

Class notes on social change: Meaning and Nature or Characteristics

Meaning of social change:

Any alteration, difference or modification that takes place in a situation or in an object through time can be called change. The term 'social change' is used to indicate the changes that take place in human interactions and interrelations. Society is a web of relationships and social change means a change in the system of social relationships. Thus the term social change is used to desirable variations in social interaction, social processes and social organization. A society generally has two distinct tendencies. They are- conservative and progressive. People in society have their tendency to conserve or preserve the social heritage of the past. Every society is proud of its own cultural history of the past. This is what may be describing as the conservative tendency of the society. But at the same time it has the tendency to change, modify and improve the existing social heritage. Man is never satisfied with his present situation or existing condition. He wants to make changes and improvement of the existing state of affairs. This change is the law of nature and it is inevitable in the life of an individual as well as of society.

So social change and development is inevitable in human society. It is also an instinctive tendency in man to have the curiosity for new knowledge and new experiences. It leads to dissatisfaction with the existing situations that result in the changes. So, social situation undergoes changes with the changes of time that result in social progress.

According to Kingsley Davis- "By social change is meant only such alterations as occur in social organization, that is, structure and functions of society."

According to Maclver and Page- "Social change refers to "a process" responsive to many types of changes; to change in the manmade condition of life; to changes in the attitudes and beliefs of

men, and to the changes that go beyond the human control to the biological and the physical nature of things”

Nature and characteristics of social change:

- Social change is continuous: Society is always undergoing endless changes. Society cannot be preserved in a museum to save it from the ravages of time. From the dawn of history society has been in continuous flux.
- Social change is temporal: Social change is temporal in the sense it denotes the time-sequence. In fact, society exists only as a time-sequence. Innovation of new things, modification and renovation of the existing behavior and the discarding of the old behavior patterns take time.
- Social change is environmental: It must take place within a geographic or physical and cultural context. Both these contexts have impact on human behavior and in turn man changes them. A social change never takes place in vacuum.
- Social change is human change: The sociological significance of the change consists in the fact that it involves the human aspect. The composition of society is not constant, but changing.
- Social change may be planned or unplanned: The direction and tempo of social change are often conditioned by human plans and programmes of man in order to determine and control the rate and direction of social change. Unplanned change refers to change resulting from natural calamities such as- famines, floods, earthquakes etc.
- Short versus long-run changes: Some social changes may bring about immediate results while some others may take years and decades to produce results. This distinction is significant, because a change which appears to be very vital today may be nothing more than a temporary oscillation having nothing to do with the essential trends of life, some years later.
- Social change is an objective term: The term social change describes one of the categorical processes. It has no value-judgments attached to it. To the sociologist social change as a phenomenon is neither moral nor immoral, it is amoral. It means the study of

social change involves no value judgment. One can study change even within the value system without being for against the change.

- Social change may create chain reaction: Change in one aspect of life may lead to a series of changes in its other aspects. For example- change in rights, privileges and status of women has resulted in a series of changes in home, family relationships and structure, the economic and to some extent political pattern of both rural and urban society.
