

# UNIT 3 SOCIAL CHANGE AND EVOLUTION

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## 3.0 OBJECTIVES

You have studied in Unit 2 how human beings forged new tools and made social, cultural and economic progress. In this Unit, you will be introduced to the more specific dimensions of this progress, i.e. social change in the context of social and economic institutions. After reading this unit, you should be able to:

distinguish between concepts of evolution, change and development in societies, trace the development of society from simple to complex forms, and know how the process of human settlement evolved over the years.

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

We very often talk about social change. As you already know society has changed a lot; morals have changed; values have changed; customs have changed; etc. But have you ever paid attention to or thought about the process of change? For example, if customs have changed, why did they change? How; did they change? Is the change for the better? Was this change necessary?

Questions like these are not to be asked only for the sake of inquiry or curiosity. They are relevant in terms of further evolution and development of human society.

Social change is the most crucial feature of all societies. It is necessary for the survival of any society to adapt itself according to the changing bio-social and physical environment. Therefore, human beings and their social institutions have evolved through time, along with changes in environment. Social changes result in differentiation of forms of social institutions. From a rather simple form, these institutions become complex. These changes in social institutions are governed by historical conditions.

It is not just that human society has been changing. It has also developed in various spheres related to human life: ideas have developed, social institutions have developed, skills and arts have developed, etc. But what is development?

Development is a process of change to which societies attribute positive value.

This Unit also tells you about the nature of differentiation in societies which move from simple to complex forms of structures and functions. Changes in technology and modes of production play a crucial role in this process. This unit, therefore, deals with evolutions of occupational differentiation in societies and the class differentiation that emerges out of it.

An attempt has also been made to describe the process of human settlement, from agrarian to industrial society; urban settlements; institutions of power and so on.

## **3.2 CONCEPTS OF CHANGE: EVOLUTION, DEVELOPMENT AND GROWTH**

During the process of evolution, the social structure undergoes many changes. These changes are related to types of work, nature of social organisation, values, beliefs and a number of human institutions. But social change unlike biological evolution can also be reversible as a process. For example a village may, in course of development evolve to become a city or town. But if advantages of economy or of location are lost, the city can once again suffer decline and become a small village. This is what we would call a reversible process. However, biological evolution from one stage to a higher one is an irreversible process.

### **3.2.1 Social Change**

Social change is a process through which social organisations, social relationships and forms of values and beliefs of people in societies are altered. This happens either as a result of internal changes in societies, such as pressure of population, changes in technology, etc. or as a result of external pressures. These may include contact with other societies through war and trade, etc.

Social change is closely related to time scale. Here, one can refer to small scale changes as the gradual development of a leadership role in a small group, such as a club or a factory. There can be short term changes as in the employment rates. There could also be long term changes such as in occupational structures. There are also cyclical changes as we see in the cultural life of a society. A fashion or life-style which declines and revives again after a short period of time.

According to some sociologists, social change refers to the unfolding of man's social arrangements through time. Hence, the analysts of social changes should focus their attention on the variations in time of one or more of the social forms, population attributes, and patterns of interaction among members of society. The changes in the cultural pattern, which include values, beliefs, knowledge and world view also form a part of the process of social change.

### **3.2.2 Development**

Development is a special form of social change. It implies changes in a direction treated as desirable by the members of society. L.T. Hobhouse, in his work *Social Development* (1924) proposed a four-fold criteria of

development, such as increase in scale, efficiency, mutuality and freedom. As you will notice each of these criteria refer to a position or state of affairs in society, which enhances its desirable features.

In contemporary sociological literature the term 'development' has been used firstly, to draw a distinction between the highly industrialised developed societies, and the societies which are predominantly rural and agricultural and have relatively low levels of income, i.e. the developing societies. Secondly, it refers to the process by which the developing societies are now becoming industrialised.

Development, therefore, is a strategy of social change in a direction, which, as mentioned earlier, is considered desirable by the members of a society. This may differ from one society to another depending on the socio-cultural background and political and geographical situation, but in all societies, the general connotation is the same. It implies growth in education, agriculture, industry, etc., simultaneously. As such, growth as a concept is a part of the process of development. Without growth, there can be no development.

The objectives of development are formulated in terms of specific social and economic policies. It reflects a preferred direction of social change.

Development thus, refers to a specific process of the concept of social change. Development as a concept assumed prominence due to the rise of the welfare role of the state. It was recognised that societies must plan and organise their process of social change so that the welfare of the people may be enhanced. For example, the development objectives in India have been defined as those of modernization, economic growth, self-sufficiency and equality. The Five Year Plans in India have been formulating sets of social, economic and physical targets for introducing changes in society through fiscal, industrial and agrarian policies of change.

### **3.2.3 Development and the New World Order**

When the states have assumed the responsibility of development and well-being of the people, the international arrangements in which these states interact among themselves have also become important for them. This is more so in these days of fast integrating world. You must have heard about 'global village', 'globalisation', 'privatisation' and 'deregulation of economics', etc. These new concepts describe a phenomenon which is only recent. The Cold War between the superpowers (US led bloc and USSR led bloc) came to an end with the disappearance of the Communist bloc of Eastern Europe. In the resulting scenario, some of the important changes (relating to social development) which took place during the 1990s may be mentioned as below:

- i) As change-initiators, two more agencies joined the state. Civil society (dominated by the widespread presence of non-governmental organisations) and 'Market' (everdemanding privatisation of hitherto government controlled sectors of the economy and other sectors) joined the state in planning and deciding the welfare of the people.
- ii) The UN system took up vigorously the task of articulating (for international solution) social problem areas for immediate attention of the global community. Series of Conferences were prepared and Programmes of Action formulated under the welcome initiative of the UN. The major World Summits (with participation from hundred and more states (which met under the UN initiative) are:
  - a) On child at New York in 1990.
  - b) On environment (The Earth Summit) at Rio or the Rio Conference in 1992.
  - c) Human Rights Conference in Vienna in 1993.

- d) On Population and Development at Cairo in 1994.
  - e) On Social Development at Copenhagen in 1995.
  - f) On Women at Beijing in 1995 and
  - g) On Human Settlement or Habitat 11 at Istanbul in 1996.
- iii) A notable gain which the poor Third World Countries have achieved towards the end of the Cold war days is the Right to Development which the developed western countries did not consider of primary importance. The General Assembly of the UN did, however, finally adopt a Declaration on the Right to Development in 1986 after many years of preparation by the poor Third world countries backed by the then Soviet Union. In 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights at Vienna succeeded in achieving two more gains in this area:
- a) all the rights-political, cultural, economic, social, etc. are indivisible and inter-dependent and
  - b) for genuine democracy to take roots (which the developed countries have been asking of the developing ones) development and popular participation are unavoidably necessary.

The Right to Development which has henceforth, become morally acceptable to all the countries after the Vienna Conference, has been defined as:

"An inalienable right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised."

It has been further clarified that "the human person is the central subject of development and should be an active participant and beneficiary of the right to development".

## Check Your Progress 1

- Note:**
- i) Use the space given below for your answers.
  - ii) Check your answer with the model answers given at the end of this unit.

1) What do you understand by "Social Change"?

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2) Identify some new developments which have occurred during the 1990s.

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## **3.3 DIFFERENTIATION IN SOCIAL FORMS**

Differentiation is the process by which the rudimentary characters in a system undergo changes in forms. It gives rise to new and more complex types of life forms of social institutions. As such, it is a biological as well as a social process. This process takes place in society due to a number of reasons such as increases in population, food and other resources, inventions of new technology, etc. These changes replace older modes of production and occupation. New institutions and social organisations also emerge. Thus, social differentiation is an evolutionary process of change in society.

### **3.3.1 Simple to Complex Society**

Let us now see from a general perspective, how human beings and their social institutions have evolved from simple to complex forms. From forest-wandering, food gathering primitive societies, to village-dwelling agriculture based societies, to finally highly developed Industrialised modern societies living in the metropolitan cities today.

This social evolution has occurred very slowly over a long period of time. Studies in pre-history and archaeology, to which you have been introduced, show very clearly how human beings and their society evolved. Evolution of new tools and technology accompanied evolution of social institutions. During the early Stone-age or Paleolithic period as you have studied, human being used pebble tools in the beginning, then started using bi-faced stone-tools made by chipping. They discovered fire and its uses and by the end of this period started building shelters for themselves. They lived by hunting and food gathering but the notions of property, barter or exchange of commodities had also taken root in its nascent form in this period. Culturally also, the early Stone Age human beings had started burying their dead, and even made offerings to them. They practiced magic, and developed beliefs which ultimately led to the emergence of religions. They also learnt to live and organised life in small group and bands. Some division of labour between sexes and age groups, as well as specialisation of skills had emerged.

The period was followed by the middle Stone age or Mesolithic age. In this period human beings faced severe climatic changes which they met by changing their ways of life. The emergence of new forests in Europe after the end of glaciation, expansion of semi-desert terrain in Asia and Africa, led them to migrate and evolve new technologies to meet new challenges. What we see in this evolution process is a movement from simple to complex social forms, institutions, etc.

### **3.3.2 Regional Cultures: Technological Advance and Social Differentiation**

Each social group that had evolved during this period had its own distinct culture. For example, the life-styles of the early caveman and the bushman were distinct in relation to their food, their tools and their places of shelter. The caveman learnt to draw and in this process depicted what he saw outside. Fortunately for us, such paintings made by the caveman were discovered and we have a few illustrations for you (See No. 13).



No. 13: Cave Paintings and Engravings (Altamira, Spain)

The evolution of the cultural process in different regions was effected by geographical variations. For example, at a particular time in Asia when human beings were using logs of wood to float, in Africa canoes made out of dugout wood were being used for fishing.

The point we are trying to emphasize here is that it is not necessary that there was or there has to be a simultaneous cultural evolution in all regions. If the caveman in Spain drew excellent pictures, the caveman in other regions might not have developed the ability to draw. Thus, we may know about the cultural pursuits of the former, but nothing about the latter.

During the next stage of social evolution, i.e. the Neolithic Age, a fundamental technological and social revolution took place. Naturally, you would ask what was this? This was the shift to agriculture as the major source of food production. During this period the dependence of human beings on the vagaries of nature relatively declined. They started producing their own food and living in permanently settled communities. Today, we might underestimate the importance of this because society has attained a lot in the form of cultural and technological advances. But judging by those times, say some 50,000 years ago, this development was a great advance for human beings. There is a close link between the development of technology, mode of production and the systems of social relationships. This is evident if you study the history of human society. Let us briefly try to understand this link.

In the most primitive age when human beings were slowly evolving their technology and mode of production, the social structure of their society was a simple one which included:

- elementary knowledge of technology, i.e. of stone and bone tools;
- some rudiments of beliefs, kinship and family organisations;
- use of symbols, gestures and some sort of language (about which we virtually know nothing) for communication, etc.

During this period there was no surplus production, hence, no class or strata differentiation. Human beings lived in small bands and groups. They led a nomadic life moving from one place to another. But their movement obviously depended on the availability of food.

But what difference did the coming of agriculture make? This, in fact, proved a turning point in the process of social evolution.

It is very difficult to pinpoint how human beings started growing their food. In all probability they learnt about it through their observations of plants and trees. Once they decided to grow food there came a great shift in their life-style—from nomad to settled community life. This was an unprecedented human achievement—a revolution in the human life-style.



**No. 14: Sowing Operations**

What were the implications of this shift to settled community life?

The need for dwellings to survive for a longer period must have led to the construction of hut type structures.

Initial food production-must not have been sufficient to meet the requirements. Thus, hunting and collecting food must have gone along simultaneously with food production.

To increase food production human beings must have experimented and created new tools. For example, the development of geometric tools, indicates the use of something similar to a sickle which can be dated to 10,000 to 8,000 years ago. In India such microlithic stone tools have been found in Gujarat. They were hafted in a bone or wooden piece to make a composite tool like a sickle.

The first sowing operations were probably done with digging sticks. The later inventions were the hoe and the plough.

The process of taming the animals and using them for various purposes started.

The beginning of agricultural operations meant that material resources (like food) could be multiplied with more labour. This led to over production (i.e. production out stripping the needs) and consequently, to the idea of surplus production. From here started the rudiments of a barter system.

This led to division of labour not only in terms of skills but also on the basis of sex and age.

The division of labour led to the emergence of distinct social organisations and forms of administration.

The production of food surplus released some people from the task and agriculture. Some of these people now could devote themselves to the development of other skills like arts and crafts, tool making, etc.

Increased contact with each other and accumulation of knowledge accelerated the pace of social evolution.

This pace was further accelerated by increase in population; emerging beliefs and social norms; differentiation in social structures, etc.

## Check Your Progress 2

- Note:**
- i) Use the space given below for your answers.
  - ii) Check your answer with the model answers given at the end of this unit.

1 ) Which of the following statements are correct? Tick (✓) or (x).

- i) Cultural development took place all over the world simultaneously. ( )
- ii) Geometric tools of New Stone Age were made of Bronze. ( )
- iii) The shift agriculture was a great achievement in the process of social evolution. ( )
- iv) Human beings of the stone age period had a culture of their own. ( )



2. Write in about 100 words the impact of settled community life on social evolution.  
Discuss your answer with the concerned Academic Counsellor at your Study Centre.

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### 3.4 EMERGENCE OF CLASS DIVISIONS

In the process of development, the most significant contribution was the discovery of metal and its uses. Prof V. Gordon Childe, an eminent scholar of pre-history wrote in his famous work 'Man makes Himself', that:

"the stone axe... is the home made product that could be fashioned and used by anybody in a self contained group of hunters or peasants. It implies neither specialisation of labour nor trade beyond the group. The bronze axe which replaces it is not only a superior implement, it also pre-supposes a more complex economic and social structure. The casting of bronze is too difficult a process to be carried out by any one in the intervals of growing or catching his food or minding her babies. It is a specialists job, and these specialists must rely for such primary necessities as food upon a surplus produced by other specialists".

In the Bronze Age, metal was used in a limited sense for making weapons, tools and ornaments. However, the discovery of iron and its smelting process as you have read earlier, led to another revolutionary change in the history of human beings. This was a tough metal and the tools (like the plough) made out of it increasingly contributed in the expansion of food production.



**No. 16: iron Tool (Taxile, 1-5 Century A.D.)**

Human being also developed more efficient techniques of irrigation like the storing of water, etc. Gradually more food surplus was generated.

The invention of the Wheel had already speeded up travel and trade. Now, it is confirmed that most of the Bronze Age civilisations had trade contacts with each other. The use of coins as money did away with the barter system. Weights and measurements were introduced in the Bronze Age itself. The human society was on the path of overall progress.

Along with these changes in society human relations were also changing. With the increase in food surplus, class distinctions also emerged. There was a class of owners and masters of the means of production. On the other side were the producers and labourers who served the masters.



**No.17: Weights and Scale (Indus Valley 3500-2500 B.C)**

In some societies like ancient Egypt and Greece there developed a system of slavery. Soon this system took the shape of a mode of production. Slaves were mainly used for agricultural production and construction purpose. These slaves were sold as any other commodity.

In certain parts of Europe the institution of serfdom and feudalism emerged. You will read about these in subsequent blocks.

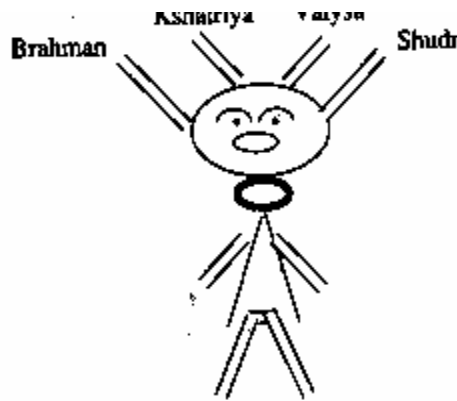
### **3.5 PROCESS OF HUMAN SETTLEMENT**

We have already introduced you to some of the key factors such as mode of production, technology and geographical conditions, etc. that contributed to the process of social change, evolution and human settlement. In this section we shall further discuss some other related aspects which played a crucial role in the process of human settlement.

- i) Women played a crucial role in human settlement. The students of pre-history agree that women were primarily responsible for the cultivation of plants, fruits and vegetables. They tilled the soil, cultivated plants and reared animals for purposes of food production. This process must have

emerged along with the division of labour based on sex. It is assumed that these tasks were performed by women when men went out hunting.

- ii) The development of social institutions like the family, clan, tribe, etc. also helped the human beings in settling down. This led to the emergence of small villages and hamlets. The choice of these settlements was, of course, determined by geographical endowment of the land, water resources and climatic conditions.
- iii) Due to the need for regular supply of water, rivers played an important role. It is, therefore, not surprising that river valleys were favourite places where early settlements of human beings emerged. All the great civilisations of the ancient world flourished along the river banks.
- iv) Agriculture, as we have already seen, played a vital role in human settlement.
- v) The division of labour, which must have emerged out of sexual differentiation, gradually extended to cover specialised groups of people working in a specific craft. In India, occupational division of labour became hereditary and took the form of caste system which passed through various stages.



### Stage in the Evolution of Caste System

- |         |   |
|---------|---|
| Stage-1 | Caste due to occupational division only, not by birth. Caste could change with change in occupation. Freedom to choose occupation.            |
| Stage-2 | Caste hereditary i.e. by birth. But freedom of occupation i.e. for example, a Shudra could do Brahman's work but would be called Shudra only. |
| Stage-3 | Caste and occupation both hereditary. Occupation according to caste.  |
| Stage-4 | Division of caste into sub-castes.  |

- vi) In the process of social change and human settlement there emerged certain political institutions like the village council, village headman, king and his cabinet, and so on. These institutions further contributed to the development of human settlements.

- vii) With the development of trade, technology and specialised skills the human settlements took the forms of towns and cities. There emerged civilisations that were urban in nature. Some of the features of the shift from rural to urban society were:

Towns emerged as trading centers.

Towns became the seats of power and administrative centres.

Some cities were also founded and developed as centres of pilgrimage.

The industrial revolution completely changed the composition of cities in certain industrialised societies.

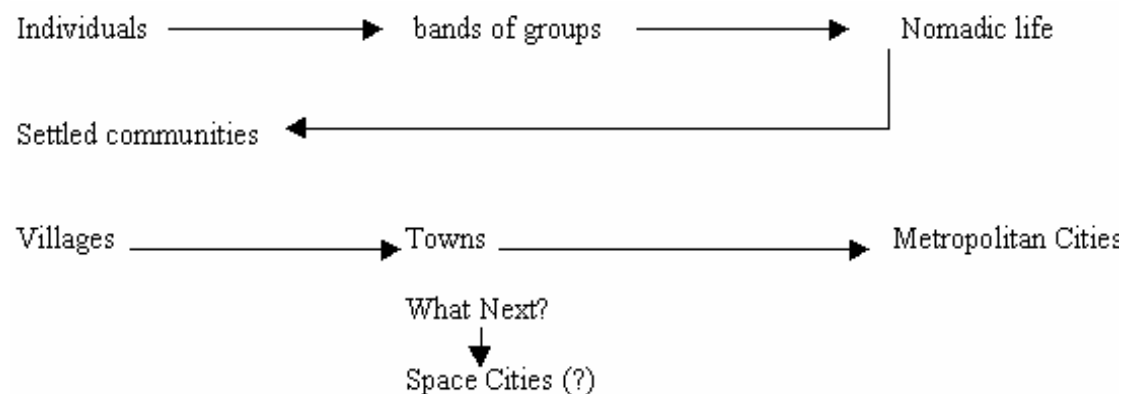
The urban and rural settlements are differentiated on the basis of occupation structure.

The majority of urban households have non-agricultural occupations whereas the rural households depend primarily on agriculture.

It is this shift from purely agriculture based occupational structure to a structure based on trade, industries and services which marks the emergence and development of city life.

- viii) You will read in detail about these aspects in further blocks of this course. However, we will have to mention here that the development of science and technology has now increased the pace of social evolution tremendously. Today, the developed industrialised societies are passing through the phase which is described as a 'post industrialised category of evolution'. This, according to some social scientists will be a stage where technocrats, scientists and intellectuals will dominate the society. You have read about Information Society in the previous unit.

The cities are increasingly becoming unliveable. The poor and the landless move for jobs and homes to cities. For the first time ever, half the world's people will be living in cities. From one person in 20 at the beginning, now we have one in almost two living in cities towards the end of this century. Between 1950 and 1995, the number of one million-plus cities grew six times in the developing world (from 34 to 213). All over major cities have air pollution level (due to vehicular emissions) which is 4 to 5 times what is considered safe by the WHO.



Process of Human Settlement

## Check Your Progress 3

- Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answers.  
ii) Check your answer with the model answers given at the end of this unit.

1) Which of the following statements are correct? Tick (✓) or (x)

- i) The discovery of metal had no significance in the evolution of human society. ( )
- ii) Slavery was a mode of production in some ancient civilisations. ( )
- iii) Women introduced civilisation of plants. ( )
- iv) All great civilisations flourished in the deserts. ( )

2) Write in about five lines the contribution of women in the evolution of human settlement.

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3) What were the four stages of the development of the institution of caste? Answer in about hundred words.

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4) Discuss the differences between rural and urban settlements in about five lines.

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## 3.6 LET US SUM UP

Social change is a process that takes place in all societies. Yet to understand its various forms one has to grasp it as a concept and distinguish it from related concepts such as evolution, growth and development. Biological evolution is an irreversible process of change from simple to complex forms of life. Social change is governed by the process of evolution, but sometimes this process can also be reversible. Growth, development and progress are idealised aspects of social change that are generally products of human efforts and planning.

The process of change involves movement of societies from one form to another, differentiation of their organisation, modes of work and cultural patterning. This movement is from simple to complex stages. Technological development plays a key role in this process. It leads to better control on forces of nature, increase in food surpluses, growth of settled form of human groups and communications, growth of

countries into towns and cities, and evolution of new institutions of power, social classes and forms of government.

In the course of human evolution, it has also been established that development is a human right and such a development has the human being at the centre of all policy planning, making and administration.

### 3.7 KEY WORDS

**Canoes:** Small narrow boats used by tribals in various parts of the world.

**Connotation:** A meaning in addition to the primary meaning of word or sentence.

**Diffusion:** Dissemination or dispersion or scattering.

**Fiscal :** Related to public revenue taxation. etc.

**Glaciation :** To form into ice ; refers to geological time when larger parts of earth were covered with glaciers.

**Guild:** A community based on occupational specialisation, mainly artisans during the medieval period of Europe.

**Heterogeneity:** Differences based on birth or origin from different sources. Intellectual: A person involved in scholarly pursuits.

**Nascent:** In the process of birth or not yet mature.

**Quantum:** Latin word that refers to amount sufficient at a time.

**Retrogress:** To move backward or revert to inferior state.

**Smelting:** Process of extracting metal from the ore. Vagaries: Unaccountable movements, freakish behaviour or motion.

### 3.8 SOME USEFUL BOOKS

(1) Chattopadhyaya, D. (ed.) 1982: *Studies in the History of Science in India* (Vol. I & II), Editorial Enterprises, New Delhi. (2) Gordon Childe, 1956: *Man Makes Himself*, 3rd Edition, London. (3) Kosambi, D.D. 1956: *Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, Bombay. (4) Korovkin, F., 1981: *History of the Ancient World*, Progress Publishers, Moscow. (5) Singh, Yogendra, 1973: *Modernisation of Indian Tradition*, Thompson Press, New Delhi.

### 3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Sub-section 3.2.1.
- 2) See Sub-section 3.2.3.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) (i) x (ii) X (iii) ✓ (iv) ✓
- 3) See sub section 3.3.2.

#### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) (i) X (ii) ✓ (iii) ✓ (iv) X
- 2) See Sub-section 3.5 (i)
- 3) See Sub-section 3.5 (v)
- 4) See Sub-section 3.5 (vii)