



Notes

18



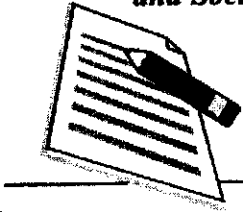
331en18

PROCESSES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

*H*uman society has always been experiencing change. You must also be experiencing such change not only in your own life but also in the family around you. Some of your family members must have left their native village and shifted to urban areas. Similarly, some must have changed their occupations from agriculture to manufacturing and service. Your grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts and cousins were previously living in large joint families, under one roof. But, now they must have separated from the large joint family and must be living in smaller units. Therefore, as you see the changes are witness not only in occupations but also in the family structure.

Till recently, people were seen wearing the traditional dress quite often, but now the cosmopolitan form of dressing has become common. The same is seen in the materials being used for these garments. We find that the social institutions too have undergone tremendous modifications from the times of our forefathers. The recent forms are very different from the way they existed in the earlier period. When we look at all that is taking place around us, we find every phenomenon undergoes some sort of change every movement which may not be perceived immediately. Like in the case of the changing relationship between an employer and employee in an industrial firm.

Therefore a study of social change, its causes and consequences, has become an important area of study today. In this lesson we are concerned with the following aspects of social change.



Notes



OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- understand meaning of social change;
- explain the terms associated with social change;
- recognize the characteristics of social change; and
- explain the theories and patterns of social change.

18.1 WHAT IS THE MEANING OF "SOCIAL CHANGE"?

The term social change comprises two words - social and change. It is imperative to understand their meaning. The social change denotes as difference in anything be it individual, group society or any material object over a period of time. The term social is defined in two different ways. One, in terms of society social structure and two in terms of culture. Some sociologists say that by social change is meant only such alterations, which occur in social organizations, that is, in structure and functions of society. The other group of sociologists define in terms of rise and fall of culture. Social change is a part of cultural change which include science, technology and values of social organization.

In other words, social change is a term used to describe variation in any respect of social processes and social interactions. It can also be described as a mode that either modifies or replaces the "old in the life of a people and in the functioning of a society. Society exists in a universe of dynamic influences. For instance, change in material equipment and expansion of technology resulted in reshaping of ideologies and values. This, in turn, effects institutional structures as they take on new components thus altering their functioning. The impact of modern social forces is evident in the change of family structure. Joint family system has been a common pattern in India. The head of the family exercises absolute powers over its members and distributes work among them. It is now fast being replaced by the nuclear family wherein family ties and authority of the head are gradually weakening.

This change is also illustrative of structural change. Such a change, in turn, brings about change in the role of family members. This is indicative of functional change. However, as a result of competitive economy and spread of education in India we expected a total transition from the caste system to the class system. But it is found that caste is not being replaced completely by class. There is only a marginal change in the role of caste. For example, we find that occupation has become caste-free. There is freedom now to take up any occupation. This is no longer

decided by one's position in the caste hierarchy. We find many upper-caste people taking up jobs that were earlier meant for the lower castes.

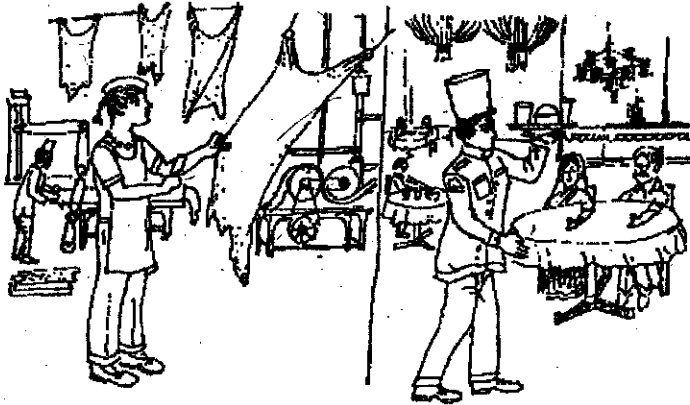


Fig 1: Occupation has become caste free

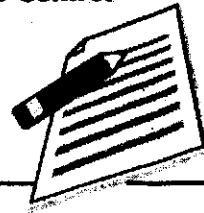
INTENT QUESTIONS 18.1

Fill in the blanks (choose the right words from the bracket):

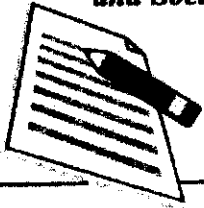
1. When an object does not show movement, it is said to be _____. (mobile, static, flexible)
2. Social change is considered to be _____. (radical, value-neutral, desirable)
3. Social change means modifications or variation in social _____, social processes and social structure. (action, reaction, inter-actions)
4. Social change is a change in the institutional and normative _____ of society. (history, economy, structure).
5. Society exists in a _____ of dynamic influences. (environment, ideology, universe)

18.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

Social change is Universal:- Every society experience change in one way or the other we find that patterns of life, social institutions and culture keep changing according to necessities and external conditions. Social change usually follows a pattern and is universal and inevitable. It is not a modern phenomenon, some kinds and degrees of change are universal in human existence. However, in contemporary society change occurs rapidly and frequently.



Notes



Notes

Social change is not Uniform:- Although social change occurs in all societies but its rate varies from place to place and time to time. Social change is relative in terms of time, space and context. Social change, in fact, depends upon the nature of society itself and upon the readiness of the people to adopt to new innovations and emerging social institutions and structure. Social change is deliberate.

Social change is Deliberate:- Many dimensions of social change are deliberately encouraged. People began as fruit-gatherer in the primitive sometimes moving slowly towards shifting cultivation and finally graduated to irrigated and multi-cropping agriculture. As seen in the case of development of industrial societies, scientists continually seek more effective forms of energy and innovations in medical technology, use of biogas not only for cooking purposes but also for electrification in villages. Medical doctors are now performing operations, on almost all organs successfully. New technology expands the range of human possibilities like successful landing on the moon. Also, it is seen that co-education in urban environment is leading to many inter-caste marriages. But couples so involved in the rural areas are boycotted and some times punished.

Duration of Change Varies:- It implies change can be rapid or gradual, continuous or abrupt, long or short. Thus, by definition it occurs over a period of time. Some changes occur within a short time, while others take centuries to be noticed. Green revolution popularized multiple cropping and high-yielding variety of seeds within a decade. Whereas, spread of female education and change in the information technology has brought rapid changes.

Social Change is value neutral:- Social change is value neutral phenomenon, as it is not understood in terms of good or bad, desirable or undesirable. Good and bad are subjective notions and are based on different criteria used by different individuals, groups and societies. For example there has been some change in the Indian Society after independence. Some people say that with industrial development their way of living has improved, whereas others say that this has spelt a doom for human kind as they not only lost their jobs but pollution also increased. Since social change is considered to be value neutral such subjective preferences of different people are not given importance in the study of social change.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 18.2

Tick Mark True or False:

1. The rate of social change is same for all societies. (True/False)
2. Social change is a universal process. (True/False)

3. Social change can take place in a short time and may take centuries to be noticed. (True/False)
4. Social change may be good or bad, desirable or undesirable. (True/False)

18.3 TERMS ASSOCIATED WITH SOCIAL CHANGE

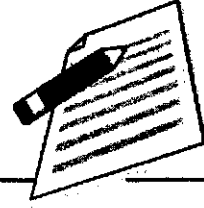
When we talk of change many terms and things are associated with it. The terms that have been associated with social change are “**evolution**” and “**progress**”. In this lesson we will look at the above terms and some other related terms like **revolution and development**.

18.3.1 Evolution

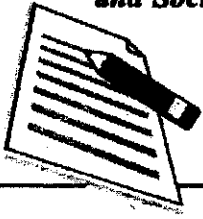
The term evolution means more than just growth. Growth actually implies a change in size or quality in a desired direction. **Evolution basically involves a more intrinsic change not only in size but also of structure.** It is a process of growth, increasing complexity and differentiation of structure and functions of society. It also refers to interdependence among differentiated parts. Thus we see that **evolution is an expression of continuity indicating a certain direction of change.** It is unilinear indirection, i.e., from simple to complex structure and from small to large whereas change may have many directions. Biological evolution explains change from a simple stage to a complex one as is seen in the case of a living organism. Many sociologists have compared society to a biological organism, thus giving an explanation to social evolution. It is taken to be a process leading to progressive differentiation with increasing capabilities and adaptation to the environment. This can be understood clearly by looking at the way people build their shelters.

Thus we may say that evolution is an irreversible process. The direction can not be reversed from the complex stage to the simple stage

In earlier days, people would build shelter themselves with the help from immediate family members. For materials they relied upon their surroundings. Later, they improved on their work. Gradually, with the advancement of technology, they started using better tools and they required skilled workers like masons, carpenter, plumber, electrician and so on. At this stage, they also started using other materials keeping in mind climate, rainfall and terrain. It may also be gauged in terms of the evolution of human society from primitive times. Initially, human beings were food gatherers who gradually transformed into a wandering and hunting group. Domestication of plants and animals brought about the agrarian stage. This was followed by the settled cultivation and horticulture stage. Subsequently, human -



Notes



Notes

beings entered into the industrial stage. A similar trend can be seen in the evolution of social institutions, laws, norms, values and social structure. Evolution describes a series of related changes in a system of some kind. However, it is seen that social evolution can be multi-linear while showing growth of human knowledge.

18.3.2 Revolution

Revolution is a form of sudden and abrupt overthrow of the existing social order and system. It is also characterized by a **change that comes about in a short period of time**. The system that replaces the existing one is totally different and new. Like in the case of the **French Revolution** the rule of the Emperor came to an end suddenly. The hungry and poor masses attacked those in power, wiping them out totally. This was replaced by the rule of the common man.

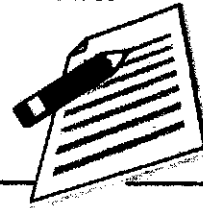
In the recent decades, Mahatma Gandhi was a true revolutionary. He successfully fought against exploitation and overthrew the British rule.

Revolution basically aims at liberating people from an oppressive system. It removes the prime cause of discontentment and thus puts an end to their social, cultural, political and economic suffering. However, the movements that aim at restoration or reinforcement of old, traditional systems can be termed as counter – revolution. The emphasis on the study of Vedas, for example, aimed at the restoration of traditional values. This was meant to create a positive feeling towards social responsibilities and gender equality.

18.3.3 Progress

It is a term that sees the present in comparison to the past. It is a relativistic notion. Progress refers not so much to social change as to the direction which human beings deliberately give to that change. This indicates the existence of some pre-determined, ideal destination or goal. This means that a “final goal” has to be reached. So, a movement in the desired direction has to be undertaken. This movement occurs so as to reach the final goal and can be termed progress. In other words, it is a **change in a certain direction, always towards some desired goals**. It can be called a realization of cherished values, which is desirable. It is seen that only relative comparisons can give a fair idea of progress. Therefore, we can say that if social change takes place in a desired direction, it is called progress. This term involves a value – judgment.

The earliest criteria used to determine progress were those related to technical advancement, like money economy and communication system. But it was found



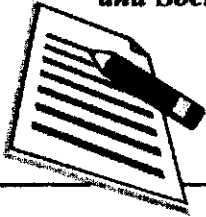
Notes

that this could not be the sole basis of evaluating progress. Progress in one area is in fact related to and dependent on another area. This leads us to recognize change as a complex phenomenon. More so, because every successive stage of human development would be progress. Similarly, the growing complexity of any organization or elaborate division of labour would show progress. Therefore, progress can not simply be treated as a movement from simple to complex but one that also involves many dimensions.

To put it simply, we could say that **progress depends on two factors, the nature of the end and the distance at which we are from it.** Progress is usually determined in terms of material advancement, individual enhancement, greater control over human conditions of life, human happiness, order and harmony at societal level. So, when we say that we are progressing we mean that society is flourishing both materially and morally. It is not possible to speak of progress without reference to standard. Standards, as we know, are eminently subjective. This is so because different people may look differently at the same social changes. To some, they may appear as progress and to some, a decadence. In the case of free mixing of young boys and girls, some people may think of it as progressive, whereas to others, it may seem as a fall in the morality. In other words, it is difficult to find clear and definite standards that would be acceptable to all. This, in turn, would lead to a difficulty in formulating definite conceptions of progress that would apply to all times and to all cultures. Since, it is not possible that inventions will stop as man has all the material goods that he needs, **as man's wants are unlimited; changes will continue in future also.**

18.3.4 Development

The notion of development is a recent phenomenon. It refers to a change in the desired direction. **It is a strategy of planned social change in a direction that is considered desirable by the members of a society.** It is contextual and relative in nature. Therefore, the notion of development may differ from society to society. This is based on the socio-cultural background, geographical and political situation of the society. It is a composite concept. It includes progress in various other fields like trade, agriculture, industry, health, education and so on. Along with this, the welfare, of weaker sections, women, sick, old people, children, unemployed and minorities are some of the considerations. Thus we may say that development is a value loaded concept that takes into account the socio-cultural and economic needs of a given society, region and people. Many policies and programmes are launched, aimed at the development of rural people, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, women, urban people, agricultural workers and industrial workers etc.



Notes

Why do we say “development” has taken place through the means of transport and communication? This can be explained by looking at the advancement from a cycle to motorcycle to railways to automobiles and so on. This does not only show a movement from the lesser to the more advanced stage. In this, we need to consider the social and economic implications. It is seen that in the case of railways, large areas have been connected for trading purposes. This has not only bridged distances but also brought the people closer. In other words, people of different cultures and strata have started mixing with each other. This has led to an exchange of cultures, breaking of barriers and better understanding. Simultaneously, it has generated employment opportunities ranging from the unskilled to the highly skilled. This illustrates how railways would be seen as a vehicle of development and not just a mere means of transport.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 18.3

Answer in one sentence

1. What is social change?

2. Give characteristics of social change?

3. What is meant by evolution?

4. How does revolution differ from counter – revolution?

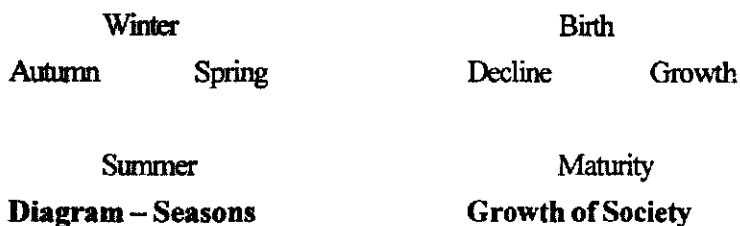
5. Give two points of distinction between the term “progress” and “development”.

18.4 THEORIES OF SOCIAL CHANGE

We need to understand the general theories put forward by social scientists to explain social change. Three main theories are there for social change.

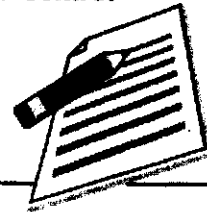
1. Evolutionary Theory
2. Cyclical Theory
3. Functional Theory
4. Conflict Theory,

1. **Evolutionary Theory** – It is believed that societies are like organisms, which evolve in the same manner as Darwin's notion of biological evolution i.e. survival of the fittest. In other words, societies go through series of stages based on increasing complexity towards higher and more advanced and developed state of existence. This theory favours a notion that each new stage of development is more advanced than the one before. Evolution describes a series of related changes in a system of some kind. It is a process in which hidden or latent characters or a 'thing' reveal themselves. The change must occur within the changing unit as the manifestation of the forces operating it.
2. **Cyclical Theory** – This theory is founded on the belief that societies have pre-determined life cycle of birth, growth, maturity and decline. Like waves in the ocean the great culture emerge, rise to heights, only to subside which others rise in their turn. Repeating set of activities that form a cyclical pattern like rhythms of nature, like cycle of night and day and seasons etc.

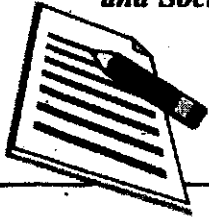


According to Hindu mythology, modern society is in the last stage in which *Satyug* will again start after *Kalyug* is over. It is also evident from the growth of various civilizations including Egyptian, Greek and Roman. They passed through cycles of birth, maturity and death. It is seen that societies also pass through periods of political vigour and decline, which repeat them in cyclical fashion,

3. **Functional Theory**- According to this theory, societies change but they also tend to move towards equilibrium. Any disturbance in the system is easily accommodated within the existing structure. The endogenous and exogenous sources of change take the system from one stage of equilibrium to another stage. The structural differentiation and concomitant development of patterns and mechanism integrate the differentiated parts, new structural units and new institutions performs the functions which were performed by old units. For



Notes



Notes

instance, the task of education which was easily performed by family is taken over by educational institutions like schools, colleges and universities.

- Conflict Theory** – According to this theory, every pattern of action, belief and interaction tends to generate an opposing reaction. Thus this theory highlights the forces producing instability using social disorganization. It sees unequal distribution of power and authority as the fundamental source of conflict. The groups with power want to preserve the status quo while other groups desire to change it. This conflict between these groups leads to various changes in the structure of society although the nature and depth of conflict and resultant change depends on numerous factors. Every social structure begins as a “thesis” of its current state of existence but its own internal contradictions or antagonisms prompt a challenge to its structure. This challenge is called the “antithesis”. This conflict resolves itself into a “synthesis” of a wholly new social structure carrying some elements from both “thesis” and the “antithesis”. However, this theory does not explain social stability in societies.

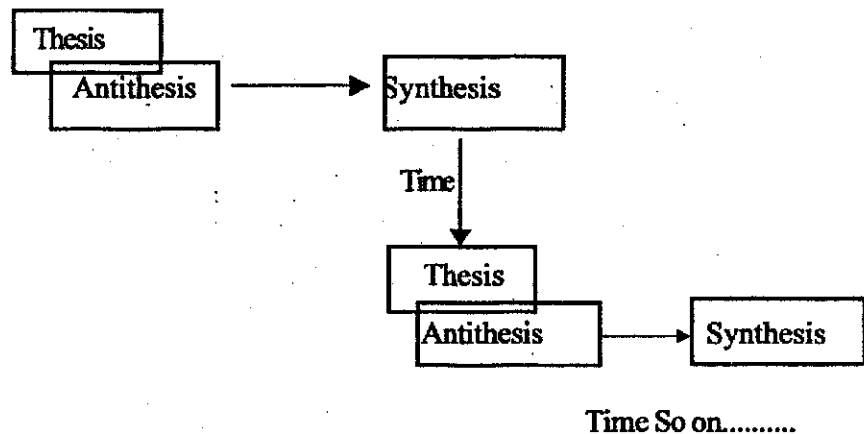


Diagram – Dialectics of Social Change

18.5 PATTERNS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

It is seen that social change follows certain patterns. The widely recognized patterns are as follows:

- Linear change** – This type of change shows a straight – line progression from one stag to another in a linear fashion.

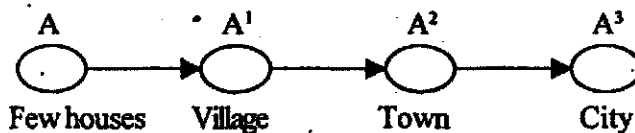


Diagram – Steady growth from few houses to city (on the basis of numbers)



Notes

Society gradually moves to an even higher state of civilization in the direction of improvement; thus it advances in a linear fashion. Also what will be invented tomorrow is not only based on what exist today but on the origins of the past inventions. The growth of development in communication such as telephone has followed a linear pattern. It has grown from land – line to cordless telephones and has reached the stage of mobile phones.

2. **Cyclical change-** Rapid change on a closer look turns out to be a repeating set of activities that form a cyclical pattern like rhythms of nature, cycle of night and day, seasons sowing-reaping-harvesting. Similarly, society has a pre-determined life cycle. After going through all the stages it returns to the original stage and the cycle begins afresh again.
3. **Fluctuating Change etc. –** When the order of change turns to the opposite direction after leading towards progress, it is called fluctuating change. In other words, the tendency of change in this phase is not consistent but seems to go up and down depending upon favourable or unfavourable circumstances, as is seen in the case of agriculture. Advancement in the field of agriculture gets retarded if there is insufficient monsoon in one season and increases if there is normal monsoons in the next season.

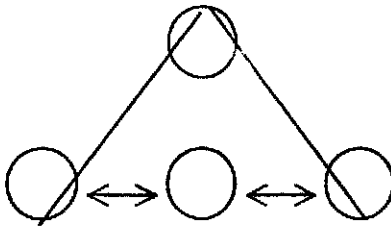


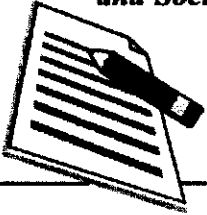
Diagram : Fluctuating change

INTEXT QUESTIONS 18.4

Write answer in one sentence

1. Give an example of cyclic pattern of social change.

2. What is fluctuating change?

**Notes**

3. Explain the cyclical theory of social change.

4. Explain the functional theory of social change.

5. List the three theories used by social scientists to explain social change.

By now, you must have seen that social change is universal and assumes different patterns in the course of time. You have also learnt how different concepts and terms are used by sociologists to express the nature and extent of social change. But the question still remains: what are the major factors responsible for changes in society. The lesson, which follows, discusses some of the major factors of social change.

**WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT**

- Social change is associated with only such alternatives which occur in society and its culture.
- The rate of social change is different in different societies.
- Many dimensions of social change are deliberately encouraged.

Social change is universal.

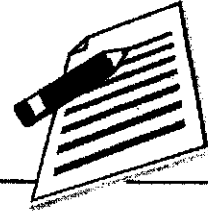
- Social change is seen to be a neutral concept.
- Evolution basically involves a more intrinsic change not only in size but also of structure. Thus evolution is an expression of continuity indicating a certain direction of change.
- Revolution is a form of sudden and abrupt overthrow of the existing social order and system. It is a change that comes about in a short period of time.

- Revolution basically aims at liberating people from an oppressive system.
- Progress is a change in a certain direction, always towards some desired goals. It can be called a realization of cherished values which is desirable.
- Progress depends on two factors: the nature of the end and the distance at which we are from it.
- Development is a strategy of planned social change in a direction, which is considered desirable by the members of a society.
- Development is a value-loaded concept that takes into account the socio-cultural and economic needs of a given society, region and people.
- Social change follows certain patterns
 1. They are Linear change.
 2. Cyclical change
 3. Fluctuating change
- The four main theories of social change.
 1. Evolutionary Theory,
 2. Cyclical Theory
 3. Functional Theory
 4. Conflict

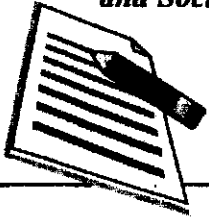


TERMINAL EXERCISES

1. List the characteristics of social change.
2. Differentiate between the terms: evolution and revolution.
3. Give at least six points of distinction between “progress” and “development”.
4. Elaborate on the most frequently found patterns of social change seen in society.
5. Explain in about 125 words the conflict theory of social change.



Notes



Notes

GLOSSARY

1. Variation- having different forms, changing
2. Neutral – impartial, neither positive nor negative.
3. Transition – Passing of changing from one place, state or condition to another.
4. Emancipated – less inhibited by social conventions.
5. Intrinsic – belonging naturally to something essential,
6. Irreversible – go back to what it was earlier.
7. Oppressive – harsh, cruel and controlling,
8. Restoration – to go back to the supposed or original form,
9. Reinforcement – strengthening or supporting,
10. Strategy – plan of action; planning or management of policy,
11. Value – loaded – a term having many interpretations, necessarily positive and good,
12. *Kalyug* – the dark era, where evil predominates over goodness e.g., in Hindu Mythology.
13. *Vedas* – Holy Scriptures of the Hindus: four in number.
14. *Satyug* – the era in which goodness and truth prevailed, in Hindu mythology,
15. Thesis – a proposition to be maintained or proved,
16. Anti – thesis – contrast or opposition between two things,
17. Synthesis – the process or result of building up ideas into a connected whole, Theory or system,
18. Dialectics – a struggle between opposing ideas of social forces,
19. Diversity – unlike in nature; varied,
20. Rational – based on reasoning; endowed with reason; sensible,

**ANSWER TO INTTEXT QUESTIONS**

18.1

1. Static
2. Value-neutral

3. interactions
4. Structure
5. Universe

18.2

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| 1. False | 2. True |
| 3. True | 4. False |

18.3

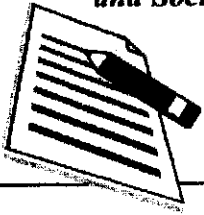
1. By social change is meant only such alternations that occur in structure and function of society and in culture of society.
2. (a) It is universal
(b) It is not uniform
(c) It is duration vary
(d) It is value-neutral
3. Evolution is a process of progressive differentiation of forms, capabilities, endowments, from simple to complex, over a period of time which is irreversible
4. Revolution is a sudden, abrupt, total change that takes place in a social system leading to the emergence of a new social order. Whereas counter – revolution is a restoration of the old traditional systems that had prevailed before the revolution.
5. Progress is a movement in the desired direction so as to reach a “final goal” which is motivated by positive and rational considerations. Development is a strategy of planned social change in a direction, which is considered desirable by the members of a society in not just one area but all related areas.

18.4

1. Trade advances, falls, business activity rises, booms, then slumps and then starts afresh.
2. When change turns to the opposite direction after leading towards progress i.e. it seems to go up and down depending upon favourable or unfavourable circumstances, it is called fluctuating change.



Notes

**Notes**

3. An example of this would be – agriculture grew from times of organic manure to chemical fertilizers, now it is back to the use of organic manures.
4. The three main theories used by social scientists to explain social change are-
 - a. Evolutionary theory
 - b. Cyclical theory
 - c. Functional Theory
 - d. Conflict theory