**Question:** **Elucidate the process of evolution and development of culture in society. (2014, 2016)**

**Answer:**

**Evolution of Culture:**

**Introduction:**

Culture is a collective term for the traits acquired by humans, living in a society, in order to adapt to a particular environment. These traits include knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, religion and any other capability acquired as a member of the society. Culture is a unique feature of human evolutionary process and humans have modified their biological evolution using culture as a tool. Because of this unique feature, the human evolution has been more rapid than that of other species.

Thus, the biological and cultural evolutions have progressed simultaneously, complementing each other in the process. Culture is believed to have evolved mainly through the second half of Pliocene and the first three-quarters of the Pleistocene period.

**Stages of Cultural Evolution:**

Based on technology of stone tools, the various stages in cultural evolution of humans are referred to as **Old Stone Age or Paleolithic Age**, the **Middle Stone Age or Mesolithic Age** and the **New Stone Age or Neolithic Age**. The main features of these stages are discussed below.

1. **The Old Stone Age (Paleolithic Age):** The Old Stone or Paleolithic Age dates back to a period two million years ago. During this age, successive glaciations alternated with milder climatic conditions. Plants, animals and humans tried to adapt to these climatic. Speech was evolved and mastered by humans along with tools and fire. Speech made easy to communicate and exchange of information, ideas and experiences. Humans started making tools using Stone, bones and wood and adopted hunting and gathering as the main economic activities. A revolutionary development, during this period, was the discovery and control of fire which made possible movement to higher latitudes, keeping the animals away, storage of animal flesh, security from predators and from fellow beings, and the origin of a religious cult which centered on fire. Another feature which evolved during this age was gender-based division of labor and sharing of food. Thus, during the Paleolithic age, humans evolved from an unspecialized food gatherer to a specialized hunter-gatherer.
2. **The Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic Age):** The Middle Stone or Mesolithic Age lasted from 11,000 to 9,000 years ago. This age is characterized by the end of the last of the major deglaciations and replenishment of water bodies by aquatic life. This age also marked the beginning of Holocene period or “the stage of incipient food production.” Humans had become specialized food gatherers by now. They also adopted the techniques for preservation and storage of food surpluses, thus reducing the ‘starvation periods’. Tools became more refined and specialized.
3. **The New Stone Age (Neolithic Age):** The New Stone or Neolithic Age period is characterized by grinding and polishing of stone, beginning of agriculture, a settled lifestyle, pottery, domestication of animals. The purposeful and intensive manipulation of biotic environment is another feature of this age. Three main sites of early agriculture are the Middle-East, Meso and Andean America, and South-East Asia. There was greater regional spread of tool and advancements were made in food preservation and storage. The animals for food were hunted outside, but were brought to the camp site and consumed there. From archeological investigation in various sites wheat, barley, peas, lentil, and skeletal of cattle and pigs have been found.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion it can be said that culture is not static, it is a continuous process. Since the beginning of human civilization, culture as a part of civilization is also has been also growing on. But one thing should be remembered that there is parallel between biological evolution of man and development of culture and it is material culture which grown faster than the non-material.