**Social Change: Meaning, Nature and Processes**  
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Change is the law of nature. What is today shall be different from what it would be tomorrow. The social structure is subject to incessant 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**.**

1. **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.”

(vii) **M. D. Jenson.** “Social change may be defined as modification in ways of doing and thinking of people.”

(viii) **Koenig, S.** “Social change refers to the modifications which occur in the life patterns of a people.”

(ix) **Lundberg and others.** “Social change refers to any modification in established patterns of inter human relationships and standards of conduct.

(x) **Anderson and Parker**. “Social change involves alteration in the structure or functioning of social forms or processes themselves.”

(xi) **Ginsberg, M.** “By social change, I understand a change in social structure e.g., the size of a society, the composition or balance of its parts or the type of its organisation.”

On the basis of these definitions it may be concluded that social change refers to the modifications which take place in the life patterns of people. It does not refer to all the changes going on in the society. The changes in art, language, technology; philosophy etc., may not be included in the term ‘Social change’ which should be interpreted in a narrow sense to mean alterations in the field of social relationships.Social relationships are social processes, social patterns and social interactions. Thus social change will mean variations of any aspect of social processes, social patterns, social interactions or social organisation. It is a change in the institutional and normative structure of society.

**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:  
Wh**ile 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 of 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.

1. **Theories of Social Change**  
   Among the theories of social change we shall study the theories regarding:

(i) **the direction of social change and (ii) the causes of social change.**

**The Direction of Social Change:**Early sociologists viewed the culture of primitive peoples as completely static, but this was abandoned with the appearance of scientific studies of preliterate cultures. Anthropologists now agree that primitive cultures have undergone changes although at such a slow pace as to give the impression of being stationary.

In recent years the social change has proceeded at a very rapid rate. Since World War I numerous countries have passed through profound changes not only in their political institutions but in their class structures, their economic systems, their modes of living. Various theories have been advanced to explain the direction of social change. We take a brief consideration of each of them.

**Theory of Deterioration:**

Some thinkers have identified social change with deterioration. According to them, man originally lived in a perfect state of happiness in a golden age. Subsequently, however, deterioration began to take place with the result that man reached an age of comparative degeneration. This was the notion in the ancient Orient.

It was expressed in the epic poems of India, Persia and Sumeria. Thus, according to Indian mythology man has passed through four ages—Satyug, Treta, Dwapar and Kaliyug. The Satyug was the best age in which man was honest, truthful and perfectly happy.

Thereafter degeneration began to take place. The modern age is the age of Kaliyug wherein man is deceitful, treacherous, false, dishonest, selfish and consequently unhappy. That such should be the concept of history in early times is understandable, since we observe deterioration in every walk of life today.

**Cyclic Theory:**

Another ancient notion of social change found side by side with the afore-mentioned one, is that human society goes through certain cycles. Looking to the cyclic changes of days and nights and of climates some sociologists like Spengler believe that society has a predetermined life cycle and has birth, growth, maturity, and decline.

Modern society is in the last stage. It is in its old age. But since history repeats itself, society after passing through all the stages, returns to the original stage, whence the cycle again begins. This concept is found in Hindu mythology, a cording to which Satyug will again start after Kaliyug is over. J.B. Bury in his The Idea of Progress, pointed out that this concept is also found in the teachings of stoic philosophers of Greece as well as in those of some of the Roman philosophers, particularly Marcus Aurelius.

The view that change takes place in a cyclical way has been accepted by some modern thinkers also who have given different versions of the cyclical theory. The French anthropologist and biologist Vacher de Lapouge held that race is the most important determinant of culture. Civilization, he maintained, develops and progresses when a society is composed of individuals belonging to superior races and declines when racially inferior people are absorbed into it.

Western civilization, according to him, is doomed to extinction because of the constant infiltration of foreign inferior elements and their increasing control over it. The German anthropologist Otto Ammon, the Englishman Houston Stewart Chamberlain and American Madison Grant arid Lothrop Stoddard also agreed with the view of Lapouge which may be called the theory of biological cycle.

Spengler developed another version of cyclical theory of social change. He analysed the history of various civilizations including the Egyptian, Greek and Roman and concluded that all civilizations pass through a similar cycle of birth, maturity and death. The western civilization is now on its decline which is unavoidable.

Vilfredo Pareto propounded the theory that societies pass through the periods of political vigour and decline which repeat themselves in cyclical fashion. The society according to him, consists of two types of people—one, who like to follow traditional ways whom he called rentiers, and those who like to take chances for attaining their ends whom he called as Speculators.

Political change is initiated by a strong aristocracy, the speculators who later lose their energy and become incapable of vigorous role. Thus ruling class eventually resort to tricks or to clever manipulations and they come to possess individuals characterized by the rentier mentality. The society declines, but at the same time speculators arises from among the subjugated to become the new ruling class and overthrow the old group. Then the cycle begins.

F. Stuart Chapin gave another version of cyclical change. He made the concept of accumulation the basis for his theory of social change. According to him, cultural change is “selectively accumulative in time.” He wrote, “The most hopeful approach to the concept of cultural change would seen to be to regard the process as selectively accumulative in time and cyclical or oscillatory in character.” Thus, according to Chapin, cultural change is both selectively accumulative and cyclical in character. He postulated a hypothesis of synchronous cyclical change. According to him, the different parts of culture go through a cycle of growth, vigour and decay.

If the cycles of the major parts, such as government and the family, coincide or synchronize, the whole culture will be in a state of integration, If they do not synchronize, the culture will be in a disintegrated condition. Growth and decay, according to Chapin, in cultural forms are as inescapable as they are in all living things.

Relying upon data drawn from the history of various civilizations, Sorokin concluded that civilizations fall into three major types namely, the ideational, the idealistic and the sensate. In the ideational type of civilization’ reality and value are conceived of in terms of a “supersensory and super-rational God”, while the sensory world appears as illusory.

In a word, ideational culture is god-ridden. In the idealistic type of culture, reality and value are regarded sensory as well as supersensory. This is a synthesis of ideational and the sensate. The thought and behaviour of man are partly anchored in the materialistic and are partly anchored with the other world.

In the sensate type of culture the whole way of life is characterized by a positivistic, materialistic outlook. Reality and value are merely what the senses perceive and beyond sense perception there is no reality. The western civilization, according to Sorokin, is now in an “overripe” sensate phase that must be supplanted by a new ideational system.

In recent times Arnold J. Toynbee, the noted English historian, has also propounded a cyclical theory of the history of world civilization. He maintained that civilizations pass through three stages, corresponding to youth, maturity and decline. The first is marked by a “response to challenge”, the second is a “time of troubles,” and the third is characterized by gradual degeneration.

He was also of the view that our civilization, although in the state of final downfall, can still ‘be saved by means of proper guidance by the “creative minority” by which he meant a select group of leaders who withdraw from the corrupting influences, commune with God, become spiritually regenerated and then return to inspire the masses.

The above concepts of the cyclical nature of social change may be called theories of cultural cycles. They are as a matter of fact the result of philosophical rather than scientific studies. The authors of these concepts begin with presumptions which they try to substantiate by marshalling a mass of data from history.

They are philosophical doctrines, spun from the whole cloth, however heavily documented and illustrated by distorted historical evidences. Barnes, while appraising Toynbee’s work, wrote, “It is not objective or even interpretative history. It is theology, employing selected facts of history to illustrate the will of God as the medieval bestiaries utilized biological fantasies to achieve the same results…. Toynbee s vast materials throw far more light upon the processes of Toynbee’s mind than upon the actual process of history….. He writes history as he thinks it should be to further the cause of salvation, rather than as it has really been.”

**Linear Theory:**

Some thinkers subscribe to the linear theory of social change. According to them, society gradually moves to an even higher state of civilization and that it advances in a linear fashion and in the direction of improvement. Auguste Comte postulated three stages of social change: the Theological, the Metaphysical and the Positive.

Man has passed through the first two stages, even though in some aspects of life they still prevail, and is gradually reaching the Positive stage. In the first stage man believed that supernatural powers controlled and designed the world. He advanced gradually from belief in fetishes and deities to monotheism.

This stage gave way to the Metaphysical stage, during which man tries to explain phenomena by resorting to abstractions. On the positive stage man considers the search for ultimate causes hopeless and seeks the explanatory facts that can be empirically observed. This implies progress which according to Comte will be assured if man adopts a positive attitude in the understanding of natural and social phenomena.

Herbert Spencer, who likened society to an organism, maintained that human society has been gradually progressing towards a better state. In its primitive state, the state of militarism, society was characterized by warring groups, by a merciless struggle for existence. From militarism society moved towards a state of industrialism. Society in the stage of industrialism is marked by greater differentiation and integration of its parts. The establishment of an integrated system makes it possible for the different groups—social, economic and racial, to live in peace.

Some Russian sociologists also subscribed to the linear theory of social change. Nikolai K. Mikhailovsky opined that human society passes through three stages; (1) the objective anthropocentric, (2) the eccentric, and (3) the subjective anthropocentric. In the first stage, man considers himself the centre of the universe and is preoccupied with mystic beliefs in the supernatural. In the second stage, man is given over to abstractions; the abstract is more “real” to him than the actual. In the third stage, man comes to rely upon empirical knowledge by means of which he exercises more and more control over nature for his own benefit. Solo-view conceived of the three stages as the tribal, the national governmental, and the period of universal brotherhood.

Pritirim Sorokin in his concept of variable recurrence has attempted to include both cyclical and linear change. In his view culture may proceed in a given direction for a time and thus appear to conform to a linear formula. But eventually, as a result of forces that are internal within the culture itself, there will be a shift of direction and a new period of development will be ushered in. Perhaps the new trend is also linear, perhaps it is oscillating, perhaps it conforms to some particular type of curve. At any rate, it also reaches limits and still another trend takes its place.

The description given by Sorokin makes room for almost any possibility, deterioration, progress or cyclical change and, therefore, sociologists find little quarrel with his description. But at any rate, Sorokin’s variable occurrence is an admission that the present state of sociological knowledge does not warrant the construction of theories regarding the long-run trend or character of social change.

Whether contemporary civilization is headed for the scrap-heap via internal disintegration or atomic warfare, or is destined to be replaced by some stabler and idealistic system of social relationships cannot be predicted on other than grounds of faith. The factual evidence which is available to us can only lead us to remark that whatever direction social change takes in future, that direction will be determined by man himself.

**The Causes of Social Change**  
Above we have discussed the direction in which social change has taken place according to the writers. But none of the above theories strikes the central question of causation of change. Among the causal theories of social change the deterministic theory is the most popular. Now we take a brief review of this theory.

**Deterministic Theories of Social Change:**  
The deterministic theory of social change is a widely accepted theory of social change among contemporary sociologists. According to this theory there are certain forces, social or natural or both, which bring about social change. It is not reason or intellect but the presence of certain forces and circumstances which determine the course of social change.

Sumner and Keller insisted that social change is automatically determined by economic factors. Keller maintained that conscious effort and rational planning have very little chance to effect change unless and until the folkways and mores are ready for it.

Social change is an essentially irrational and unconscious process. Variation in the folkways which occurs in response to a need is not planned. Man can at most only assist or retard the change that is under way. It was Karl Marx who, deeply impressed by the German philosopher Hegel’s metaphysical idealism, held that material conditions of life are the determining factors of social change. His theory is known as the theory of economic determinism or “the materialist interpretation of history”.

Briefly put Marx held that human society passes through various stages, each with its own well-defined organisational system. Each successive stage comes into existence as a result of conflict with the one preceding it. Change from one stage to another is due to changes in the economic factors, namely, the methods of production and distribution.

The material forces of production are subject to change, and thus a rift arises between the underlying factors and the relationships built upon them. A change in the material conditions of life brings changes in all social institutions, such as state, religion and family.

It alters the primary socio-economic relationships. To put in his own words, “Legal relations as well as forms of state could neither be understood by themselves, nor explained by the so- called general progress of the human mind, but they are rooted in the material conditions of life……… The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual process of life.

It is not the consciousness of man that determines their existence, but on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.” Thus the economic factor is a primary one in society, for all social phases of life are dependent upon it and are almost entirely determined by it.

According to Engels, a close associate of Marx, ‘The ultimate causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought not in the minds of men, in their increasing insight into the eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the mode of production and exchange.” According to Marx, the social order has passed through five phases called the oriental, the ancient, the feudal, the capitalistic, and the communistic.

The modern capitalistic system has been moving towards its doom because the conditions it produced and the forces it unloosed make its disintegration inevitable. In it the class struggle is simplified, revealing itself more and more into the clear-cut conflict of two great classes, the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

As Marx puts…………….. ‘The weapons with which the bourgeoisie felled feudalism to the ground are now turned against the bourgeoisie itself. But not only has the bourgeoisie forged, the weapons that bring death to itself, it has called into existence the men who are to wield those weapons—the modern working class, the proletarian.” Coker has beautifully summed up the tendencies of capitalism in the following words.

“Thus the capitalist system enlarges the number of workers, orings them together into compact groups, makes them class conscious, supplies them with means of inter-communication and co-operation on a worldwide scale, reduces their purchasing power, and by increasingly exploiting them arouses them to organised resistance. Capitalists acting persistently in pursuit of their natural needs and in vindication of a system dependent upon the maintenance of profits, are all the time creating conditions which stimulate and strengthen the natural efforts of workers in preparing for a system that will fit the needs of working men’s society,”

The resulting social order will not reach its full development at once but will go through two stages. In the first, there will be a dictatorship of the proletariat during which the proletariat will rule despotically and crush out all the remnants of capitalism. In the second, there will be real communism, during which there shall be no state, no class, no conflict, and no exploitation. Marx visualized a society in which the social order will have reached a state of perfection. In that society the prevailing principle will be “from each according to his capacities, to each according to his needs.”

Marx’s theory of determinism contains a great element of truth but it cannot be said to contain the whole truth. Few deny that economic factors influence social conditions of life but few hold that economic factors are the only activating forces in human history. There are other causes obviously also at work.

There is no scientific proof that human society is going through the stages visualized by Marx. His claim that man is destined to attain an ideal stage of existence is little more than visionary. His theory of value and its corollary of surplus value, his theory of the sole productivity of labour as such, and his law of the accumulation of capital are derived from an outmoded, abstract and narrow doctrine of the equivalence of price and cost which has been now rejected by modern economists.

Moreover, Marx’s thesis of the relation between social change and economic process is based upon an inadequate psychology. In a way it may be said that an inadequate psychology is perhaps the fatal weakness of all determinisms. He does not tell us as how change is reproduced in the modes of production. He speaks as though the changing technique of production explained itself and was a first cause.

He gives a simple explanation of social change and ignores the complexities of habituation on the one hand and of revulsion on the other. He simplifies the attitudes that gather around institution; the solidarities and loyalties of family, occupation and nation are subjected to those of economic class. He as a matter of fact has not squarely faced the intricate question of social causation. That the economic changes and social changes are correlated, none may deny. But to say that the superstructure of social relationships is determined by the economic structure is going too far.

Russell writes, “Men desire power, they desire satisfactions for their pride and their self-respect. They desire victory over rivals so profoundly that they will invent a rivalry for the unconscious purpose of making a victory possible. All these motives cut across the pure economic motive in ways that are practically important.” The deterministic interpretation of social change is too simple.

A number of social thinkers opposed to the theory of economic determinism consider non-material elements of culture the basic sources of social change. They regard ideas as the prime movers in social life. The economic or material phenomena are conceived to be subordinate to the non-material. Gustave Le Bon, George Sorel, James G. Frazer and Max Weber held that religion is the chief initiator of social changes. Thus Hinduism, Budhism and Judaism have had a determining influence upon the economics of their adherents.

The theory of religious determinism has been criticised by Sorokin in his Contemporary Sociological Theories. He posed the question; “If all social institutions change under the influence of the changes in religion, how, when and why does religion change itself’? According to Sorokin change is caused by the interaction of the various parts of a culture, none of which may be considered primary.

It means that change is pluralistic rather than monistic in origin. But this pluralistic theory of social change is initiated in the material culture and thence spreads to other spheres. Change is caused not only by economic factors but is also largely automatic in nature.

A number of sociologists have held that social change can be brought about by means of conscious and systematic efforts. Thus, Lester F. Ward asserted that progress can be achieved by means of purposive efforts of conscious planning. Through education and knowledge intellect can assert itself over the emotions so that effective planning is made possible.

Natural evolution, according to Ward, is a slow process, whereas intelligent planning accelerates the processes of nature. Charles A Ellwood agreed with Ward that progress is promoted by education and knowledge. Lund-wig Stein, a German sociologist and philosopher, and L.T. Hobhouse, an English sociologist, also expounded theories closely resembling Ward’s.

They expressed the view that progress can be achieved through the control of material factors by the mind. Human affairs are amenable to control by reason and, therefore, rational element in our nature must be developed so that it may be utilized as a factor in the evolutionary process.

**IV. Processes of Social Change**  
The term “Social change” itself suggests nothing as far as its direction is concerned. It is a generic term describing one of the categorical processes. It only suggests a difference through time in the object to which it is applied. Social changes are of various types and can be explained by different terms such as Growth, Progress, Evolution, Revolution,- Adaptation, and Accommodation, etc. Here we shall consider only two terms, i.e.. Progress and Evolution.

The Meaning of Evolution:  
Evolution is a process of differentiation and integration. The term ‘evolution’ comes from the Latin word ‘evolvere’ which means ‘to develop’ or ‘to unfold’. It is equivalent to the Sanskrit word ‘vikas’. It means more than growth. The word ‘growth’ connotes a direction of change but only of a quantitative character, e.g., we say population grows.

Evolution involves something more intrinsic, change not merely in size but at least in structure also, for example when we speak of biological evolution, we refer to the emergence of certain organisms from others in a kind of succession.

Evolution describes a series of related changes in a system of some kind. It is a process in which hidden or latent characters of a thing reveal themselves. It is an order of change which unfolds the variety of aspects belonging to the nature of the changing object. We cannot speak of evolution when an object o system is changed by forces acting on it from without.

The change must occur within the changing unity as the manifestation o forces operative within it. But since nothing is independent of the universe, evolution also involves a changing adaptation of the object to its environment, and after adaptation a further manifestation of its own nature. Thus, evolution is a continuous process of differentiation-cum-integration.

The concept of evolution as a process of differentiation-cum integration was first developed by the German sociologist Von Bae and subsequently by Darwin, Spencer and many others. Spence writes, “Societies show integration, both by simple increase c mass and by coalescence and recoalescence of masses. The changes from homogeneity to heterogeneity is multitudinously exemplified; from the simple tribe, to the civilized nation full of structural and functional unlikeness in all parts. With progressive integration and heterogeneity goes increasing coherence…… simultaneously comes increasing definiteness.

Social organisation is at first vague; advance brings settled arrangement which grow slowly more precise; customs pass into laws, which while gaining fixity, also become more specific in their application to variety of actions, and all institutions, at first confused] intermingled, slowly separated at the same time that each within itself marks off more distinctly its component structures. Thus in all respects is fulfilled the formula of evolution. There is progress towards greater size, coherence, multiformity and definiteness.”

Herbert Spencer thus prescribes four principles of evolution these are:

(i) Social evolution is one cultural or human aspect of the law of cosmic evolution;

(ii) Social evolution takes place in the same way in which cosmic evolution takes place:

(iii) Social evolution is gradual;

(iv) Social evolution is progressive.

Social evolution does not always proceed by differentiation:

But the point at issue is whether this process of differentiation-cum-integration is sufficient to explain the general march of society excluding thereby any other kind of interpretation. Ginsberg writes, “The notion that evolution is a movement from the simple to the complex can be, and has been, seriously disputed.” In every field where we find the forces of differentiation at work, there the opposite trends are also manifest.

Thus, in the development of languages where the process of differentiation has been stressed we have many disconcerting facts. The modern languages derived from Sanskrit like Bengali or Gujrati cannot be compared in their structure with the richness and diversity of their origin. Here the process is not towards differentiation but towards simplification.

In the development of religion too the transition from fusion to differentiation is difficult to see. The state has made inroads into the institutions once administered by the church. Many of the functions once performed by the church are now being absorbed by the state. Instead of differentiation there is fusion between state and religion.

In the economic system too we find the state controlling more and more the economic activities of the people, the period of laissez-faire being over. On the whole we find that social evolution does not always proceed by differentiation, but also by simplification and synthesis.

To define, social evolution is the process by which individuals are detached from or fail to be attached to an old group norm so that ultimately a new norm is achieved. According to Hobhouse, “Social evolution is development, planned and unplanned of culture and forms of social relationships or social interaction.”

Looking to the difficulties about the version of social evolution the French sociologist, Claude-Levi-Strauss was of the opinion that “sociology should relinquish every attempt at discovering origins and forms of evolution.” However, in spite of the various difficulties the concept of evolution still retains its usefulness.

MacIver to has angry supported the principle of social evolution. He has Criticized the practice of believing social evolution to be imaginary. Social evolution is a reality. Nadel writes: “We need the concept of evolution as it were, to satisfy our philosophical conscience; but the ‘law’ of evolution is of too huge a scale to help us in understanding the behaviour of Toms, Dicks and Harrys among societies and culture, which after all is our main concern. Perhaps indeed there are no particular ‘laws’ of evolution, but only one law’, or postulate if you like, that there is evolution.”

**The Idea of Progress:**  
In the earlier theories of biological evolution the idea of progress was closely associated with that of evolution. For the social evolutionists of the nineteenth century social evolution was in effect social progress. The technological advance of the same century led many philosophers and sociologists to conclude that the major trends of social phenomena made for social progress. But from what has been discussed in these pages it is clear that the idea of progress is different from that of evolution.

Differentiation between evolution and progress:

What, in fact, do we mean by progress is “a development or evolution in a direction which satisfies rational criteria of value” According to Ogburn, progress “is a movement towards an objective, thought to be desirable by the general group, for the visible future. According to MacIver, “By progress we simply not merely direction, but direction towards some final goal, some destination determined ideally not simply by the objective consideration at work.” According to Burgess, “Any change or adaptation to an existent environment that makes it easier for a person or group of persons or other organised form of life to live may be said to represent progress.” According to Lumley, “progress is change, but it is change in a desired or approved direction, not any direction.”

The nature of progress depends on two factors: the nature of the end and the distance at which we are from it. Thus, when we say that we are progressing, we mean that society is flourishing both materially and morally. Evolution is merely change, the change may be for the better or the worse. When we speak of social evolution we refer to the emergence of certain institution. The emergence of the institution may or may not be welcomed by the people. The reference is to an objective condition which is not evaluated as good or bad.

But when we speak of progress we imply not merely direction, but direction towards some final goal, some destination determined ideally. Progress means change for the better, and hence implies a value judgment. It is not possible to speak of progress without reference to standards. Hobhouse writes. “By evolution I mean any sort of growth, by social progress the growth of social life in respect of those qualities to which human being can attach or can ration ably attach values.”

According to Mazumdar, H.T. progress must at least contain six ingredients:

(1) enhancement of the dignity of man, (2) respect for each human personality, (3) ever increasing freedom for spiritual quest and for investigation of truth, (4) freedom for creativity and for aesthetic enjoyment of the works of nature as well as of man, (5) a social order that promotes the first four values, and (6) promotes life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, with justice and equity to all.

Now it is easy to see why evolution cannot be progress. It is not logically necessary that evolutionary process, should always move in the direction of progress. That society has evolved, all agree. That society has progressed, all would not agree because we cannot speak of progress” without reference to standards, and standards, as we know, are eminently subjective. If the process of evolution satisfies also our sense of values and if it brings a fuller realization of the values we cherish then for us it is also progress.

Different people may look differently on the same social changes and to some they may spell progress, to others decadence. Evolutionary changes are welcomed by some and are opposed by outers. Civil marriages, divorce, women’s participation in public life, free mixing of young boys and girls may appear to some to be in line with progress while, to others it may seem retrogression because they have different values.

Primitivism has always had its champions and it still has them today. Many of the conditions on which important human values such as contentment, economic security, honesty and freedom depend are not often realized more adequately in the more evolved society. Industrialization led to urbanization and urbanization led to congestion, epidemics, poor health, and more accidents on the road. Similarly, competition, rivalry, corruption and dishonesty are the other effects of industrialization.

In fact, strong indictments have been drawn against civilization on the basis of social and moral values. Clearly, therefore, we cannot associate progress with evolution. In short, no single criterion can be used as a test of progress. Societies are complexes made up of many important elements. Progress is achieved if, in a society, all aspects of social life move in a coordinated manner towards desired ends.

To briefly put the characteristics of progress are the following:

(i) Progress is change — a change in some direction:

(ii) Change can be called progress only when it fulfills the desired aim:

(iii) Progress is communal i.e., related to social system,

(iv) Progress is volitional. It requires desire and volition;

(v) The concept of progress is variable. What is considered today the symbol of progress may tomorrow be regarded as sign of regress.

(vi) There are no limits to human progress.

**Have we progressed?**

To the question whether we are progressing or not or whether we are more cultured than our ancestors, no absolute answer can be given. Comte, it may be recalled, believed in the perfectibility of society, although he considered that perfection was something that men would have via science. Marx also advanced the thesis that progress was a law of society. Nothing could prevent the coming of communism where all men would share alike and all would be content. In those days progress was regarded as a ‘cultural compulsion.’

Of recent, the social philosophers have changed their mood. They consider the modern civilization as a failure or as an experiment doomed to failure. Standards of morality are no respecters of technical achievement. However, the answer to whether we have progressed or not depends upon our standards of moral value.

Our parents do not share many of our moral standards, for standards are not objective. In the near past, progress was taken for granted; now in some circles, the very idea arouses indignation, and the multitudinous deficiencies in human social conduct are pointed lo with something approaching triumph.

The national wealth of the county has gone up, but is the acquisition of wealth progress? We have invented aeroplanes and other fast-moving mobiles, but does it bring more security of life? Our country is on the way lo industrializalion but does this bring health, happiness or peace of mind? Some people marvel at our material achievement but often question whether it really represents progress.

Thus, there can be much difference of opinion about whether we have progressed or not. Progress in science is possible but no one is obliged to regard progress in science as a good thing in itself. Evidence of progress in morality from preliterate society to modern civilization is simply lacking. In spite of the many technological achievements, big industries and imposing dams the fact remains that in India the evils of unemployment, crime, violence and disease have not lessened.

The family bonds have loosened. More marriages break now than yesterday. The social evils like drug-addiction, dowry system, prostitution, alcoholism, child exploitation and delinquency have increased manifold. We are politically hypocrites, economically corrupt, socially dishonest and morally unfaithful. In the face of these multitudinous defects in our social conduct it would be hard to maintain that we have progressed.

Thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi and Aurobindo Ghose have warned mankind against moral degeneration.

No universal standards of progress. But as stated above it is all a question of one’s standard of moral value and outlook, if we think that increased scope for personal development is really better than opportunity for only a few, if we think that education makes for more enlightened judgment and further if we believe that in India more people have now scope for development than before, then we may justly say that we have progressed. Nobody would deny that we have progressed in the case of technology. Tools have become more varied and efficient.

Whether the influence of tools on society has been for human happiness or not is a question to which no definite answer can be given for there are different standards for different people to measure human happiness. Conceptions of happiness differ as to ideals of what is good for a people. In a word it is difficult to find clear and definite standards that all people would accept and to formulate definite conceptions of progress which may apply to all time and to all cultures.

While general principles do serve as tools to be used in thinking out the course of action we wish to pursue, they do not afford specific guidance. While considering social progress, it is well to note the time and place qualifications. Thus, abolition of female labour at night may be deemed a step in the direction of progress but may not be so deemed a hundred years hence.

It may be interesting to speculate on the probability of change in the future. Some thinkers are of the opinion that men have all what they need in material goods and that there is no need for further invention. However, it would be unwise to assert that further inventions be stopped because mankind has all the material goods it needs. Man’s wants are limitless. Changes will continue in future also.