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THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE OF NEP 2020

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Abstract

The objective of the paper titled Theoretical Perspective of NEP 2020 is to offer a critical view of National Educational Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) from the lens of three major sociological theories (symbolic interactionism, functionalism, and conflict) to present the sociological position of NEP 2020 for a larger understanding of the function of education in the present global economy. The paper is structured in three sections, firstly it established the three sociological theories, secondly examined education from these three sociological theories. The third section discussed the study observation on NEP 2020 from the three sociological theories.

Keywords: NEP 2020, National Educational Policy, Theory, Sociology, Education, Weaker Section, Scheduled Caste, SC, Scheduled Tribe, ST.

I. Introduction- Sociological theories

A theory is a set of ideas that is intended to explain something (Collins's dictionary). A more scientific understanding is, that a theory is a proposed relationship between two or more observed phenomena, otherwise, a theory is a coherent statement or set of ideas that explains observed facts or phenomena. Precisely, a theoretical perspective is a set of assumptions about reality that inform the questions we ask and the kinds of answers we arrive at as a result (Crossman, Ashley 2020). Sociologists develop theories to explain social phenomena, and explain why it occurs, and lends to explain social events, interactions, and patterns. For sociologists, a **theory** is a way to explain different aspects of social interactions and to create a testable proposition, called a **hypothesis** about society (Allan 2006). Sociologists to explain the proposed relationship between two or more observed phenomena, sociologists test propositions about society by employing three major sociological theories namely symbolic interactionism, functionalism, and conflict. Symbolic interactionism provides a micro analysis of one-to-one interactions and communications. Structural functionalism at the macro level examines the way each part of society functions together to contribute to the whole. Whereas conflict theory at macro examines the way inequalities contribute to social differences and perpetuate differences in power. All these three sociological theories are to explain how society influences people, and how people influence society (Smith 1999, Elias 1978). In sum, while functionalism emphasizes stability, conflict theory emphasizes change, and interactionist emphasis is the relationships of an individual in the society.

II. Education and Sociological theories

India's 21st century first National Educational Policy 2020 (NEP 2020) acknowledges education is fundamental for achieving full human potential, developing an equitable and just society, and promoting national development. In this context, education has an important function in society. This section briefly presented the three sociological theories views of symbolic interactionism, functionalism, and conflict, and their relation to education as a function in society and explored each theoretical perspective on the NEP 2020. Education for French sociologist, Emile Durkheim (858-1917), is a means of organizing the individual self and the social self, the I and the We into a disciplined, stable and meaningful unity. The internalization of values and discipline represents the child's initiation into society. Durkheim thus views education as a means of organizing the individual self and the social self, the I and the We into a disciplined, stable and meaningful unity. The internalization of values and discipline represents the child's initiation into society (Subrata S Satapathy). Furthermore, as regarded by Mannheim (1940) sociologists do not regard education solely as a means of realizing abstract ideals of culture, such as humanism or technical specialization, but as part of the process of influencing men and women. Education can only be understood when we know for what society and for what social position the pupils are being educated.

• Symbolic interactionism, education and NEP 2020

Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level theory that focuses on the relationships among individuals within a society. Major interactionists are George Herbert Mead (1863-1931), Charles Horton Cooley (1864-1929), and Erving Goffman (1922-1982). Herbert Blumer (1900–1987) coined the term symbolic interactionism and identified its three basic premises. Firstly, humans act toward things based on the meanings they ascribe to those things, secondly, the meaning of such things is derived from or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and society. And thirdly, these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters (Blumer 1969). All these three premises are about communication, the exchange of meaning through language and symbols is believed to be how people make sense of their social worlds. Theorists Herman and Reynolds (1994) note that this perspective sees people as being active in shaping the social world rather than simply being acted upon. Another theory stemming from symbolics is labelling theory (**Howard Saul Becker**, 1963) which explains why the behaviour is considered negatively deviant to some people, groups, and cultures but positively deviant to others. The other



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symbolic technique was dramaturgical analysis, Erving Goffman (1922-1982) used theatre as an analogy for social interaction and recognized that people's interactions showed patterns of cultural scripts. Because it can be unclear what part a person may play in a given situation, he or she has to improvise his or her role as the situation unfolds (Goffman 1958).

A precise understanding of symbolic interactionism is that interactionist examines the relationship of individuals within their society by studying their communication, language and symbols. Symbolic Interactionism provides a theoretical perspective that helps to examine the relationship of individuals within their society. This perspective is centred on the notion that communication or the exchange of meaning through language and symbols is how people make sense of their social worlds (Nathan Keirns, Eric Stray 2012). Thus the broad understanding of Symbolic Interactionism is that it is centred on the notion that communication or the exchange of meaning through language and symbols is how people make sense of their social worlds (Herman and Reynolds 1994).

Education for symbolic interactionists is well understood that interactionists examine the relationship of individuals within their society, precisely their analysis is centred on the notion that communication or the exchange of meaning through language and symbols is how people make sense of their social worlds. Applying such a notion to education explains that interactionists limit their analysis of education to what they directly observe happening in the classroom. They focus on how teacher expectations influence student performance, perceptions, and attitudes. Symbolics also study the dynamics of the classroom, the interactions between students and teachers, and how those affect everyday life. For example,

- according to the labelling theory, (**Howard Saul Becker**, 1928) labelling has a direct correlation between those who are in power and those who are being labelled. This means, that low standardized test scores or poor performance in a particular class often lead to a student being labelled as a low achiever. Such labels are difficult to shake off, which can create a self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton 1968).
- A study conducted by Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1968) found that when the teachers expected a particular performance or growth, it occurred.
- Another study by Ray Rist (1970) found, that a teacher assigned students to tables based on ability, the better students sat at a table closer to her, the average students sat at the next table, and the weakest students sat at the farthest table. Rist discovered that the teacher assigned the students to a table based on the teacher's perception of the student's skill levels without any form of testing. Rist also found that the students the teacher perceived as better learners came from higher social classes, while the weak students were from lower social classes.

The labelling with which symbolic interactionists are a concern, labelling can significantly impact a student's schooling. This is easily seen in the educational setting, as teachers and more powerful social groups within the school dole out labels that are adopted by the entire school population. Studies such as those by Labov (1973), Becker (1970), and Cicourel and Kituse (1963) suggest that teachers' definitions of success and failure cannot be taken for granted. Interactionism has raised the educational question on basic concepts such as ability, for example:

- if teachers did not associate social class characteristics with ability, there would be greater equality of educational opportunity.
- One more argument was with bright and dull. Students are a product of meanings and definitions which are created in interaction situations, interactionists claimed that these meanings and definitions are not fixed and unchangeable. Thus, students defined as dull in one series of interactions may well be seen as bright in another series based on a different set of negotiated meanings.

Since interactionists seek to understand the process of action between individuals. Nell Keddie (1973) argues all actions are meaningful, it can only be understood by discovering the meaning that actors assign to their activities. For example, interaction processes in the classroom must be examined. Must explore how teachers and students interpret and give meaning to educational situations. Given the fact that teachers have the power to award grades and assess students. It is important to discover the meanings which direct this process.

• **Functionalism, education and NEP 2020**

Functionalism is also known as structural-functionalism, its major proponents are Herbert Spencer (1820–1903), Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Talcott Parsons (1902-1979), and Robert Merton (1910-2003). Initially brewed by Herbert Spencer (1898) who argued that just as the various organs in the human body work together to keep the entire system functioning and regulated, the various parts of society work together to keep the entire society functioning and regulated. By parts of society, Spencer was referring to social institutions such as the economy, political systems, healthcare, education, media, and religion (Maryanski and Turner 1992). In sum structural-functionalism views society as a structure with interrelated parts designed to meet the biological and social needs of the individuals who make up that society (Nathan Keirns, Eric Stray 2012). A little bit enhancing view of **Functionalism**, for Durkheim (1893) society is a



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complex system of interrelated and interdependent parts that work together to maintain stability. Durkheim believed that **social facts** are the laws, morals, values, religious beliefs, customs, fashions, rituals, and all of the cultural rules that govern social life (Durkheim 1895). Functionalists believe society is held together by **social consensus** or cohesion. Emile Durkheim suggested that social consensus takes in one of two forms-**mechanical and organic solidarity**. He defined mechanical as a form of social cohesion that arises when people in a society maintain similar values and beliefs and engage in similar types of work, and it most commonly occurs in traditional, simple societies for ex-everyone on farms. Whereas **organic solidarity** occurs in a society of interdependent, as seen in industrialized, complex societies. Concerned about modern societies, Durkheim was of the view that they were more complex, and people served many different functions in society and their ability to carry out their functions depended upon others being able to carry out theirs.

Another view of **functionalism**, proposed by Robert Merton (1910–2003) that social processes often have manifest and latent functions. **Manifest functions** are the consequences of a social process that are sought or anticipated, while **latent functions** are the unsought consequences of a social process. One additional approach to study functionalism was dynamic equilibrium, proposed by Parsons (1961). Parsons reasoned that a sociological approach to social phenomena must emphasize the systematic nature of society at all levels of social existence: the relation of definable structures to their functions concerning the maintenance (needs) of the system. He provided a useful analytical grid for sociological theory in which an individual, an institution, or an entire society could be seen as a system composed of structures that satisfied four primary functions namely: adaptation (how the system adapts to its environment), goal attainment (how the system determines what its goals are and how it will attain them), integration (how the system integrates its members into harmonious participation and social cohesion), and latent-pattern maintenance (how basic cultural patterns, values, belief systems, etc. are regulated and maintained).

Education for functionalism, Functionalists attempt to explain social institutions as collective means to meet individual and social needs, for them, institutions come about and persist because they play a function in society, promoting stability and integration. They ask questions what is the function of the institution? How does it contribute to social stability? For example, what is the function of education for society? Functionalists believe that education equips people to perform different functional roles in society, moreover, it also focuses on the ways that universal education serves the needs of society. Functionalists view education as one of the more important social institutions in a society.

- Emile Durkheim characterized schools as “socialization agencies that teach children how to get along with others and prepare them for adult economic roles” (Durkheim 1898).
- Socialization involves learning the rules and norms of society as a whole. Whether the proposed education contributes manifest and latent functions? For example,
- education in manifest function includes gaining knowledge, preparing for a career, and finding a good job, whereas education in the latent function is meeting new people, and participating in extracurricular activities, additionally, education creates a hierarchy of employment based on the level of education attained, whereas latent functions can be beneficial, neutral, or harmful.
- According to functionalists the benefits of the manifest are socialization, the transmission of culture, social control, social placement, and cultural innovation, whereas the benefits of latent functions are a courtship, social networks working in groups creation of a generation gap in political and social integration.

Another form of analysis of structuralism was dysfunctions. Dysfunction states social processes that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society. For examples:

- the dysfunction includes getting bad grades, truancy, dropping out, not graduating, and not finding suitable employment. In functionalist views, the government provides education for the children, and the children become law-abiding, taxpaying citizens, who in turn support the state. If all goes well, the parts of society produce order, stability, and productivity. If all does not go well, the parts of society then must adapt to recapture a new order, stability, and productivity.

• **Conflict theory, education, NEP 2020**

Championed by Karl Marx (1818–1883). Conflicts examine society as a competition for limited resources. Conflicts observe how society is being made up of individuals in different social classes who must compete for social, material, and political resources such as education, employment, and housing. Social institutions like government, education, and religion reflect this competition in their inherent inequalities and help maintain the unequal social structure. Its emphasis is on the role of coercion and power in producing social order (Nathan Keirns, Eric Stray 2012). German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) agreed with Marx that the economic inequalities of the capitalist system were a source of widespread conflict. Agreeing with Marx, Weber also believed that, in addition to economic inequalities, inequalities of political power and social structure cause conflict. Weber noted that different groups were affected differently based on education, race, and gender and that people’s reactions to inequality were moderated by class differences and rates of social



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mobility, as well as by perceptions about the legitimacy of those in power. Another German sociologist, Georg Simmel (1858–1918), wrote that conflict can help integrate and stabilize society. Simmel believed that conflict can help integrate and stabilize society. Conflict theorists note that unequal groups usually have conflicting values and agendas, causing them to compete against one another. Therefore, Conflicts give a framework for explaining social change. Overall, when studying a social institution or a phenomenon conflict perspective allows studying the distribution of resources, power, and inequality, by asking the big question who benefits from this element of society?

Education for conflicts, Conflicts ask how is the educational system shaped by the economic infrastructure? How does the educational system produce the kind of workforce required by capitalism? They argue that education works in the interests of the elite class. That school forms part of the ideological state apparatus, reproduces class inequality, it legitimates class inequality, and education works in the interests of capitalist employers. Thus,

- Conflicts see the purpose of education as maintaining social inequality and preserving the power of those who dominate society, in wholesome conflicts view education as a means of widening the gap in social inequality.
- Additionally, conflicts view education not as a social benefit or opportunity, but as a powerful means of maintaining power structures and creating a docile workforce for capitalism.
- Another Marxist, Louis Althusser (1918-1990) also analysed education as a part of the superstructure and infrastructure. He laid an argument that for the ruling class to survive and prosper, the reproduction of labour-power is essential for the reproduction of the skills, ruling class ideology, socialization, technically efficient, and submissive and obedient workforce.

On the ideology of Marxism, social theorists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) developed correspondence theory for the study of connections between education and social inequality. Their argument was:

- education in a capitalist society is the reproduction of labour-power. According to them, capitalism requires a surplus of skilled labour. This maintains a high rate of unemployment which provides an effective means of control over the workforce. The threat of dismissal and the possibility of resulting unemployment reduces militancy and keeps wage demands at a relatively low level. The reserve of skilled labour allows workers to be easily replaced.
- They argue schools produce this surplus of labour. Since the mental and skill requirements of the majority of the jobs are fairly low, and many skills are learned on the job, schools if anything over-educates the labour force.

Marxists see the education system as working in the interests of ruling class elites. The education system performs three functions for these elites, firstly reproduces class inequality, secondly legitimates class inequality, and thirdly the correspondence principle-School works in the interests of the capitalist employer.

III. Study Observations: Theory and NEP 2020 Symbolic Interactionist and NEP 2020

NEP 2020 has an emphasis on teachers and students. NEP 2020 wanted to re-establish teachers as the most respected and essential members of our society, because they truly shape our next generation of citizens, and bring quality control and accountability. For students, for example, NEP 2020 wanted to ensure support for those weaker sections, gifted students or students with special talents. What the paper observes from the interactionist point of view for NEP 2020 was:

- Teachers and Students: interactionist focus is on how teacher expectations influence student performance, perceptions, and attitudes. Interactionist also studies the dynamics of the classroom, the interactions between students and teachers, and how those affect everyday life. For example, studies conducted by Merton (1968), **Howard Saul Becker** (1928), Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1968), Ray Rist (1970), and Nell Keddie (1973) on labelling, ability, bright and dull. For example, labelling has a direct correlation between those who are in power and those who are being labelled. For example, low standardized test scores or poor performance in a particular class often lead to a student being labelled as a low achiever. And has evidence that when the teachers expected a particular performance or growth, it occurred. Moreover, labelling can significantly impact a student’s schooling. This is easily seen in the educational setting, as teachers and more powerful social groups within the school dole out labels that are adopted by the entire school population.
- On such labelling concerns as discussed by Labov (1973), Becker (1970), and Cicourel and Kituse (1963), the paper suggests that NEP 2020 shall monitor teachers’ definitions of success and failure, labelling cannot be taken for granted.
- Concerned with ability, for example, a teacher assigned students to tables based on ability, the better students sat at a table closer to her, the average students sat at the next table, and the weakest students sat at the farthest table. Rist's study discovered that the teacher assigned the students to a table based on the teacher's perception of the student's skill levels without any form of testing. Rist also found that the students the teacher perceived as better learners came from higher social classes, while the weak students



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were from lower social classes. NEP 2020 given ability argument shall see that teachers would not associate social class characteristics with ability, one would be greater equality of educational opportunity.

- One more argument was with bright and dull. Interactionist views students are a product of meanings and definitions which are created in interaction situations. Students defined as dull in one series of interactions may well be seen as bright in another series based on a different set of negotiated meanings. NEP 2020 shall examine the interaction processes in the classroom. Must explore how teachers and students interpret and give meaning to educational situations. Given the fact that teachers have the power to award grades and assess students. It is important to discover the meanings which direct this process.

Functionalist and NEP 2020

In functionalist views, the government provides education for the children, and the children become law-abiding, taxpaying citizens, who in turn support the state. In this purview NEP 2020 shall see that education produces order, stability, and productivity. If all does not go well, the parts of society then must adapt to recapture a new order, stability, and productivity. NEP 2020 shall favour the educational system as an important mechanism for the selection of individuals for their future roles (achieved status). Furthermore, from the functionalist view NEP 2020 shall maintain:

- Create an environment for social solidarity, learn teaching skills necessary for work, and teach core values, and role allocation.
- As advised by Durkheim NEP 2020 shall favour the teaching of history to the child so that the child respecting school rules will develop a sense of commitment to the social groups, and helps the child to develop the habit of self-control.
- As advised by Talcott Parson - NEP 2020 to build schooling as subsequently acting as a focal socializing agency preparing the child for their adult role. Where the child status in the family is ascribed, whereas it is achieved in adult life.
- NEP 2020 characterizes schools as “socialization agencies that teach children how to get along with others and prepare them for adult economic roles” (Durkheim 1898).
- NEP 2020 to build the education system to maintain manifest and latent functions, where manifest function shall see gaining knowledge, preparing for a career, and finding a good job, whereas education in the latent function is meeting new people, and participating in extracurricular activities.
- NEP 2020 shall avoid the dysfunctions. Dysfunction states social processes that have undesirable consequences for the operation of society. For example, the dysfunction includes getting bad grades, truancy, dropping out, not graduating, and not finding suitable employment.

Conflict and NEP 2020

Conflicts when studying a social institution, they allow studying the distribution of resources, power, and inequality, by asking the broad question of who benefits from this element of society? Conflicts ask how is the educational system shaped by the economic infrastructure? How does the educational system produce the kind of workforce required by capitalism? Since conflicts argue that education works in the interests of the elite class. That school forms part of the ideological state apparatus, reproduces class inequality, it legitimates class inequality, and education works in the interests of capitalist employers. Thus, NEP 2020 has big challenges ahead from the conflict point of view on how it controls:

- the purpose of education is not to maintain social inequality and will not widen the gap in social inequality.
- How NEP 2020 will monitor education is not creating a docile workforce for capitalism.
- How NEP 2020 will have checks and balances on the reproduction of labour-power. That it will not produce a surplus of skilled labour in the interest of capitalists. Since the production of surplus labour produces a high rate of unemployment which provides an effective means of control over the workforce and keeps wage demands at a relatively low level.

Summing up the paper, while symbolic interactionism and functionalism focus on the positive aspects of society that contribute to its stability, **conflict** focuses on the negative, conflicted, and ever-changing nature of society. While interactionists and functionalists defend the status quo and avoid social change, conflict theorists challenge the status quo and encourage social change. In education purview, symbolic interactionists study the dynamics between students and teachers and how they affect their everyday life. Functionalists believe that education equips people to perform different functional roles in society. Whereas conflicts view education as a means of widening the gap in social inequality and examine how educational systems preserve the status quo and guide people of lower status into subordinate positions in society. NEP 2020 would achieve the aspirations of the students and the nation and would achieve India a superpower in education in the global economy by overcoming the challenges principled by the sociological theories the conflict, the interactionist and the functionalists.



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