8. Social Change

8.1 Social change: Meaning, Nature and Characteristics

8.2 Factors responsible for social change

Introduction

Can we argue that society has remained the same always? Are employment opportunities the same today, as they were before 1991? Is the extent of transport development the same in Nashik and Pune? Was there coalition politics four decades ago? The answer to all these questions would have to be an emphatic - NO!

All human societies and their cultures are dynamic and undergo continuous change. In this chapter we shall understand the meaning of social change, its characteristics and factors that bring about social change.

8.1 Social change: Meaning, Nature and Characteristics.

8.1.1 Definitions

1. *Harry Johnson :* "In its basic sense social change means change in social structure."

2. *Horton and Hunt :* "Social change is a change in the social structure and social relationships of the society."

3. *Kingsley Davis :* "By Social change is meant only such alterations as occur in social organizations, that is, structure and functions of society."

All the definitions given above make reference to a structural-functional approach to social change. This implies that changes in the 'structure' of society have an impact on social relationships that are found within them.

8.1.2 Nature of Social change

Change is an integral part of human society. Changes occur in the natural world as well as, in all human societies. Communities - whether tribal, rural or urban, backward or modern, simple or complex, also experience change. Indeed, the nature of change and the direction of change will vary from one society to another, but change is inevitable. Changes may be slow or rapid; the consequences of change may be positive/constructive or negative/destructive. Social change is a continuous, ongoing process.

In the above paragraph we have used some terms such as the 'nature' of social change, its 'direction', as well as a comment with regard to its 'speed'. Let us briefly examine these terms.

Nature of social change refers to its basic qualities or characteristics. These will be discussed after looking at some terms which are referred to, when speaking about social change.

Sometimes, changes proceed from one stage to another, like in a sequence, and in a single direction. For example, Auguste Comte has given us a Theory of Three Stages of human thought (Refer to Unit 1). This is an example of linear change. Of course, change does not always proceed

in a linear manner. It may also be multi-linear, that is, changes can take place in several different directions at the same time.

Then again, change may be cyclical; for example, this is common in the world of fashion. Styles of dressing or hairstyling which were popular few generations ago have become popular today.

The speed of change is also different. Obviously, one cannot measure the speed of change in terms of precise scales of measurement like in natural sciences, when dealing with societal changes. However, it is possible to perceive that changes are taking place slowly or at a quicker pace. Terms such as 'slow' or 'fast' are relative.

The term 'social change' refers to changes that take place in the structure and functioning of social institutions for example: government, education, economy, marriage, family, religion.

This view of looking at society from the point of view of structure and functions is called *structural functionalism*. It is one way of understanding how society works. It is a 'system's approach',

Herbert Spencer

that has its roots in the English sociologist, Herbert Spencer's 'Organic Analogy' – a theory in which he compares society to a biological organism.

So, just as living organisms have

structures i.e. parts, each part has its own function, or set of functions. Similarly, human society is a structure with various parts. These parts are interrelated and interdependent.

As we know that some of our body parts may, or may not function properly i.e. they may become dysfunctional. For example, if you have a kabbadi match but you have high fever, you will not be able to concentrate on your game. You will need rest or treatment to return to normalcy.

In the same way, the social system also may become dysfunctional at times. Then human beings have to make conscious efforts to help bring about stability, balance and equilibrium in society. Do recall that Emile Durkheim makes reference to 'anomic suicide' where there is a state of normlessness or chaos, which can trigger suicidal feelings.

The social system comprises social institutions like education, government and economy, for example. They regulate human conduct, allocate roles and provide resources. Social change also refers to change in performance of social roles of individuals according to changing times. For example, in today's "Information Age", the role of a teacher in a school is radically different than it was during the Early Vedic period, a few thousand years ago. There are marked differences in terms of size of the school, learners, content of education, the educational philosophy, methods of teaching and evaluation etc.

Society is a system consisting of different components. There is an interrelationship among its parts. The social structure is like a living organism.

Organisms, like institutions and groups always experience some kind of change. Structural changes always occur in society. For example, with regard to structure - in terms of size of family, joint families are now undergoing significant changes. At the same time there are functional changes in the family system. Education was a function of the family previously; today, it is has become a specialized function which has been passed on to schools, colleges and universities, through a formal means of education.

Social change is also a complex phenomenon. It includes the direction of social change, form of social change, sources of social change, causes of social change, and consequences of social change. Any alternation, difference, modification that takes place in a human situation, through time, can be called social change.

8.1.3 Characteristics of Social Change

1. **Universality:** All human societies change. This could include changes in population, beliefs, tools, attire, customs, roles, music, art, architecture etc. Social change is universal. It takes place everywhere. This change is not uniform; it takes place at differing speeds. However, the change is happening.

2. **Continuous process:** Social change is an endless process. There is continuity of change in society. Society is in a permanent state of flux! Right from the emergence of human society – from the times of nomadic cave dwellers to the present, every aspect of human life and living has changed.

3. **Temporal:** Social change is temporal in the sense, it denotes a time sequence. Innovations of new things, modifications, and renovation of the existing phenomena and the discarding of the old takes time. Social change is not instant; it takes place over time. The speed of social change will vary from place to place, from time to time, and within a social context.

4. **Interactional chain reaction:** A single factor may trigger a particular change, but it is almost always associated with other factors. The physical, biological, technological, cultural, social, economic and other factors may together bring about social change. This is due to mutual interdependence of social phenomenon. Thus for example, a huge increase in School Fees will have an impact on student enrolment. It may further result in higher 'drop outs' especially for girl children from the school system.

5. **Neutrality:** The term 'social change' has no value judgment attached to it. As a phenomenon, it is neither moral, nor immoral; it is amoral. It is ethically neutral. Social change is an objective term.

6. **Short-term and Long-term change:** Some social changes may bring about, immediate results while some others may take years or decades to produce results. The purchase of new gadgets like Home Theatre for the purpose of entertainment within the home is faster if one has the purchasing capacity, when compared to giving up social evils like dowry, early marriage, or domestic violence. Eradicating

strongly embedded customs and practices take decades to get rid of.

7. **Planned or Unplanned change:** Unplanned change by its very name, suggests that it is a type of change that is not planned. It happens suddenly. For example, natural calamities such as famine, floods, earthquakes, tsunami etc. When a natural disaster takes place, there is loss of human and animal lives as

The sources or causes of social change are many. The factors responsible for social change may be accounted under different categories which may not always act singly. More often than not, social change is a result of the interaction of multiple factors. Let us examine significant sources of social change:

Planned city

well as property. Rehabilitation programmes have to be immediately designed and implemented for the affected persons.

Some purposeful and planned changes are promoted by the government or other agencies. Take the case of planned cities in India. They have definite spaces marked for residences, parks, grounds, places of worship, business districts, economic zones and so on.

1. **Physical factor:** This factor is also known as geographical or natural factor. Physical factors consist of climatic conditions, physical environment, animal life, biodiversity, mineral resources, natural resources (rivers, vegetation, mountains) etc. They have great influence upon human society. Social change is to some extent conditioned by physical factors. The rate and direction of social change are also governed by the physical

environment. Natural calamities such as famine or drought affect human lives. The Latur earthquake in 1993, in Maharashtra had long-term impact in terms of displacement.

However, geographic conditions may also be favorable for human settlements. There are numerous examples to see how human society has progressed as a result of a healthy physical environment. For example, people who live in areas which have plenty of rain, suitable soil conditions or which are rich in minerals.

The physical environment has also been adversely affected by human behaviour, in the name of "development". For example, the effects of industrial pollution on the environment and the consequent effects such as global warming, melting of solar caps, gradual rise in sea-water levels, submergence of certain coastal regions. These bring about changes in quality of human life. Today therefore, there is a need for conscious efforts to promote 'sustainable development for all'.

2. **Biological factor:** This factor is also known as demographic factor.

Earthquake

ACTIVITY - 2

You have learnt about the physical factor of social change.

Now, write one page about how natural calamities affect the life of people and society by giving some suitable examples.

Demography: Demography is a statistical study of human population. Demography encompasses the study of the size, structure and distribution of the population. It records spatial and temporal changes in population in response to birth, migration, aging and death.

The factor lies in the biological conditions of social continuity, the perpetuation, growth or decline of a given population, migration, or race.
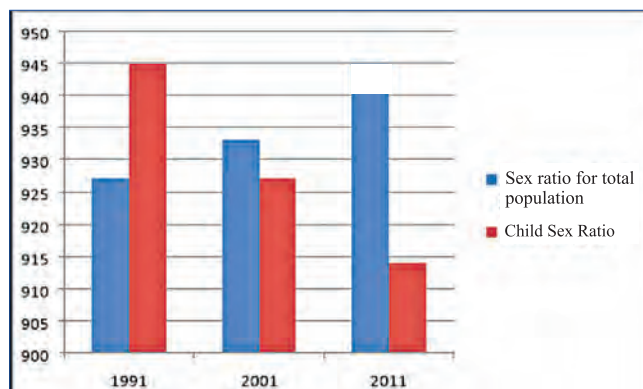
Biological factors influence numbers i.e. population, sex composition, birth rate and death rate, fertility rate and the hereditary quality of successive generations. Factors like size and composition of population produce social change.

The problems of food, housing, unemployment, poor health, poverty, low standard of living etc. are problems as well as direct outcomes of changing demography. Both, overpopulation or under-population has its share of consequences. It leads to regional imbalance, changes in density, skewed sex ratio. All of these affect society. Socio-economic development and access to opportunities is affected by the size of population. For example, the growing population of senior citizens, or declining number of youth in some communities creates new challenges for society.

Sex ratio: Sex ratio is defined as the number of females per thousand males in any given population.

3. **Socio-cultural factor:** Human culture is a process of change. Any change in the cultural order is accompanied by a corresponding change in the whole social order. Where two cultures meet or clash, social changes are inevitable. Cultural diffusion is a source of change. Culture includes our values, beliefs, ideas and ideologies, morals, customs and traditions. These are all subject to change and they in turn, cause changes.

Ideas propounded by biologist Charles Darwin, psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud and thinker Karl Marx, for example, in the past century, have had significant impact across the globe. Let us consider few examples of how ideas and cultural values play a crucial role in social change. The German

sociologist, Max Weber gave importance to the *cultural* factor of social change. He showed an interrelation between the teachings of Protestant religion and spread of capitalism in Europe, in his famous book, 'Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism'.

Also, there are negative consequences of ideologies that promote religious fundamentalism, extremist thinking, superstitious beliefs and practices, blind faith, crass materialism, mindless values; these lead to untold hardships and human miseries. They become stumbling blocks to change.

4. **Economic Factor:** This factor is of unique importance in social change. Stages of economic development in human history are not limited to economic transformation in society. They promoted large scale political and social transformations. Amidst these changes, there continues to be a need for a decent livelihood and human welfare.

Economic development affects different institutions. In Unit 1 you read about the impact of the industrial revolution as well as the scientific revolution on human society. The growth of large–scale industries led to a spurt in cities, employment opportunities, professionalism, exploitation, trade unionism and so forth.

Economic competition has resulted in class-conflict, increase in materialism in the society. The class-divide continues to this day. The well-known Theory of Class by Karl Marx has

been discussed in Unit 2. This 'conflict approach' has had a significant impact on understanding social change and also on movements against injustice in society. For example: Peasant movement, Women's movement, Labour movement, Equal Rights movement, Students' movement, Tribal movement etc. For conflict theorists, 'conflict' is considered a basis for change in society, unlike the 'functionalist' approach - which focused on explanations related to the maintenance of social stability and equilibrium in society.

You are students who were born during the post-Globalization era. It is a process that continues to have a huge impact on Indian society. The LPG (Libralisation, Privatisation and globalisation) Policy adopted by the Government of India in 1991 has led to far reaching consequences on our political institution, economy, family, education etc.

ACTIVITY - 3

Try to understand the meaning of globalisation and observe changes brought about by globalisation in the world around you.

5. **Technological factor:** One of the benchmarks of a so-called civilized society is its extent of technological development. Today, we certainly ask questions like: What does 'development' mean? Development for whom? Development at what cost? And yet, technological development creates new conditions of life and new conditions for adaptation. Technological development continues

to be an index of the overall 'progress' of society.

Technological changes have affected social, economic, religious, political and cultural life of human beings. For example, during the decades of the British period in India, systems of transportation and communication were laid. These may well have served the needs of the colonizers then, but we still continue to benefit from the systems founded by them. Indeed, successive Indian Governments have further expanded and improved these services.

Our daily life is increasingly loaded with the effects of technology - from our homes, to our workplaces, sports, entertainment, voting, banking, e-commerce, e-business, e-governance, travel etc. Opportunities for e-learning, e-library, e-commerce, e-ticketing, online marketing, online examination is possible today, due to technological innovations.

Metro project

We live in a digitized age. Alas, the tragedy is that while we have started using advanced technologies, there still exist people who go to bed on an empty stomach; those who cannot access health care, those who cannot afford professional education, or those who are homeless! Digitization has helped the government to identify

many beneficiaries.

6. Educational factor:

Ignorance, lack of awareness and unwillingness to be educated is a major impediment to change. Education through various means such as formal education, informal education, non-formal education and open/distance learning provides opportunities for us to get educated.

YCMOU

Education is a means to help develop ideas and skills, solve problems, transform people. People do acquire knowledge, skills, develop competencies and then use these to seek employment or self-employment. The government is making huge efforts to reach to all sections of society through Right to Education (RTE).

The purpose of education, its content, its pedagogy is changing. Use of technology

within education through e-learning, online education (for example, MOOCS), smart boards, virtual classrooms, National Digital Library etc. have brought about far-reaching changes even within the field of education.

Many persons have opportunities to learn due to the efforts of the government.

A special effort has been made by the University Grants Commission, (UGC) to encourage education for transgender persons. Universities have started admitting students who identify as transgender, to some of their educational programmes of study. There are also many philanthropists who provide scholarships for those who are needy, as well as for the meritorious.

Education can transform people's lives.

Change is the one constant feature of human society. This chapter has taught you the meaning of social change and specifically factors like biological, socio-cultural, economic, technological and educational which have changed our lives and patterns of living. This chapter will definitely help you understand changes happening around you.

SUMMARY

- Human society is a dynamic process. Change is ever present phenomenon everywhere. Change is inevitable.
- Sociology studies static as well as dynamic aspects of society.
- Sociology is interested in studying the structural as well as functional aspects of society. Social change means the alterations that occur in the structure and functions of society.
- Social change has some important characteristics like - continuous process, temporal in nature, phenomenal inter-dependence, ethically neutral, short-term and long-term change, planned and unplanned change etc.
- Social change is caused by a number of factors. No single factor is responsible for change in society.
- The factors that contribute to social change are: Physical or Geographical factor, Biological factor, Socio-cultural factor, Economic factor, Technological factor and Educational factor.

EXERCISE

1. (A) Choose the correct alternative and complete the statements.

(1) Social change as a term is ___.
(value loaded, ethically neutral, prejudiced)

(2) The effects of an earthquake on people is a ___ factor of change.
(geographical, biological, cultural)

(3) The study of sex ratio is a ___ factor of change.
(biological, technological, natural)

(4) The Slum Rehabilitation programme within a city is an example of ___ social change.
(planned, unplanned, revolutionary)

1. (B) Correct the incorrect pair.

(1) (i) Earthquake - Physical

(ii) Fundamentalism - Biological

(iii) Growing urbanization - Economic

(iv) E-governance - Technological

1. (C)   Identify the appropriate term from the given options.

Physical factor, Educational factor, Economic factor

(1) Impact of rising sea water level on coastal regions.

(2) Creating awareness about the problem of sexual abuse.

1. (D)   Correct underlined words and complete the sentence.

(1) Social change is a <u>linear</u> process.

(2) All teachers are expected to think about how they will teach a unit in the classroom. This is an example of <u>unplanned change</u>.

2.   Write differences.

(1) Planned change and Unplanned Change

(2) Short-term and Long-term change

3.   Explain the following concept with an example.

(1) Social change

(2) Long-term change

4. (A)   Complete the concept map.

Identify the significant factor of change for each:

Inventions	
Effects of earthquake	
Declining sex ratio	
Student Exchange programme	

(B)   State whether the following statements are True or False with reasons.

(1) Prejudice and fear of the unknown is an obstacle to change.

(2) Social change can be predicted accurately.

5.   Give your personal response.

(1) Do you think people do not accept change easily? Why?

(2) Do you think the 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' has had a positive impact on society? Justify your response.

ACTIVITY:

Trace changes in fashions and eating habits followed by teenagers in the past decade. Make a pictorial album or photo essay to show the changes.

❖❖❖