

# Development of Human Societies

Historians and other social scientists, using various models and criteria, have defined several stages of societal development. Some of them have made the list lengthy; others have made it short. However, historians seem to acknowledge that the two greatest revolutions in human history are the agricultural revolution and the industrial revolution. They also acknowledge that those two revolutions have had the greatest impact on human ways of living and states of living, or on peoples' cultures and economic conditions. There is also an agreement on at least three major stages of societal development, or civilizations: the pre-agricultural, or the hunting and gathering stage, the agricultural stage, and the industrial stage. Nevertheless, a growing number of historians and social scientists suggest that the information and communications revolutions of the 1980s represent another great revolution that is destined to transform both the ways of living and the states of living of people everywhere.

Changes that mature industrial societies, like the American society, have begun to experience in the 1990s have led some thinkers to herald the arrival of a new stage of societal development. This new, yet to be defined stage, is often referred to as the post-industrial age, the information age, or the globalization age. I call it the "knowledge age," because knowledge including new scientific discoveries, recent technological developments and innovations and their sociocultural and political and economic implications is fundamentally changing the ways of living and states of living of almost all societies in the world, not just the mature industrial ones.

A careful analysis of these stages should make it possible to place all major economic, political, social and cultural transformations in their proper historical contexts and enable us to track the process of human development and social progress over time. However, the intended analysis in this chapter is not meant to recount the history of human societies or underline its countless accomplishments. The sole purpose of this analysis is to find the thread that runs throughout all stages of societal development forming the continuous human movement that is called the “historical process.” Emphasis, therefore, will be placed on the major forces of change and transformation and the roles they have played and continue to play in linking civilizations to one another and differentiating them from each other.

Historical records suggest that long before the development of agriculture, human beings were able to get enough food and attain a sufficient level of physical security to survive and grow. Familial and tribal ties, as well as customs, norms, and traditions served as social glue to hold early human societies together and give meaning to their communal lives. This simply means that the roots of civilization came into existence probably 20,000 years before the dawn of the agricultural age and the establishment of permanent human settlements. However, it was a primitive civilization based on a food economy that depended primarily on the hunting of animals and the collecting of wild fruits and vegetables. Societies in that civilization were nomadic, and cultures consisted of little more than tribal norms and traditions. The economic arrangements and social organization of those societies were simple and informal and, because of that, they remained largely changeless for countless generations until the domestication of animals and the development of agriculture some 11,000 years ago.

With the development of agriculture, the economic base of life began to change; and consequently the culture and the social and economic structures and political organization began

to transform themselves slowly in ways that differed greatly from the tribal ones. But after agriculture was established and its culture fully developed, the pace of societal change slowed, causing life conditions to become steady and seem perpetual. Most socioeconomic forces of change were either dormant or yet to be born. The most important change to occur during the later centuries of the agricultural era was the appearance of organized religion, the development of writing and reading, the expansion of trade, the incorporation of merchant life into the economic life of society, and the emergence of states and empires. Tradable products subsequently became a growing economic activity, and this, in turn, caused services to expand and social change to evolve slowly but systematically. Trade helped societies connect with each other, and led them to exchange products and ideas; it facilitated cultural interaction and technological borrowing. Meanwhile, the state was able to regulate economic and non-economic relations between neighboring communities and establish law and order in society.

In the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the production of manufactured goods emerged in England as the most important, though not the largest, economic activity. This development heralded the coming of a new age, the industrial age, and the dawn of rapid socioeconomic, sociopolitical and sociocultural change. The coming together of major economic, social, cultural, political, philosophical, scientific, and technological developments is what historians call the Industrial Revolution. It was a revolution that changed the economic base of life and its mode of production, forcing all other social and political and cultural organizations and human relations to change drastically, profoundly and irreversibly. The Industrial Revolution emerged as a forceful and continuous process of socioeconomic, sociopolitical and sociocultural change that seems to have no end in sight. "Our fathers," wrote Charles Van Doren, "started the revolution and we are still living it. We could not stop it even if we wanted to."<sup>1</sup>

In the late 1980's, industrial society in general and the American society in particular began to experience a new type of fundamental change, or revolution. This new revolution was instigated by knowledge that caused the economy to shift from the production of tradable goods to the production of tradable services. In the United States, "service employment has continued to grow, to the point where it accounted for 80 percent of employment in 2000. More people were at the time working in doctors' offices than in auto plants, more in laundries and dry cleaners than in steel mills"<sup>2</sup> Consequently, the Knowledge Revolution began to force itself and impose its own logic on the prevailing way of living and economic conditions of the emerging knowledge societies, causing all aspects of life to undergo fundamental and irreversible change. For example, while employment was increasing rapidly in the service sector, it was declining fast in the industrial sector, causing a great damage to the status and power of the middle class. The following sections describe in more details the economic conditions and cultures of societies living in the pre-agricultural, agricultural and industrial civilizations, as well as societies passing through the transitional period to the fast-evolving knowledge society.

## The Age of Hunting and Gathering

The hunting and gathering age lasted longer and experienced less change than any other age; it started probably 30,000 years ago and continued without interruption until the development of agriculture some 20,000 years later. The domestication of animals, which occurred at around the same time of the agricultural revolution, gave the tribal society and its social organization a new meaning; it enabled the nomads to strengthen their economic base, grow in size, and further develop their culture and way of life. Domesticated animals, which made tribal life easier and sustainable, were put to good use. The meat of some was used for food, the skin and fur of others

were used for clothing, and the bones of some animals served other purposes, providing tools, weapons, musical instruments and ornaments. In addition, people employed some animals like the camel and the horse as means of transportation, making it easier for tribal people to move across difficult terrains and interact peacefully and otherwise with other tribes. The intellectual horizon of the tribal people, however, remained “limited to their allegiance and their loyalties, which extended no further than the tribe, and was directed towards the smaller family group in the first instance.”<sup>3</sup> Culture in this age was not much more than a tribal way of life, whose essence was based on age-old norms and traditions and a history of feuding with other tribes. In this society, the social and cultural aspects of life, or what I call *the sociocultural process* governed the pace and determined the direction of societal change for thousands of years to come without much challenge. In fact, the sociocultural process could hardly be called a process; it consisted of a simple set of traditions and norms and customs that were passed from one generation to another without discernible change. Economic stagnation, lack of complex political and social organization and technological innovations, and the abundance of freedom made change difficult to conceive or initiate in this age. However, the basic and most important goals of survival and physical security were improved during this age, but remained vastly constrained by nature, which set the limits and defined the space of social and economic maneuverability.

Since economic means were basically the same everywhere during those times, nature or the physical environment became the primary force influencing the course of social change. And since environmental conditions played similar roles in human life, they produced similar patterns of living. Consequently, tribal cultures displayed almost identical characteristics in content, in character, in attitude, and in outlook; all had the same internal and external dynamics. The way of life of an African tribe, for example, has been found to be similar to that of a Middle Eastern tribe,

which resembled greatly the way of life of Asian, Australian, European and Mexican tribes. “Many events in human history seem to correlate very remarkably with environmental controls. The historical theory that ascribes many events in the human record to environmental causes thus receives powerful support from geology.”<sup>4</sup> All tribes lived in the same stage of societal development, had the same economy, and developed similar cultural outlooks and values and traditions. Members of each tribe were tied to each other by blood and kinship relationships, and believed and largely behaved as if they were members of one large family sharing the same history and destiny.

Strict tribal norms and traditions, and almost identical life experiences served to weaken individuality while strengthening tribal unity as well as social harmony and loyalty. However, internal tribal solidarity reflected an almost equal tribal enmity toward the outside. Relationships between tribes were and still are built on suspicion, hostility, old feuds, and a strong desire to avenge real and perceived past injuries to tribal honor. Tribes raided each other for a reason and often for no reason at all. Hostility toward the other has been, as the Rwanda, Burundi and Somalia tragedies of the 1990’s sadly demonstrated, an important aspect of tribal way of life. Contact between different tribes meant often conflict and war, whose consequences were recognized and largely accepted by everyone as normal. In other words, if the behavior of modern African tribes is an indication of the behavior of ancient tribes, *the tribal man fought to live and lived to fight*, causing life in general to start and end with fighting.

Nevertheless, differences in geography and topography, as well as in nature’s endowment of plants and animals that lend themselves to domestication caused tribal cultures to differ slightly from each other. So, the environment or nature and the limitations it imposed on people had been the major force that determined the structure of tribal society, the nature and content of its culture,

and the pace of societal change it had experienced. In addition, nature and the dictates of a largely nomadic life denied people the opportunity to establish roots in any one place, leading them to have no attachment to any particular country or develop a sense of belonging to a nation even after the state was established. The family house, usually a tent, was the space to which tribal people exhibited most attachment, and the tribe was the nation to which they belonged and to whose customs, traditions, norms, social organization and historical legacy they gave allegiance.

It is thought that about 10,000 years ago, man began to domesticate plants and develop agriculture. Although no one knows how this discovery came about, historical records suggest that agriculture was first practiced in present-day Iraq, Palestine and Egypt. From there, it traveled slowly to other Asian, African, and European countries. It is also believed that agriculture may have developed independently in other regions of the world, particularly in China and New Guinea. It is significant that “the long transition from foraging to agricultural life... happened in several places seemingly independently, yet within a few thousand years of one another.”<sup>5</sup> Year-round warm weather, the abundance of water and fertile land, and the availability of domesticated animals made a semi-nomadic but localized tribal life possible. And this, in turn, seems to have enabled man to observe nature closely, follow and understand its seasonal course, and ultimately discover the life cycle of plants.

Since tribal man was forced by nature and culture to spend most of his time foraging, I am inclined to believe that the woman was responsible for discovering the life cycle of plants and developing agriculture. In fact, women in many agricultural societies have continued to spend most of their time cultivating the land, tending plants, preparing agricultural produce for food, and preserving it for cold seasons and hard times. Even today, about 80% of all farm workers in the world are women. And while women continue to work in the fields, men in some rural areas are

busy practicing bad habits, such as smoking and abusing their wives. Therefore, the woman should be credited for causing the most important revolution in human history.

## The Age of Agriculture

The development of agriculture instigated the most important revolution in human history; it changed the economic conditions and the cultures of societies that adopted agriculture. The agricultural revolution transformed human relations and the way societies and economies were organized, as well as the relationships of people to one another and to their physical, social and technological environments. It brought about a new civilization with its own society, economy, culture, social structure and political organization. “The change from hunting and gathering to agriculture involved more than a mere change in subsistence pattern; it represented a complete change in the social and cultural fabric of life.” It “meant also a mental change.”<sup>6</sup>

As agriculture was increasingly becoming a way of life, permanent human settlements began to appear and grow in size and people began to build houses and make roots in scattered hamlets wherever agriculture was practiced. With agriculture, the ability of man to produce enough food to support a subsistence living was no longer in doubt. Because of that assurance, the importance of survival as an existential issue was vastly reduced. As a consequence, the old life of the wanderer in constant search for food became largely obsolete and had to recede; and the building of a new, more socially and economically advanced life in its place had to begin.

The building of permanent settlements transformed all aspects of human life. It changed the economic base, creating new activities over which man had some control, and gave domesticated animals added roles in the new economy, particularly in cultivating the land and transporting



agricultural products. It also caused land to acquire a new meaning that forced societies to reorganize themselves socially, politically and economically in response to the new reality. “Compared with the thousands of years humans spent foraging, the construction of villages represented another revolutionary change in culture, subsistence, technology, social organization and history. In many respects, humans still have not successfully completed this major transition.”<sup>7</sup> In addition, the cultivation of the land on permanent basis caused people to develop a strong attachment to their environment, while the new relationships dictated by practicing agriculture led individuals and families to acquire a sense of belonging to a community or to a larger society. As a result, people began to develop new traditions and values and attitudes, initiate new internal and external relationships, and accumulate wealth, both portable and non-portable. The desire to accumulate wealth and improve the quality of life created a need for access to new and secure water resources and fertile land and necessitated the expansion of trade. Subsequently, the state superstructure emerged and began to build cities as trade and political centers, form armies and bureaucracies to collect taxes, defend citizens, keep law and order, protect cities and villages, and expand state influence over larger areas and differentiated communities. Consequently, politics and political institutions, or *the political process* emerged and began to play an increasingly important role in societal life. Therefore, the development of agricultural society and economy and the state superstructure moved together; they reinforced one another, giving the new civilization its major cultural and non-cultural characteristics.

The social relations people developed in this age were, unlike those of the tribal age, based more on cooperation and trust, not on suspicion and enmity. Learning from their experience and environment, people also began to develop and accumulate knowledge. This caused people’s desires and needs to grow slowly in manners that affected their ways of living, social relations,

interests and worldviews. Meanwhile, the accumulation of knowledge, the legalization of private property, and the ability to produce a food surplus worked together to introduce the idea of progress in human life, and accelerate the pace of development in four major areas:

1. State building, which led to the emergence and then to the strengthening of the political process and its societal role as a force of change and transformation;
2. Expansion of trade, which created a need to produce new tradable products, and paved the way for the emergence of the economic process;
3. Development of skills and tools of production and means of transportation, which led to increasing labor productivity and facilitating trade and governance; and this, in turn, paved the way for the introduction of a technological element to the environment; and
4. Cross-cultural interaction, which led societies to learn from each other, exchange ideas, and borrow available technologies, causing some people to become more aware of and interested in the world around them and change faster.

The need to share water resources among neighboring communities and resolve conflict by peaceful means among clans which replaced tribes in the new society, and the need to protect trade routes from roaming tribesmen created the need for a social superstructure to manage inter-community relations and provide much-needed order and collective security. Since the newly built human settlements were easy targets for roaming tribesmen, particularly since most settlements were small villages and isolated hamlets, they could not survive on their own. And because the core purpose of an agricultural community was and still is to cultivate the land, not fight wars, the capacity of the new society to protect itself against invaders was limited. In fact, mobility of fighting forces, which tribesmen enjoyed, has served as an advantage in all wars throughout history. Consequently, the state evolved as a superstructure to govern people and influence the direction of societal change.

While the same economic base caused nations to belong to the same civilization and exhibit its major characteristics and life patterns, dissimilar environmental settings and challenges and technologies caused societies to develop slightly different cultures. “The ways in which different societies responded to challenges distinguished Chinese civilization from that of the Aztecs, or Egyptian civilization from that of India. Problems produced unique responses and further differentiated one culture from another.”<sup>8</sup> Though ancient agrarian societies produced sophisticated laws and poetry and philosophy, the production and consumption of food has continued to be the focal point of the economic and social life of such societies in general. As a consequence, *agricultural man ate to live and lived to eat*; making food production and consumption and the enjoyment that comes with these activities the essence of the culture of the agricultural age.

With the expansion of trade and conquest, cultures began to play a more active role in society, viewing external forces not only as threats to be avoided, but also as challenges to be faced, as well as potential opportunities to be harnessed. Cultures that viewed external forces as challenges and opportunities were able to change faster and make more progress, such as the ones that appeared in present day Egypt, Iraq and Syria. In contrast, cultures that viewed external challenges as threats to be avoided, such as African cultures in general, became suspicious and conservative and thus less open to change and ill-equipped to make further progress. Consequently, culture became an important force shaping peoples’ attitudes and ways of thinking and worldviews, defining societal goals, setting priorities, and influencing the nature and magnitude of peoples’ responses to varied challenges. Such challenges were not limited to the physical environment and the other only; they also included new ideas, philosophies, technologies, scientific facts and unconventional political, social, and economic arrangements. Nevertheless, cultures in general, regardless of place and time, have shown little enthusiasm for change, especially change introduced from the outside or caused

by non-traditional forces.

Sociologists and political scientists often speak of a 'national culture' and the role it plays in uniting people and giving them an identity of their own. While it is true that each people living in one state feel that they belong to one country and form one nation, no society has ever had one culture, except the tribal one. The minute the notion of private property became part of societal life and the state was created, no society could stay homogeneous. And since wealth is a major source of power, and power is a means to gain more wealth, the crystallization of the private property institution caused the haves to feel and often behave differently from the have-nots. And this in turn served to differentiate the rich from the poor, causing the culture of the rich and powerful to acquire new traits that differentiated it from the culture of the largely poor and powerless. And as societies moved from the agricultural to the industrial age, the socioeconomic gaps that separated the rich from the poor widened, and a new sociocultural divide was created. Socioeconomic gaps reflect differences in income and wealth between the rich and the poor; sociocultural divides reflect educational levels and cultural sophistication and ideological orientations that differentiate one group from other groups.

During the hunting and gathering stage of societal development, the tribe represented the society to which every member belonged. Each tribe had its own chief whose authority was regulated by customs, and whose functions were largely limited to leading his people in times of war and mediating between them in times of peace. Life activities, particularly the economic ones, were performed almost entirely outside the family home. But when the agricultural age and its civilization arrived, the tribe and its way of life lost most of their meaning and reasons for being. The clan and its subset of the extended family replaced the tribe and became the basic social unit of the typical agricultural community, which normally consisted of a few clans. Meanwhile, most

social and economic activities were performed in the family house or around it.

While the tribe represents the entire nation to which tribal people belong and exhibit unquestioned allegiance, the clan represents the social unit or the building block of agricultural community, which represents a small portion of the nation or state. And while tribal chiefs are chosen on the basis of their age and familial legacy, the clan's head is often chosen on the basis of his knowledge and wisdom. And unlike the tribal chief, the role of the clan head is limited to maintaining clannishness, manage conflict with other clans, and mediate between members of his clan and state authorities. So the role of the clan head is more social and economic, while the role of the tribal chief is more political and military.

Agriculture, by enhancing the economic and personal security of agricultural man, gave people more time to think and led them to develop laws and religions, and build the social, political and physical infrastructure of society. Traditional land cultivation and ownership obliges people to settle in one place for several, at times countless generations, while the seasonal nature of land cultivation and harvesting encourages them to cooperate with each other and seek peaceful coexistence with one another. Trade, meanwhile, dictates that merchants and communities develop interest related relationships and financial arrangements conducive to the nurturing of mutual trust and the expansion of trade.

As a result, the logic that governed tribal life during the previous age lost its relevance, and the old civilization and its cultural patterns and social and economic organizations became outdated and relatively less civilized. Thus, the history of the age of hunting and gathering ended at the gates of the agricultural age, as a new civilization with its own history and historical logic was being born. Although tribal history would retain much of its logic within its own living pattern for

thousands of years to come, it lost under the state superstructure much of its pastureland and freedom of movement and action and thus its momentum. It was forced to adopt a circular movement within an increasingly smaller and more confined physical, economic and political space.

Consequently, the tribal society, being less free and less able to provide for itself as before, became dependent on the agricultural society. And as the first lost much of its momentum and freedom, its ability to challenge the second declined substantially; it could only retain a capacity to disrupt the life of agricultural societies and temporarily impede their development. Even when the tribal society did invade, loot, and destroy a state or an empire and cause its demise, it did not and could not reverse the course of history. In fact, the conquerors tribesmen were often absorbed by the more economically productive and culturally sophisticated conquered agricultural peoples. History, being irreversible, has continued to change and move from one stage of societal development to a more developed one, making some of the most civilized peoples of the past the least civilized and developed ones of the present.

Since neighboring agricultural communities shared same interests and had similar cultures and worldviews, they had little difficulty interacting with each other and establishing workable means of communications among themselves. And because relationships were essentially based on cooperation and trust, language differences and a scattered existence did not present insurmountable obstacles. But since their cultures were, and still are, different from those produced by a less sophisticated tribal civilization, they had much difficulty communicating with tribal societies and resolving conflict with them peacefully.

Communications between similar cultures produced by the same civilization has always been

easier than communications between cultures produced by different civilizations. Latin Americans, for example, have less difficulty communicating with each other than with North Americans, while the latter have an easier time communicating with Europeans than with Asians. Third World nations in general, whose cultures are products of a largely agricultural civilization, find it easier to communicate with and understand each other than to communicate with and understand the industrialized societies of Europe and North America. Communicating across cultural lines, therefore, must be understood and defined as communicating across civilizational lines, or across profoundly different cultures produced in different times that place different values on wealth, time, human feelings, family relations and symbols of honor.

Until the fifteenth century, no center of civilization anywhere in the world had experienced profound change to distinguish itself from other centers. Both Paul Kennedy and Jack Weatherford argued that throughout the Middle Ages the great centers of world civilization were at roughly similar stages of development and, because of that fact, “the world formed a single, albeit large, social system that operated at a much slower pace than that to which we have become accustomed.”<sup>9</sup> But around the middle of the fifteenth century, the pace of social, intellectual, technological, economic and political change began to accelerate and change direction, particularly in Europe. Several developments forced all social systems at the time to enter a new period of transformation. Trade, which by then had become an important economic activity, led the ensuing change and paved the way for the economic transformation and technological developments that were to follow.

Other developments occurred subsequently and played a decisive role in promoting change and accelerating its pace. Such developments included substantial improvements in navigation tools and maps, the building of better roads and ships, the production of more potent arms, enhanced security, growing competition between the major European cities and states, the development of printing,

and the discovery of a new world. Subsequently, manufacturing expanded, and services, especially financial services, were established and acknowledged as an important and legitimate business activity, and scientific, technological and philosophical inquiry multiplied. Three centuries later, the Industrial Revolution took place in England, and traveled from there to other European and North American countries, transforming agricultural life in ways and to extents previously unknown. “Agricultural societies were transformed into urban industrial societies within the space of perhaps a hundred years, and all the accumulated norms, social habits and customs that had characterized rural village life were replaced by the rhythms of the factory and the city.”<sup>10</sup>

## The Age of Industry

In the second half of the eighteenth century a new way of organizing manufacturing began to emerge and spread in England. Workers were brought to work together in one place for one master, who often was the sole owner of the means of production, the raw materials and the finished goods. People, who worked for the new entrepreneur, were often landless and powerless laborers having nothing more than their labor to sell. Because of that powerlessness, workers were, especially during the first century of the industrial age, vulnerable to exploitation by the industrial capitalist; and consequently, they were forced to work for long hours and live under intolerable life conditions. In fact, when man is forced to sell his labor because of need, he is more likely to lose dignity and become vulnerable to exploitation and sometimes slavery as well.

The Industrial Revolution, just like the agricultural revolution of some 10,000 years earlier, ushered in a new wave of change that transformed all aspects of life in every industrial state. For example, workers were no longer free to determine their work hours and how to perform their work; tasks were assigned, working hours were specified, regulations were imposed, and hierarchical



relationships within the workplace were established and enforced. Income was tied to work, and survival as well as job security became functions of work availability and worker's capacity to work long hours and endure the pain of performing repetitious, largely boring tasks. For the first time in history, the new worker could own neither the place of his work, the means of production, nor the end products he produced. His only source of income was his labor, and his labor was the only commodity he could trade. Industrial man in fact was transformed through manufacturing and money making into a machine, causing work to become the focal point of life in society, even for the rich capitalists who see work as a source of both wealth and satisfaction. ***Industrial man works to live and lives to work***, causing life to start and end with work, not necessarily dictated by need.

The new conditions created by manufacturing forced workers to live near their places of work in clustered residential communities that lacked almost all health amenities. Slums, as a result, emerged and became home for a growing rootless, powerless, and very vulnerable social class, whose appearance was seen by many as inevitable. Critics of this development, however, saw it as an evil act committed intentionally by a heartless capitalist class. Consequently, critics called for change but failed to agree on the nature and direction of the desired change, which led them to be divided along two major lines, one revolutionary, and the other utopian. But history, being the product of actions and reactions by many social actors with conflicting interests and societal processes and natural forces, moved along neither the revolutionary nor the utopian line. It implemented change dictated by its own logic, the logic of the industrial age, where economic forces and interests, or ***the economic process***, had become the dominant force of societal transformation. And despite several attempts to make revolutions and build utopias, history has rendered both utopia and revolution impractical and unworkable in the long run.

Workers who were most attracted to the new job opportunities were the young whose families

had earlier lived an agricultural life on land that was taken away from them by their landlords. Being landless in a new harsh environment made workers also rootless; they had to build new communities, develop new traditions, and plant new roots suited to their unique, unprecedented circumstances. Karl Marx, writing some eighty years after the birth of the Industrial Revolution, observed that “man’s ideas, views and conceptions, in one word, man’s consciousness, changes with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relations, and in his social life, or in the state of his living.”<sup>11</sup> However, with the emergence of the industrial workers who lived in crowded slums, things began to change; and slowly a new social class emerged and began to seek change. Workers began to form labor unions to facilitate collective bargaining and apply collective economic and political pressure on the capitalists and the industrial state. Intellectuals, seeing the enormity of exploitation, especially of children and women, and the inhumane life and working conditions in and around factories, supported the demands of the working class. Gradually, the industrial workers developed a stronger class consciousness that made them look and behave as a distinct social class. Unions that failed to achieve their goals peacefully resorted to demonstrations, strikes and at times violence, which helped them become more assertive and forced the state subsequently to recognize their needs and grievances and address their legitimate rights.

While people were being uprooted and compelled to work and live under appalling working and living conditions, members of the capitalist class were living in affluence and accumulating more wealth and power, causing wealth to be transformed from the domain of land to the domain of capital. Wealth, meanwhile, enabled the wealthy to continually improve the quality of their lives and exploit more people as domestic servants and industrial workers. More than a century later the number of servants living at the homes of their masters was used as a criterion to determine the social class to which the household belonged. “Census categories of the time defined a lower middle

class household as one that employed fewer than three servants.” (Peter Drucker: “The Age of Social Transformation,”<sup>12</sup> But despite the fact that farmers and servants who worked on farms and in their masters’ houses were by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the two largest groups in almost every industrial society, neither group was recognized as a social class. Members of each group were weak and scattered and, despite sharing similar living and working conditions, were unable to develop a shared consciousness, which is a prerequisite for forming a social class.

As the industrial revolution advanced, it began to diversify and create new, unforeseen jobs, causing the numbers of people involved in manufacturing to multiply. And this in turn created need for more people to perform related tasks such as plant managers, financial clerks, labor relations personnel, transportation and trade managers, retail and sales persons, technicians to service equipment, researchers and scientists to develop new technologies and production systems, and banking and investment officers. Industrial expansion and economic diversification subsequently gave birth to a new middle class that was neither rich nor poor. Because of its unique social position and economic functions, the new class of largely urban dwellers shared neither interests nor traditions with the rich capitalists or the poor workers; it has to develop its own way of life and consciousness.

Since wealth and power move hand in hand in society, the new capitalist class was able to acquire more power, often at the expense of the landed aristocracy and always at the expense of the industrial workers. And with this shift in wealth and power and social status, the pace of change in the social and economic structures of society began to accelerate, causing the traditional cultural patterns to change drastically. Though industrial society has developed its own culture, the accumulation of change over time has led that society to have three major subcultures: one for the

rich, another for the middle class, and a third for the poor working class.

Official recognition of labor unions and their right to strike and bargain collectively on the one hand, and intellectual support of those rights on the other, were instrumental in facilitating association in society and strengthening democracy and political participation. Meanwhile, a middle class aware of its economic interests but weak political power supported democracy, because democratic systems facilitate political participation and promote economic freedom. And this in turn gave the middle class a societal role to play and a political forum from which it could air its grievances, protect its interests, and promotes socioeconomic change in its favor. And while democracy was being strengthened and labor unions were growing stronger and getting better organized in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, life conditions in general were improving for all members of the industrial society. Several factors had contributed to making this development a reality; noted among them:

1. Continued development of new technologies that improved productivity and reduced the cost of production and increased profit margins;
2. Increased demand for manufactured goods at home and abroad, which enabled capitalists to make more profits and encouraged them to provide better wages and new employment opportunities for workers;
3. Increased state revenues from taxes, which led governments to spend more on public health and education, improve infrastructure, and finance other services and welfare programs; and
4. Official recognition of the need to end labor exploitation and limit monopoly and expand markets, which caused economic activities to expand and provide more business opportunities and better paying jobs, especially for members of the middle class.

Meanwhile, migration from the countryside to urban centers in search of jobs caused the

extended agricultural family as well as the clan and their traditions and social obligations to become obsolete and ultimately disappear. The new communities that emerged in the new industrial cities were composed of nucleus families sharing smaller living spaces and facing similar life challenges. Traditions and kinship ties that provided the social glue that held agricultural communities together for countless generations while minimizing change were no longer workable in the new environment. Life conditions were changing so quickly that the knowledge and wisdom of the past were fast becoming outdated and largely irrelevant. Old traditions and inherited wisdom, as a consequence, could not be passed on from grandparents to grandchildren without questioning. Neither tribes nor clans could exist or continue to function in the new industrial society.

For example, the old family home on the farm lost much of its economic and social role in the new industrial society. Being small and urban, the family home could not perform many of the traditional tasks it used to perform on the farm. The education of children, the making of clothes, the processing of agricultural products for storage, and even entertainment moved almost entirely out of the home to new institutions run by specialists. Caring for the sick and the elderly also moved gradually to hospitals and special health care facilities, further weakening the old community structure and mutual obligations and social ties that held clans together.

Change in social and political relations as well as in economic and social structures led to changing the economic conditions, production relations and ways of life of all industrial societies, producing a new civilization, the industrial civilization, with its unique society, economy and culture and thus social and economic structures. Because these transformations were largely limited to western societies, the new pattern of life was dubbed the 'Western Civilization.' However, the term 'culture' is often used to differentiate between western societies, such as the French from the German, or the European in general from the American. Industrial civilization,

like the agricultural civilization that preceded it, produced its own cultural varieties wherever it took roots.

Historians and philosophers of history, despite a wealth of books and field work, are yet to agree on the forces that caused the Industrial Revolution. Some believe that economics and self-interest were the determining factors that led the transformation process. Others argue that the Protestant Reformation, which brought about many bloody religious wars in Europe leading to the separation of religion and state, was the decisive factor. Still others feel that the enclosure movement, which ended the feudal system as landlords confiscated or repossessed the land on which farmers had lived and worked for generations, created the first landless, rootless social class that provided the cheap labor whose sweat facilitated the building of the industrial capitalist system. Science, technology, inventions, new ideas, population growth, urbanization, political freedom, trade, and economic liberty are also cited as forces whose contributions to the Industrial Revolution were momentous. In fact, the Industrial Revolution was the culmination of countless changes, many of which were technological and scientific in nature, and some were manifestations of economic change and social, religious and political conflict. The three hundred years prior to the Industrial Revolution (1450-1750) were decisive in giving birth to new forces of change and undermining many of the older ones. These centuries represented a transitional period during which many of the old social systems and institutions were invalidated, new ones were developed, and qualitative societal change was introduced.

Karl Marx was one of the first philosophers of history to argue that the underlying economic forces in society are responsible for cultural products such as religion and ideology. Max Weber, in contrast, argued that culture produces certain forms of economic behavior and work ethics that facilitate economic progress. Both arguments, while basically sound, are partial and therefore

cannot individually provide a satisfactory explanation of how societies respond to changes in the economic conditions of life, or to transformations in the sociocultural values and ideas that regulate their lives. In a civilizational setting, culture plays the crucial role in changing economic behavior; in transitional periods, economic forces and technological innovations lead the way to societal change and cause sociocultural transformations.

The age of industry did not only expand manufacturing, it also helped agriculture expand, diversify its activities and become much more productive; it also expanded trade in agricultural products as well as in manufactured goods. Agriculture, consequently, became dependent on industry; it could not grow to meet demand, increase productivity and improve the quality of products without the new machines, fertilizers, irrigation and farming systems, and improved seeds that industry and its scientific and technological base had produced. In fact, without the advancement of science and technology that helped develop the agricultural sector, food production would have been less than adequate to support a growing industrial working class and feed increasing numbers of urban dwellers.

Therefore, after some 10,000 years of farming the land, agriculture was unable to transform itself and change its largely primitive methods of production on its own. Such a change had to wait until a new stage of civilizational development was established and gained the upper hand in society. Rendering agriculture dependent on industry has also caused agricultural society to become dependent on the industrial society as well. There is no doubt that some western nations and their colonialist enterprises had worked hard to deepen the dependency of Third World agricultural economies on the western industrialized ones; and because of that, the colonial powers did contribute to hindering the process of Third World societal development in general. Nevertheless, there was nothing agricultural societies could do to avoid dependency, which was

and still is an inevitable development dictated by the history of societal development. The natural dependency of the agricultural society on the industrial one thus renders the '*dependency theory*' largely baseless. Therefore, the dependency theory described by David S. Landes as "Latin America's most successful export,"<sup>13</sup> is not a model capable of explaining lack of genuine development in the Third World; it is rather a sophisticated argument to blame the other and justify failure.

The discovery of the 'new world' and the triumph of Christian nationalism in Spain at the end of the fifteenth century, which led to the expulsion of Arabs and Jews from that country, marked the end of agricultural dominance, practically ending the great civilizations-empires of the past. For 500 consecutive years thereafter neither Arabs nor Chinese, nor Indians or Turks or Persians made notable economic or scientific contributions to the world civilization. Agricultural society in general, getting increasingly dependent on the industrial one, can neither challenge industrial society nor can it undermine its cultural, economic, political or military dominance. It cannot even defend itself against the ideas, values, economies, technologies and armies of the new society. Because of industrial military and technological and economic superiority, tiny England was able in less than 150 years of industrialization to rule over more than half of the world's population for the next 150 years.

The fundamental change in the state of human living ushered in by the Industrial Revolution made the history and life wisdom of all previous eras largely irrelevant to the new one. Meanwhile, agricultural society, feeling threatened by the colonialist enterprise of the industrial state, became inward looking and more protective of its traditional cultural values and way of life. Consequently, most agricultural nations began to retrench, becoming more religious and conservative in their thought and outlook, and suspicious of the other. This development served to further weaken the



ability of such nations to initiate change on their own and transform their economic condition and cultures and meet the challenges of their times. And due to an expansionist industrial state and capitalist strategy, nations living in the agricultural age found themselves suddenly besieged; the political and economic space within which they had lived and functioned for countless generations was slowly becoming smaller and less free, similar to what had happened to the tribal society ten thousand years earlier.

The advancement of the industrial age strengthened the economic forces and institutions, or the economic process, giving both the capitalist system and capital prominent roles in societal life. Slowly but steadily, the economic process began to assume a leading role in all industrial societies, greatly influencing their cultures, social relations, political systems and outlooks. The capacity of this process to contribute to every human activity has enabled it to grow in influence and visibility and to eventually replace the political process as the most dominant societal process. The decisive role played by industrial technology, military power and money in winning W.W.II was instrumental in giving the economic process and its leading institutions and representatives the opportunity to gain the upper hand in industrial society, especially in the United States.

Changing the state of human living as described above caused the history and the historical logic of the old era, the agricultural era, to come to an end; it no longer had valid life experience to share, or proven economic or scientific wisdom to give. The new society had to write its own history and depict its own logic while its social and political and economic relationships were being rearranged. Nations that failed to understand this historical lesson were dwarfed by history and made to pay a heavy price in squandered resources, lost opportunities, and increased dependency on others for generations to come. It must be noted, however, that both China and India have regained their abilities to face the challenges of our times and experience remarkable

economic growth and cultural revival during the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Decades after the economic process had become the most influential force of societal change, concerns began to be expressed regarding the damage manufacturing and mining was causing to the environment, and the negative impact that capitalism was having on the poor and the principles of equality and social justice. Questions were raised as to the ability of the environment to sustain the then prevailing production and consumption levels and provide for the needs of future generations. Pollution control, sustainable development, helping the poor, equality of opportunity, and reducing military spending emerged consequently as popular issues motivating intellectuals, scientists, liberal politicians and social activists everywhere to challenge the capitalist system and expose its shortcomings. But the worst was still to come.

As the capitalist system was getting more productive and money was getting more ruthless, a communications revolution and an information revolution were taking place and changing reality in all advanced industrial societies in ways unknown before. These two revolutions are linked together and dependent on each other; and because of that they form one powerful societal process, *the infomedia process*. The twin revolutions have transformed the media and its role in society, leading it to become a powerful societal process having the capacity to manipulate the other three processes and influence the shape and direction of societal change at all levels. As a consequence, the twin revolutions paved the way for the evolvement of a new civilizational age, the age of knowledge. The transition to this age, which has been transforming our economic and social and cultural lives for years, is expected to last about 15 more years and be completed around 2025. “The physical and mental world we inhabit has changed more and faster and more often in the past 200 years than it did in the previous 20,000 years.”<sup>14</sup>

## The Age of Knowledge

The age of agriculture lasted about 10,000 years before the Industrial Revolution occurred. Because of its long duration, it was able to transform the economic conditions and cultures of most tribal societies. When the age of industry arrived in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of the world's population was already living in the agricultural age. But when the age of knowledge announced its impending arrival in the early 1990's, the age of industry was hardly 200 years old. Because of that, only some 30 percent of the world's population had experienced life under industry, leaving the rest of the world to languish in the pre-industrial ages. Due to the nature of the knowledge age and its complexity and unique knowledge requirements, it is not expected to transform the economic conditions or the culture of an entire state society at any time. In fact, every society will continue to need people to do certain jobs and be engaged in certain activities that are rooted in the industrial and agricultural civilizations. However, the age of knowledge is expected to create a society in a permanent state of transition, where change occurs at all levels, all the time and causes the state of living and ways of living of all people involved with the many aspects of knowledge to change continuously.

As the age of knowledge advances, the infomedia process becomes more powerful. In fact, by the time the twentieth century ended, the infomedia process had become the leading societal process of change and transformation. Because its services are essential, at times detrimental to the proper functioning of all other processes and the organizations associated with them, the infomedia is able to influence the nature and direction of change in all societies and states. Meanwhile, the dynamic nature of the knowledge age, and its demanding knowledge requirements is making the creation, utilization and commercialization of knowledge and information the focal point of economic

activity. As a consequence, the main form of wealth has begun to shift from capital to the domain of knowledge; and a new man whose job is to create and process knowledge through learning has emerged. Because of that, *the knowledge man learns to live and lives to learn*.

As we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, I feel that the transitional period leading to the age of knowledge is still incomplete; it probably has another decade or so before it ends. Because of this fact, it may be unwise to describe the expected characteristics of the new era in concrete terms, particularly since it is expected to be an era of dynamic change and continuous transformation. However, many far-reaching changes have already occurred and can be detected at all levels of individual and societal life. Values, traditions, needs, and convictions that used to provide the social glue that kept communities and families together for generations have begun to fracture; some have even become dysfunctional or irrelevant. Basic assumptions that helped economists, political scientists, sociologists, and military strategists to conceptualize, define, and analyze social and political and economic units, such as national economy, the nation state, society, culture, class and family have been either partially or totally invalidated.

National cultures, for example, are being divided into subcultures along ethnic, cultural, racial, religious and socioeconomic lines. Shared traditions and values, languages, religious convictions and collective historical memories are no longer enough to maintain the unity of any culture, society or nation. Economic interests, lifestyles, hobbies, professional connections, and educational backgrounds are becoming more important in forming new communities and undermining older ones. And because new communities can and do often transcend political borders and ideologies they are producing a unique global culture with its own core of values and traditions and even language. National societies, moreover, are being divided into sub-societies along sociocultural

lines in addition to the old socioeconomic divides.

Reactions to developments instigated by the advancement of the knowledge age are deep everywhere. People seem to have become overwhelmed by strange currents of change; and there is a feeling of general loss of direction and control over unfolding events. The resulting reactions to this change range from denial to bewilderment, from political conservatism and religious fundamentalism to radical nationalism and extremism, from aggressiveness to retreat and retrenchment, from embracing the new values and lifestyles to cultural particularism, from universalism and globalism to tribalism and ethno-nationalism. All of these reactions cause conflict and instigate change and, in the process, create new realities that transform societies, and make history more dynamic and irreversible. In fact, the new age of knowledge promises to make the future a world in a constant state of transition.

## Concluding Remarks

In concluding this chapter, I wish to reiterate that each *stage* of societal development represents a unique civilization that comes after a difficult and sometimes long transitional period. Such periods, viewed from a wide angle, represent historical discontinuities that cause history to become chaotic, moving in all directions at the same time without a discernible sense of direction. Historical discontinuities also cause the passing era to come to an end, while paving the way for the new era to move forward and write its own history. And as one history ends, its logic becomes largely irrelevant, and the wisdom of the past becomes of little value to the new age and its peoples.

Transitional periods are battlegrounds where war is waged between old values and new ones, between the forces of stability and continuity on one side and those of innovation and change on the other, between science and magic, and between the economic forces and sociocultural actors.

The political process, meanwhile, experiences paralysis and confusion, which causes it to lose its traditional ability to lead. Such periods tend to be workshops for destructive creativity, where creativity is a tool of destruction and destruction is a condition for creativity. As the first decade of the twenty-first century came to an end, almost all nations of the world seemed to be, as Matthew Arnold once remarked, “wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other unable to be born.”<sup>15</sup>

In the not-distant past, natural resources, the environment, strategic geographical locations, gifted individuals, ambitious political and religious leaders, creative ideas, and certain cultures and states played important, and at times, decisive roles as agents of change and forces of social transformation. Lately, however, the roles of all such agents have been greatly and irreversibly diminished, and the roles of the societal processes of change and transformation have been vastly enhanced at their expense. Such processes are defined as the sociocultural, the political, the economic, and the infomedia processes. These processes are social mechanisms developed unconsciously over time to manage and synchronize the functions of the many systems and actors in society. And unlike social systems, societal processes do not abide by certain rules or laws, and are not subject to effective control by any authority. Nevertheless, they tend to reflect the philosophical orientation of society and the developmental stage of its economy. Together, these processes form the larger framework within which all systems function and through which all change is introduced and managed in society.

Each societal process has specific tasks to perform, objectives to pursue, and logic of its own to follow. But since no societal change can occur without affecting the roles and relative positions of all major players in society, no process can function freely or independently of the other processes. Every process therefore affects all other processes, and is affected by them. Despite this interdependence, in each civilization or stage of societal development one of these processes

distinguishes itself as the major force of change and transformation, overshadowing, and sometimes overwhelming the other three processes. While the sociocultural process continues to dominate the life of tribal and traditional agricultural societies and determine the direction of societal change, the political process dominates the life of mature agricultural and early industrial societies and determines the direction of change. The economic process dominates the life of all mature industrial societies and participates in shaping its future. Today, the infomedia process, in association with the economic process, dominates the lives and determines the direction of societal change in all societies passing through the transitional period to the knowledge age. Nevertheless, there are strong indications that the infomedia and economic processes are slowly merging to form one societal process that is hard to challenge or tame.

Each civilization has produced its own culture, within which similar but not identical sub-cultures have developed, causing societies living in the same era to have similar traditions, values, attitudes and relationships. In addition, each civilization or stage of societal development was largely dominated by one societal process. Although that particular process did not cancel out the other processes, it dominated them, reducing their influence and making social transformation largely a function of its own dynamics. Since values are the essence of the sociocultural process, and values seldom change, societies dominated by the sociocultural process such as traditional agricultural society were unable to experience real change for thousands of years. In contrast, due to the changing nature of interests, which represent the essence of the economic process, societies dominated by the economic process have experienced and continue to experience change and transformation. The change in the relative role of each societal process as history moves from one civilization to another makes history of the past unable to repeat itself, shape the future or predict

its course; civilizational change makes it also impossible for any societal process to fully regain a role it had lost.

As each new civilization got established, societies of the preceding civilization could not match its accomplishments, resist its appeal, or challenge its society; and, consequently, they were forced to become dependent on it and less able to transform themselves on their own. There is no doubt that previous civilizations had their notable accomplishments, many of which had contributed to making the accomplishments of succeeding civilizations possible and easier. Nonetheless, science and technology do not move in increments only; they accumulate over time and make leaps that cause past achievements to become less meaningful to the present as well as to the future. Due to this fact, older societies and civilizations had to acknowledge the superiority of the new civilization and accept dependency on it, imitate its social and economic organizations and learn from it, or retreat into their traditional civilizational shells and deteriorate slowly into economic, political and scientific irrelevance. The history of each stage, as a result, had to end with the transitional period, which marks the end of one history and the beginning of another.

The emerging knowledge age is creating a new society that seems destined to live in a state of perpetual change and transformation, or in a permanent state of transition. The infomedia process, which emerged at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the leading societal process of change and transformation, is forcing all other processes to react to its unconventional ideas and values and technologies, and thus it has made them more actively reactive. While the sociocultural process is resisting many aspects of the cultural and social change promoted by the infomedia and condemning some of its economic aspects, the economic process is welcoming the economic aspects of change and promoting most of them internationally. The political process, meanwhile, seems to be lost, unable to decide where to go or what position to take, running in all directions without a sense of



direction. This is the first time in history that the sociocultural, political, and economic processes find an environment suited for their activation at once. As a consequence, the way has been opened for never foreseen transformations and unprecedented opportunities for change and advancement in all fields of human endeavor. However, no change is neutral; all change brings with it a lot of pain and gain that tend to be unevenly distributed in society, causing some people to get most of the gain, while others feel most of the pain.

While the farming of the land was the economic change that represented the historical vehicle through which tribal society was transformed into an agricultural one, manufacturing was the economic and technological vehicle through which agricultural society was transformed into the industrial one. Today, economic and cultural globalization and the information and telecommunications revolutions represent the new vehicle through which industrial society is being transformed into the knowledge one. And since each civilization produces its unique culture and society and economic and political system, capitalism and democracy, being the major products of the industrial age, will have to change drastically to face the challenges posed by the knowledge age and deal efficiently with the new conditions being shaped by it.

Capitalism and democracy and the freedoms and rights they espouse have helped shape the lives of most western societies and made America a great country; they represent today the organizing principles of the American society. However, both systems came under attack since the beginning of the 1980s. Money, greed, lack of corporate social responsibility, lack of effective financial and economic regulations, and political corruption have undermined and continue to undermine both capitalism and democracy and poison their social missions. As a consequence, the income and wealth gaps between rich and poor widened, poverty spread and became endemic,

unemployment has become structural, and economic growth rates have lately failed to keep pace with population growth rates, causing per capita incomes in several western industrial states to decline. Therefore, an urgent need has been created to restore the essence and social missions of both capitalism and democracy, and foster their traditional societal roles. Without protecting people's rights and freedoms including freedom of speech, and holding all politicians and other government and business officials accountable, fairness and social justice will not prevail, and neither capitalism nor democracy will be saved.

## Footnotes