**Social Change**

Individuals may strive for stability, societies may create the illusion of permanence, the quest for certainty may continue unabated, yet the fact remains that society is an ever-changing phenomenon, growing, decaying, renewing and accommodating itself to changing conditions and suffering vast modifications in the course of time. Our understanding of it will not be complete unless we take into consideration this changeable nature of society, study how differences emerge and discover the direction of change.

**I. The Meaning of Social Change:**

The word “change” denotes a difference in anything observed over some period of time. Social change, therefore, would mean observable differences in any social phenomena over any period of time.

The following are some of its definitions:

(i) Jones. “Social change is a term used to describe variations in, or modifications of, any aspect of social processes, social patterns, social interaction or social organisation.”

(ii) Mazumdar, H. T. “Social change may be defined as a new fashion or mode, either modifying or replacing the old, in the life of a people, or in the operation of a society.”

(iii) Gillin and Gillin. “Social changes are variations from the accepted modes of life; whether due to alteration in geographical conditions, in cultural equipment, composition of the population or ideologies and whether brought about by diffusion or inventions within the group.”

(iv) Davis. By “Social change is meant only such alterations as occur in social organisation, that is, structure and functions of society.”

(v) Merrill and Eldredge. “Social change means that large number of persons are engaging in activities that differ from those which they or their immediate forefathers engaged in some time before.”

(vi) MacIver and Page. “…Our direct concern as sociologists is with social relationships. It is the change in these relationships which alone we shall regard as social change.”

**II. Nature of Social Change:**

**The main characteristics of the nature of social change are as follows:**

**(i) Social change is a universal phenomenon:**

Social change occurs in all societies. No society remains completely static. This is true of all societies, primitive as well as civilized. Society exists in a universe of dynamic influences.

The population changes, technologies expand, material equipment changes, ideologies and values take on new components and institutional structures and functions undergo reshaping. The speed and extent of change may differ from society to society. Some change rapidly, others change slowly.

**(ii) Social change is community change:**

Social change does not refer to the change in the life of an individual or the life patterns of several individuals. It is a change which occurs in the life of the entire community. In other words, only that change can be called social change whose influence can be felt in a community form. Social change is social and not individual.

**(iii) Speed of social change is not uniform:**

While social change occurs in all societies, its speed is not uniform in every society. In most societies it occurs so slowly that it is often not noticed by those who live in them. Even in modern societies there seems to be little or no change in many areas. Social change in urban areas is faster than in rural areas.

**(iv) Nature and speed of social change is affected by and related to time factor:**

The speed of social change is not uniform in each age or period in the same society. In modern times the speed of social change is faster today than before 1947. Thus, the speed of social change differs from age to age.

The reason is that the factors which cause social change do not remain uniform with the change in times. Before 1947 there was less industrialization in India, after 1947 India has become more industrialized. Therefore, the speed of social change after 1947 is faster than before 1947.

**(v) Social change occurs as an essential law:**

Change is the law of nature. Social change also is natural. It may occur either in the natural course or as a result of planned efforts. By nature we desire change. Our needs keep on changing. To satisfy our desire for change and our changing needs social change becomes a necessity. The truth is that we are anxiously waiting for a change. According to Green, ‘The enthusiastic response of change has become almost a way of life.”

**(vi) Definite prediction of social change is not possible:**

It is difficult to make any prediction about the exact forms of social change. There is no inherent law of social change according to which it would assume definite forms. We may say that on account of the social reform movement untouchability will be abolished from the Indian society; that the basis and ideals of marriage will change due to the marriage laws passed by the government; that industrialization will increase the speed of urbanisation but we cannot predict the exact forms which social relationships will assume in future. Likewise it cannot be predicted as to what shall be our attitudes, ideas, norms and values in future.

**(vii) Social change shows chain-reaction sequence:**

A society’s pattern of living is a dynamic system of inter-related parts. Therefore, change in one of these parts usually reacts on others and those on additional ones until they bring a change in the whole mode of life of many people. For example, industrialism has destroyed the domestic system of production.

The destruction of domestic system of production brought women from the home to the factory and the office. The employment of women meant their independence from the bondage of man. It brought a change in their attitudes and idea. It meant a new social life for women. It consequent affected every part of the family life.

**(viii) Social change results from the interaction of a number of factors:**

Generally, it is thought that a particular factor like changes in technology, economic development or climatic conditions causes social change. This is called monistic theory which seeks to interpret social change in terms of one single factor.

But the monistic theory does not provide an adequate explanation of the complex phenomenon of social change. As a matter of fact, social change is the consequence of a number of factors. A special factor may trigger a change but it is always associated with other factors that make the triggering possible.

The reason is that social phenomena are mutually interdependent. None stand out as isolated forces that bring about change of themselves. Rather each is an element in a system. Modification of vale part influences the other parts and these influence the rest, until the whole is involved.

**(ix) Social changes are chiefly those of modification or replacement:**

Social changes may be broadly categorised as modifications or replacements. It may be modification of physical goods or social relationships. For example, the form of our breakfast food has changed. Though we eat the same basic materials which we ate earlier, wheat, eggs, corn, but their form is changed. Ready-to-eat-cornflakes, breads, omelets are substituted for the form in which these same materials were consumed in yester years.

There may also be modifications of social relationships. The old authoritarian family has become the small equalitarian family, the one room school has become a centralized school. Our ideas about women’s rights, religion, government and co-education stand modified today.

Change also takes the form of replacement. A new material or non-material form supplants an old one Horses have been replaced by automobiles. Similarly, old ideas have been replaced by new ideas. The germ theory of medicine has replaced older views of the cause of disease. Democracy has replaced aristocracy.

**Causes of Social Change**

i. A large part of change in society is caused by change in culture. Culture is a system that constantly loses and gains components. Invention, discovery and diffusion are considered to be the main sources of cultural change.

Inventions produce new products, ideas, and social patterns. It is a new combination or a new use of existing knowledge. Inventions may be classified into material (telephone, aeroplane), and social inventions (alphabet, language, government, etc.). Each invention is new in form, function and meaning and has long-term possibilities of impact. Discovery is finding something that has never been found before, or finding something new in something that already exists. A discovery adds something new to the culture and becomes a factor in social change only when it is put to use. Diffusion is a process of the spreading of ideas, culture and objects to other societies. It operates both within societies and between societies involving trading, migration, and mass communication. It is indeed a two way process:

ii. New ideas and modification of old ideas in a new context bring wide-scale changes in society. For example, Max Weber established that rationalisation of religious ideas brought about phenomenal change in Protestant world.

iii. Demographic change is caused by an increase in birth and decline in death and migration of populations. Change occurs from the demographic transition in society.

iv. Social change is also caused by tension and conflict. Structural strain, deprivation, cultural revitalisation have been the major causes of conflict. Again social division based on class, caste, gender, ethnicity, estate, etc. have also been important sources of conflict in society.

v. Social movements are organised efforts of groups of people to bring about deliberate change in the values, norms, institutions, culture relationships and traditions of the society. They also generate new identities and a new perspective.