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# Spencer's theory of evolution

"Evolutionary Theory" or "The laws of evolution" is often regarded at the greatest contribution of the British sociologist Herbert Spencer to the realm of social thought. Spencer's ideals have left an indelible impression on the succeeding writers.

"Evolution" - The most exciting concept of the 19th century.

"Evolution" was one of the most exciting ideas of the 19th century. Its most influenced sponsor was the naturalist Charles Darwin. Darwin developed the concept of "Evolution" in his "origin of species - 1859." He saw social evolution as "a set of stages through which all the societies moved from simple to the complex and from the homogenous to the heterogeneous."



## Meaning of the concept of "Evolution"...

The term "evolution" comes from the Latin word "evolueere" which means "to develop" or to "unfold". It closely corresponds to the Sanskrit word "vikas". Evolution literally means gradual "unfolding" or "unrolling". It indicates changes from "within" and not from "without"; it is spontaneous, but not automatic. It must take place on its own accord.

## Meaning of "Social Evolution"

The term "evolution" is borrowed from biological science to science to sociology. The term "organic evolution" is replaced by "social Evolution" in sociology. Whereas the term "organic evolution" is used to denote the evolution of organism, the expression "social evolution" is used to explain the evolution of human society.



As L.A. Coser has pointed out the "evolutionary principle" or "the laws of evolution" constitutes the very basis of Spencerism. Spencerian interpretation relating to "evolution" could be divided into two parts :

- A) General Theory of evolution,
- B) Theory of Social Evolution.

### A). General Theory of Evolution

Spencer's "Theory of social evolution" is grounded in his "General Theory of evolution." But the evolutionary perspective as such, Spencer borrowed from Charles Darwin's "Evolutionary Theory."

Spencer's concept of "Universal Evolution"

Spencer has made "evolution" a universal principle in his treatise "First principles." According to Spencer, "evolution is a change from a state of relatively indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite coherent heterogeneity."



# Three basic Laws as proposed by Spence

Within the framework of universal evolution, Spence developed his "three basic laws" and his "four secondary propositions" each building upon each and all upon the doctrine of evolution.

## 1. Law of persistence of Energy or Force:

There is a persistence of force in the world. There is the persistence of some sustaining energy in which all phenomena are rooted and upon which all phenomena rest. But this force or energy itself lies beyond our knowledge. This is major, irreducible fact which we cannot explain, but which we are obliged simply to accept.

## 2] The law of Indestructibility of Matter:

This basic elements of matter and energy in the world are neither created nor destroyed, but conserved.

## 3] The law of continuity of Motion:

There is a continuous motion in the world. All things continue in motion. As it is in the case of matter, motion also cannot be stopped or destroyed. When the form of the matter changes, motion also changes.

## Four Secondary proposition or Laws

In relation to the evolutionary process, Spencer has mentioned of four secondary propositions or laws in addition to the three basic laws. They are as follows:

### a] Uniformity of Law:

There is a persistence of certain relationship among the forces in the world. The world is an order of elements.



Recurring manifestations of events in the natural world, the forces, elements of matter, and relation of motion existing among them have a definite regularity.

### b) Law of Transformation and Equivalence of Forces :

The Force, the elements of matter, the motion, are never lost or dissipated entirely in a process of change. They are merely transformed into the manifestation of some other event or some other form of existence.

### c) The law of Least Resistance and Great Attraction :

There is the tendency of every thing to move along the line of least resistance and of greatest attraction.

### d) The principle of Alteration or Rhythm of Motion :

All phenomena in nature have their own particular rate & rhythm of movement, of duration & development.

## Evolutionary Theory - A Joint Product of seven Laws :

It is significant to note that Spencer derived from these basic proposition his "law of evolution." According to Spencer, when we examine the nature of both order and changes in any kind of phenomena in the world we find that the pattern of transformation is the same & could be formulated in the following words.

"Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion, during which the matter passes from relatively indefinite incoherent homogeneity to a relatively definite coherent homogeneity.

### B) Social Evolution Theory :

Two of the main books written by Spencer namely, i) "The study of sociology", ii) "The principles of sociology", provide us more details about his "theory of social evolution."



As Abraham and Morgan have pointed out 'spencers' theory of evolution involves two essential but interrelated trends or strains of thought:

- i) change from simplicity to complexity or movement from simple society to various levels of compound societies ; and
- ii) Change from military society to industrial society.

i) change from simplicity to complexity , or  
Movement from simple society to various  
Levels of compound society.

Spencer identified four types of societies in terms of stages of their evolutionary development.

a) Simple Society: This is the most primitive society without any complexities.

b) Compound Society: A large number of above mentioned simple societies make a compound society. This is clan society.

c) Double compound Society: These consist of several clans compound into tribes.



d) Tribely compound society : Here the tribes are organized into nation states. This is the present form of the world.

ii) Change from Military Society to Industrial Society :

### Characteristics :

- i) Thus while the military society is characterised by compulsory co-operation, industrial society is based on voluntary co-operation.
- ii) While the military society has a centralised government, the industrial society has a decentralised government.
- iii) Military society has economic autonomy whereas it is not found in industrial society.
- iv) There is the domination of state over all other social organizations in the military society whereas in the industrial society the functions of the states are very much limited ; ~~correct~~