in the culture of the world. They **disfavored the idea of 'psychic unity' and 'parallel inventions'** on the argument that men were uninventive, but they had limitless capacity to adapt and imitate, which is possible either by diffusion or migration.

**Historical Particularist** and cultural relativist **emphasized upon divergent trend in culture of an area or sub- area**. They were **not ready to accept unilinear sequences of cultural evolution**, in which cultural diversities were not denied, but they were of mere secondary importance.

In order to remove those shortcomings, neo evolutionary scheme was proposed by neo- evolutionists. Among Neo- evolutionists, **Leslie White and Julian Steward of America and V. Gordon Childe of Britain**, occupy most significant place in reviving evolutionary theory. Neo evolutionists believed that all the weaknesses of classical evolutionists theory can be solved, if it is accepted that **culture developed not in a unilinear sequence but in the form of parabolic curve**. According to parabolic curve theory of culture evolution, a social institution is born in a specific form in the early stage. It then gradually develops in entirely different form in different direction. It again moves towards original form but in a new developed form.

### The parabolic curve

Classical evolutionary theory- unilinear evolutionary scheme

Neo evolutionary theory- Parabolic scheme

#### **3<sup>rd</sup> stage**

1. Common ownership
2. Nudism
3. Sex- freedom

#### **2<sup>nd</sup> stage**

1. Individual ownership
2. Body covered cloth
3. Monogamy

#### **1<sup>st</sup> stage**

1. Common ownership
2. Shortage of cloth
3. Sexual promiscuity

For instance, the institution of property was born in the form of communal ownership or communism. In Medieval time, the common ownership took the form of private ownership. Today again the concept of common ownership through state has developed.

Similarly beginning- lack of clothes- men remain naked-invention of clothes made possible to naked cover the entire body – but in present time, adoption of fashion compelling to remain half naked.

In field of sex relation, in early stage – sexual promiscuity, in course of time monogamy- again in present time, argument for sex-based freedom.

### **GORDON CHILDE**

Gordan Childe was a **trained Archeologist** and on the basis of collection of materials remain from East and Europe, and comparing them he attempted to make evolutionary scheme alive.

His most **famous book**, which describes evolution of culture, is “**Social Evolution**”. He describes evolution of culture in terms of 3 major events:

- *Invention of food production*
- *Urbanization*
- *Industrialization*

Analyzing the transitions that took place under the impact of these major events, he presented an overall view of evolutionary process and delineated its common factors.

According to him, the evolution of archeological periods and cultural developments are as follows:

Sr. no.	Archeological Period	Cultural development
1.	Paleolithic Period	Savagery
2.	Neolithic Period	Barbarism
3.	Copper age	Higher barbarism
4.	Early bronze age	Civilization

His above scheme of evolutionary sequences clearly reveals that he was very much influenced by Tylor's and Morgan's evolutionary schemes i.e. savagery, barbarism and civilization. Thus, he was a devout follower of unilinear evolution of classical evolutionist. He did not place particular groups into savagery, barbarism and civilization as L.H Morgan had done. But he was closer to E.B. Tylor, who had talked that **mankind as a whole had passes through successive cultural development stages of savagery, barbarism and civilization**. As Childe discussed evolution of culture of mankind as a whole, **Julian Steward called him as Universal Evolutionists**, because he had placed general stages of evolution applicable to mankind as a whole not of specific or particular cultures which were the creation of local environmental factors.

In establishing universal sequence of cultural development, Childe opined that all societies had lived in different historical environments and had passed through different ups and downs due to which their traditions had diverged. As a result of which multiplicity had emerged in cultural ethnography.

Childe was of the opinion that a drastic change in life pattern of mankind appeared in civilizational stage in which an aggressive attitude towards environment developed among mankind. Forest dwellers or cave dwellers became house dwellers, hunter gatherers became food producers by adopting agriculture. Writing made them capable of preserving their tradition and mathematics helped them in counting things. The development of cities made them urbanized. Technology development of smelting made them capable of producing durable utensils and implements.

Thus, according to him at **each stage of cultural development, mankind developed their technological skill to exploit natural resources**. In the early stage. Less advanced technological skill had made them less aggressive towards environment, but as knowledge went on increasing, they became more and more aggressive.

#### **WEAKNESS OF CHILDE'S SCHEME**

- Being an Archeologist, he **relied too much on archaeological data** in formulating his cultural sequences.
- He was **unable to differentiate between the old and present-day hunters and food gatherers**.
- Childe's most serious shortcoming was **lack of interest in civilizational sequence outside middle east and Europe**.

#### **LESLIE A. WHITE**

The basic strategy of White's evolutionism is **cultural materialism phrased in energy terms**. White's two famous books, "**The Science of culture**" and "**The evolution of Culture**", deal with the theoretical issues related to his approaches of neo- evolutionism.

Culture advances as the amount harnessed per capita per year increases or as the efficiency or economy of the means of controlling energy is increased or both.

In earliest stage of human development, man used his own physical strength as the major sources of energy, but with the introduction of tools, he began to increase his amount of energy. Later on, he began to capture other source of energy such as fire, water and wind etc. and utilized them for his own purpose.

According to White, **culture is basically a survival mechanism and that energy is required to provide man with the necessities for his continued existence**.

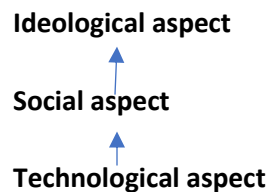
Leslie White defined culture as an **EXTRASOMATIC TEMPORAL CONTINUUM** of things and events dependent upon symbolism.

The cultural system can be divided into **three sub- systems**:

- *Technology/ techno-economic*
- *Social*
- *Ideological*

The most basic one is technology, tools, weapons and knowledge of their use. Here lies the means of capturing and utilizing energy as well as for meeting other two important requirements for cultural survival, protection from elements and defense against enemies.

The other two sub systems are social and ideological. All three are in a mutually influencing interrelationship, but technology dominates by operating through social structure on ideology.



Technological subsystems control the amount of energy captured and utilized by the cultural system. As the technology becomes more efficient, more energy is captured and utilized, which leads to development in culture as whole.

And thus to cite some of White's examples- a railroad worker's union is based on technological fact of having a railroad and the social institutions formed by the existence of the rail road. **Technology determines concepts of female beauty:** "In cultures where technological control over food supply is slight and food is frequently scarce as a consequence, a fat woman is often regarded as beautiful. In cultures where food is abundant and women work little, obesity is likely to be regarded as unsightly[!]" (White 1959a:21).

### **LESLIE'S LAW OF CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Culture advances as the amount of energy harnessed per capita per year increases or as the efficiency or economy of the means of controlling energy is increased or both.

This **law of culture development can be represented by formula**

$$E * T = C$$

E- Energy  
T- Technology  
C - Cultural Development

In this way White's stage of development were Savagery, Barbarism and Civilization and Energy revolution.

Throwing light on social organization, he opined that it is combination of 3 processes i.e. Nutrition, Protection and Reproduction.

$N * P * R = S$       N- nutrition  
P- Protection  
R- Reproduction  
S – Social organization

He formulated Property as follows

$T * L = P$                       T – Things  
L- Labor  
P- Property

Steward called him as **universal evolutionist**, who dealt with culture as a whole and not particular or specific culture.

### **WEAKNESS OF WHITE'S SCHEME**

White gave **much importance to techno economic factors** and proposed that each type of techno economic system conditioned a specific type of social organization. But this is not supported by ethnographic evidences. For example, agricultural systems have widely divergent form of social organization.

### **JULIAN H. STEWARD**

In his **book, “Theory of Culture Change”**, Steward suggested a threefold classification of evolutionary approaches. These are

- *Unilinear*
- *Universal*
- *Multilinear*

**Unilinear** – The classical 19<sup>th</sup> century evolutionist formulation which dealt with particular cultures placing them in stages of a universal sequences.

**Universal** - This designates the modern revamping of unilineal evolution, which is concerned with culture in general than in particular. In other words, it is concerned with evolution of culture of mankind as a whole, rather than with particular cultures. It is represented by Leslie White and V. Gordon Childe. It is applicable in the case of generalization only, but not in its treatment of particulars. In this scheme, distinctive cultural tradition and local variations are excluded as irrelevant.

**Multilinear** - This is like unilinear evolution in dealing with particular cultures, but it is distinctive in searching parallels of limited occurrence, instead of universals. Steward claims himself as Multilinear evolutionists, one who deals with the evolution of particular cultures and only with demonstrated sequences of parallel culture change in different areas.

**Approach of Multilinear evolution**, was to select for detailed comparison a small number of particular cultures that were in similar environments (e.g., same types of desert or forest) and at the same level of sociocultural complexity (family, tribe, or state). The cultures selected should be widely separated geographically to avoid the possibility of cultural similarities arising from diffusion. Consequently, similarities in the sample of cultures that Steward selected would be the result of parallel adaptations in the sense of similar responses to similar environmental conditions.

**Steward was of the opinion that all cultures of the world have not passed through the same developmental stage**, rather their stages were different in different areas or sub areas. For example, the sequences of cultural developments, in ice area, deserted area, forested area and plain area, are different due to varied environmental situations.

Culture evolution of these areas can be studied by choosing the limited parallels of evolution (**parallels of limited occurrence**) and comparing them with each other. Thus, cross cultural examinations of regularities or parallels will yield successful result of evolution.

Steward studies the cultures of Mexico, Mesopotamia, Egypt and China cross- culturally, and arrived at a conclusion that these cultures have evolved in the same developed stage beginning from pre-agriculture stage, but in different period following the multilinear course of evolution. These centers shared parallels of form, function and sequence” based on having developed in arid and semiarid environments in which economic basis was irrigation and floodwater agriculture. Agriculture created food surpluses that allowed for non-subsistence activities and population growth. When population growth reached the limits of agricultural productivity, competition over natural resources intensified, warfare ensued, and political leadership shifted from temple priest to warrior king. As some communities prospered and others suffered, empires were forged that instituted strong political controls over vast regions.

Steward traced the evolutionary similarities in the five ancient civilizations. Although chronology was different Steward argued that there were striking parallels in the pattern of cultural evolution, not because there were universal stages of cultural development but these five cultural traditions emerged in similar arid and semi arid environments where agriculture had been able to flourish.

Thus, Multilinear evolution is a methodology based on the assumption that significant regularities or parallels occur in culture change, and it is concerned with the determination of cultural laws. Its method is empirical rather than deductive. It is inevitably concerned with historical reconstruction but it does not expect that historical data can be classified into universal stages. It is concerned with local variations and diversified facts which force the frame of reference from particular to general. Thus, what is lost in universality, will be gained in concreteness and specificity. Multilinear evolution, has no prior schemes or law.

The methodological approach of multilinear evolution is to establish sequences of parallel development that could be investigated in empirical reality. It was Steward’s thesis that society with a similar technology, existing in similar environment, would parallel one another also in their forms of social and political organization.

Thus it appeared to him that hunter gatherers tended to form patrilineal band, and that widely scattered Indian societies, were comparable in their social political organization.



His argument was strengthened by the research of Karl Wittfogel, who showed that societies located in war undulating river, which carried out irrigation agriculture, originated state organizations, demonstrating the interaction between environment, technology and political organization.

### **STEWARDS'S CONCEPT OF MAN- HABITAT INTERACTION: CULTURAL ECOLOGY**

Steward suggested a systematic way to **study the dynamics of man- habitat interaction so as to get a process and at the same time to provide cross cultural generalizations**. His method was based on simple assumption that not all features of a given habitat, ecology, are relevant to a given socio- cultural system, nor all systematic element i.e. religion, politics, technology and kinship etc. are equally affected by man habitat interaction. The analyst task is to determine what features of the habitat bear upon the productive pattern of system by focusing on those systematic features, which empirical analysis shows to be most closely involved in the utilization of habitat in culturally prescribes way.

Cultural ecology is an **important branch of Ecological anthropology**. Ecological anthropology is broadly defined as study of relations between human beings and their environment. **Orlove defines ecological anthropology as the study of the relationship among the population dynamics, social organization and culture of human population and environment in which they live.**

**Cultural ecology is the study of the adaptation of a culture to a specific environment and how changes in that environment lead to changes in that specific culture.** It also focuses on how the overall environment, natural resources available, technology, and population density affect the rest of the culture and how a traditional system of beliefs and behavior allows people to adapt to their environment. Interplay between any population and their environment is the subject of ecological studies.

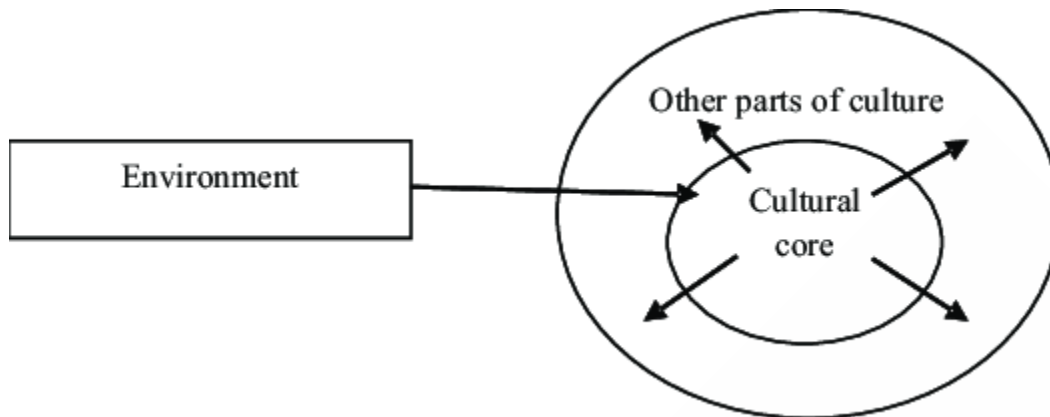
Cultural ecologists study how humans in their society and through specific cultures interact with the larger environment. In the case of human beings, much of the behavior involved in interaction with the environment is learned behavior that has become part of the reserve of learned skills, technology, and other cultural responses of a people in a society. Within this framework cultural ecology studies the relationship among the transformation of nature, social reproduction and cultural processes within particular social formation.

Cultural ecology is a theoretical approach that attempts to explain similarities and differences in culture in relation to the environment. Highly focused on how the, material culture, or technology, related to basic survival i.e. subsistence, cultural ecology was the first theoretical approach to provide a casual explanation for those similarities and differences. Developed by Steward in 1930s and 1940s, cultural ecology became an influential approach within Anthropology, particularly archaeology.

**In culture ecology, cultures, not individuals adapt.**

**Because culture is very complex, Steward did not think that all elements of culture were equally likely to be influenced by the environment. This led him to propose the concept of the “cultural core.”**

Steward proposed that we could begin to understand these adaptations by first examining the **cultural core**, as this was the critical cultural component that dealt with the ability of culture to survive. **The cultural core are the features of a society that are most closely related to subsistence activities and economic arrangements.** Furthermore, the core includes political, religious and social patterns that are connected to such arrangements.



Steward specified **3 steps in investigation of the cultural ecology of a society:**

- Describing the natural resources and technology used to extract and process them.
- Outlining the social organization of work for these subsistence and economic activities.
- Tracing the influence of these two phenomena on other aspects of culture.

Steward studied Shoshone of the Great Basin in the 1930s and noted that they were hunter gatherers heavily dependent on the pinon nut tree. Steward demonstrated that lower population densities exist in area where tree is sparsely distributed, thus illustrating the direct relationship between resource base and population density.

As Steward documented the limited natural resources, simple technology, and seasonal movements of Great Basin food collectors from arid basins to alpine piñon groves, a general model of hunting and gathering societies emerged. This model emphasized the egalitarianism and social fluidity of bands

Steward's early research on band society outlined parallels between such scattered societies as the Shoshone, Australian Aborigines, the San and other so-called Bushmen groups of southern Africa, and the Semang of Malaysia. He argued that they exhibited similar adaptations shaped by low population density, reliance on foot transportation, and hunting of scattered and non-migratory game.

### **MARSHALL SAHLINS AND ELMAN SERVICE**

Who were students of both White and Steward, **combined the views of both by recognizing two kinds of evolution- specific and general.**

In 1960, Sahlins and Service co-authored **Evolution and Culture**, in which they sought to reconcile the views of Steward and White. In the time-honoured anthropological tradition of treating biology and culture as analogues, they argued that, **like biological evolution, cultural evolution has two different dimensions.** The dimension of general evolution was being pursued by White, who was concerned with long-range evolutionary progress and trends, while the dimension of specific evolution was being pursued by Steward, whose explanation of local adaptation was analogous to Darwin's mechanism of natural selection. They demonstrated that White and Steward were really complementary rather than antagonistic.

According to them evolution moved simultaneously in 2 directions. On one side, it creates diversity through adaptive modification as a result new forms differentiate from old. On the other hand, evolution



generates progress, because of which higher form arise and surpass lower ones. The former is specific evolution and latter is general evolution.

They opine that specific and general evolution are not different reality, rather they are aspects of one total process.

The general cultural evolution is the study of successive forms such as hunting- gatherers bands, agriculturist, industrial revolution, atomic age, etc. through long periods of time. The specific cultural evolution on the other hand is the development of local cultures or groups of culture through relatively short period of time. The keynote of specific evolution is diversity brought about by localized factors such as environment, diffusion and invention.