**How is society organized and how does it change?**

Society is a very abstract term. Some define it as a group of people who share common living space and culture; others prefer to refer to it as the interaction and processes that occur amongst those people. Regardless of the definition, this group of people needs a structure to function. This essay will discuss how societies are organized in different social structures; and the factors that can contribute to the changes in social structure.

A social structure is a set of rules or norms that guides human interaction in a society. One of the main factors that form a society’s social structure is its culture, which includes its religious beliefs, social practices, race demography, language, cultural values, and even historical background. Take the caste system in India as an example; this social structure doesn’t allow certain caste such as Sudra to take on high-skill jobs even if they have the abilities to, marriage across caste is also seen as disgraceful; and there are numerous other rules that follow. As perplexing as it might seem to outsiders, this caste system is already ingrained in India’s culture due to its historical background and it can be considered as the main structure in which Indian society is organised.

Each society in different parts of the world has its own defining set of culture; this explains why different societies have its own unique set of social structures.

A society can also have multiple social structures in which it is organised, influenced by different aspects of the society. Culture in itself covers a very broad aspect of a society as it is already multifaceted and can give rise to more than one structure. However, I would like to explore another factor that is no less pivotal in forming a social structure which is a society’s means of production.

Karl Marx’s theory of historical materialism explains how a society is organised depending on its material condition (he identified six stages of material conditions in Communist Manifesto, naming primitive communism, slave society, feudalism, capitalism, socialism, and modern communism). While his theory might not always be applicable for all societies, it is definitely useful in explaining the prevalent system in a society depending on a society’s means of production. This system is a form of social structure as it governs people’s behaviour. For example, in a socialist system such as the UK, demanding for social welfare is seen as a right while it might be unthinkable for people in a feudal system such as Ethiopia.

Marx’s theory is a more systematic approach to analyse how a society is organised in comparison to cultural approach. However, cultural factor still undeniably plays a big role in explaining the subtle differences from society to society or the anomalies in societies such as Tibetan or Nepalese.

Marx’s theory is also useful in explaining a society’s structural change. With the change in means of production of a society, the dominant social class in a society will also change. This change in dominant social class will promote the change of system through the process of class struggle (when the new rising class attains enough power to overthrow the previously dominant class). The change in means of production can be induced by various factors such as the improvement in technology, shift in division of labour or capital accumulation. However, often times, these changes have to be accompanied by a change in a society’s culture as well. For example, China has had the comparative advantage of low-skilled labour for a very long time but it was only tapped on when there was a paradigm shift towards a more open China.

In conclusion, each society is a unique and dynamic society that are continuously affected by numerous factors, a change in social structure is a rather organic process that resulted from cumulative effect of all the contributing variables; and the same factors can result in different changes in different society. It is almost impossible to isolate one factor that is responsible for a change in social structure. However, it is always useful to draw a general trend with a systematic approach such as Marx’s theory in order to better prepare for the future of a society.