**Social Mobility**

**Definition of Social Mobility**

Every society has different strata in it. The different individuals and groups who occupy a certain social position may not remain in that position permanently. Some may move from one position to another, from higher social class position to lower social class position, and vice versa. Social mobility implies a set of changes in opportunities, incomes, lifestyles, personal relationships, social status and ultimately class membership.

Social mobility is a type of movement but it is not physical movement over geographical space although social mobility could involve, and be brought about by, physical mobility. It is movement in the social space, the shifting or changing of statuses or class positions. Social mobility is a social process that takes place among individual members or groups in a society, as they interact with each other. It is a process by which individuals or groups move from one status to another; or from one class or stratum to another.

Social mobility describes the volume and quality of movement among strata. That is the kind of movement that people make between the different social classes. Our unit of analysis in social mobility may be an individual, or a social group or a nation.

**Types of Social Mobility**

Sociologists have identified different types of social mobility. The following is a brief discussion of the different types of social mobility (Team of Exeprts, 2000).

**Vertical Social Mobility**

Vertical social mobility is a type of social mobility that individuals experience when they move from their social status to other higher or lower social status. It is a radical social change in an individual's position. It is a movement between different social classes and it involves a change in social position of an individual, a family or a group. It may be upward or downward.

**Horizontal Social Mobility**

Horizontal social mobility is also called lateral social mobility. It is movement within a social class or a social position where the individual slightly improves and/or declines in his social position with in his/ her class level. Unlike vertical social mobility, it doesn't involve drastic changes.

**Inter-generational Social Mobility**

This type of social mobility involves the movement up or down, between the social class of one or two generations of a family, or a social group. In this mobility, our focus of attention is a social group, like the family. Here we look at change in the status position of the family over two or more generations, i.e., the social position of the grandfather, the father and the son.

If a child, for example, whose father was an upper class person as a result of his wealth becomes only a laborer in his own time, then he has experienced a downward intergenerational social mobility.

**Intra-generational mobility**

This concerns individual changes in positions during one's lifetime. It may also refer to the change that occurs in social groups or a country’s socioeconomic position over a specified period of time. In other words, through achievement or other means one can move up from being a poor primary school teacher to a high court judge. Unlike the Inter-generational social mobility, intra generational social mobility is with in one generation. But like inter-generational social mobility, it may be an upward or downward social mobility. Unlike the intergenerational social mobility, our focus here is on a specific individual or group. Here, we observe change in the social position of an individual or a group over the life cycle of the individual himself or the group either upward or in some cases downward. For example, a person in his/her lifetime may rise up from a lower position such as shoeshining, and climb up the social ladder until he or she becomes a member of privileged social and economic position. Or, others may happen to lose their once prestigious socio-economic position and as a result move down until they end up in destitution.

**Avenues of Social Mobility**

The avenues of social mobility are the doors through which a person moves upward in the social hierarchy. The major avenue to social mobility in most modern societies is access to appropriate modern education. Change of profession/ occupation and geographical mobility are also avenues. There are also some sudden or short cut avenues to social mobility. These include windfall gains in terms of inheritance, gambling, theft or financial corruption, winning a lottery game, etc. Such mobility is rare, bearing in mind that most inheritance is within the same social group.

The opportunities for upward social mobility are great in modern societies which have open systems. In such societies, there is freedom of vertical social mobility, and any member of a society may move up or down the social hierarchy. There are no legal and/or traditional restrictions that are put on social mobility on either direction. What count a lot are personal merits, competitions and efforts for achievement. On the other hand, in societies with closed system vertical, especially upward, is very difficult. In such societies, individuals born to a certain social position remain within that category for their lifetime. The most important determinants here are not individual's achievements, merits or personal effort, but what counts most are one's ancestry, racial background, family background, religion, sex, ethnicity, etc.

**Barriers to Upward Social Mobility**

These are factors that make it difficult to individual families or groups to move from one status position to another. Such barriers may include various social, psychological, cultural, economic, political and other related factors. Lack of opportunity, motivation, commitment, interest, or positive attitude, etc., is very crucial psychosocial factors. Other most important barriers may include one's own physical condition, lack of access to an appropriate modern education; inequality in the distribution of inherited wealth; one's color or ethnic origin, religion, etc. These are the most obvious barriers to social mobility.

**Social Change**

**Definition and Basic Characteristics of Social Change**

Social change may be defined as the alteration or transformation at large scale level in the social structure, social institutions, social organization and patterns of social behavior in a given society or social system. Social change can also be defined as the alteration, rearrangement or total replacement of phenomena, activities, values or processes through time in a society in a succession of events. The alteration or rearrangement may involve simple or complex changes in the structure, form or shape of the social phenomena. Sometimes it may mean the complete wiping out of the phenomenon and their total replacement by new forms (Calhoun et al, 1994).

Some minor changes that take place in the lives of individuals and small, limited groups may not be regarded as social changes although these kinds of changes may be the manifestations or effects of changes that are taking place at larger scale. Changes in the material and non- material contents of a culture also may not be regarded as social changes. However, it is very difficult to separate social changes from cultural change. Because the two are usually interdependent, social change may usually introduce cultural changes, and vice versa. Some of the basic characteristics of social change are the following (Indrani, 1998; Team of Experts, 2000):

• Social change occurs all the time. Its process may be imperceptible and can be cumulative, i.e., one may not easily perceive the processes of social change, although it is always taking place.

• There is no society that is static and unchanging. All societies are susceptible to social change. In other words, social change is a universal phenomenon (it is every where and anywhere). It is spread both over time and space.

• Change occurs both at micro-level and macrolevel. The point here is that while social change often refers to noticeable changes in social phenomena, we must not lose sight of the fact that small changes in minor relationships can also be significant

• The influence of change in one area can have an impact on other related areas. That is, social change is contagious, like infectious diseases.

• Social change has a rate; it can be rapid or slow.

**Theories of Social Change**

Theories of social change have generally been concerned with the direction of change and the manner in which change occur. Sociologists want to explain the nature, direction, cause and effects of social change. Some of the theories of social change are the following:

**Structural Functionalist** **Theory**

This theory states that social change takes place as the diversification and division of labor increases in the social system of a given society. Structural functionalists focus on the cohesion, order and stability of social system. Change disrupts the orderly functioning of the system. Structural- functionalist theory focuses on the effect of social change on the structure of society, the function and dysfunction of change, stability and equilibrium of the social system. When change takes place, it affects the order and equilibrium of the social system and thus the system has to bring itself back to the equilibrium, to smooth functioning of the system.

**Conflict Theory**

This theory states that social change takes place due to the ever-present class conflicts in the social system for the better or worse. According to this theory, thus, social change is the result of social conflicts and is essential and beneficial. Every social system contains within itself the seeds of change as far as it is a system wherein exploitation of one group by another exists. Social change continues to become inevitable until a classless society emerges, one in which conflicts cease to exist.

**Cyclic Theory**

This theory states that society undergoes change in circular manner. Social change takes a cyclic form, from worse to better, back again from better to worse. Social change is not always for the better. Societies may grow, advance, and reach peak stage of development, and then they may stagnate and finally collapse, with the potential for rising again.

**Linear Theory**

This theory states that change takes place in a linear manner. The direction of social change is from worse to better, simple to complex and backward to modern. In other words, according to linear theory, social change is evolutionary; it is always towards the better way until perfection is achieved.

**Modernization Theory**

This theory of social change may be regarded as an extension of linear, evolutionary theory. It states that the change that is being experienced by most Third World societies is by imitating or copying the values, experiences, and models of already modernized societies. It is by adopting; assimilating and internalizing those aspects of the industrialized societies which if copied would bring about an improved social, economic and political development to the society.

**Factors That Facilitate and Hinder Positive Social Change**

The various factors that promote or hinder social change may be generally categorized as socio-cultural, psychosocial, economic, natural, demographic, political, and so on. Natural factors may include climate changes, the discovering of natural resources such as, minerals, petroleum, etc., are those which are considered as having positive effects on society. Other natural factors are natural disasters such as earthquake, flood, famine, drought, and pestilence and so on. The emergence of HIV /AIDS as pestilence is for example having great effects on the social arrangement and organization of societies.

Demographic factors-migration, urbanization, population growth, etc., are also important ones in bringing about socio-cultural change. Political factors such as planned change by government, change of state ideology, etc., are also important. Other factors such as war, scientific invention and discoveries, diffusion of non-material and material elements of culture through education and trade relations, etc., also promote social change.

Last but not the least psychosocial factors like beliefs, vested interests, sacred values, attitudes, resistance to change or to accept and entertain new things and intending to maintain the status quo are also very important forces.