UNIT 4 FUNCTIONALIST APPROACH TO UNDERSTAND EDUCATION : EMILE DURKHEIM AND TALCOTT PARSONS

UNIT STRUCTURE

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4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to-

- Know the views of Durkheim about education
- Know about the views of Talcott parsons regarding education.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

Society is viewed as a system by the functionalist. Each and every part of the society is correlated for the maintenance of it as a whole..All the constituents are interdependent and help in the maintenance of social order. Biology is one of the most important disciplines, from where the concept of functionalism has come. The idea of society and its functions are similar with are organism. The concept of social organism was central to Herbert Spencer's ideas in which he viewed evolutionary principle eligible to be applied to the human society. Spencer treated human society as an organism. Both organism and society evolves from simple to complex and from homogeneous to heterogeneous. Function, for him, is inevitable for society. Functionalism also advocates that for the survival of the social system all its part must function, failing to which it can affect rest of the social system. Change in one part leads to the change in the rest of the

parts of social system. Unity and integrity is central to the notion of functionalism. In this way, society works for the benefit of its members and the members must reciprocate.

Education is one of the most important institutions for the human society. Like education, religion, the economy also constitutes institutions in the society. These social institutions are considered as a societal subsystem. No institutions exist in a vacuum. They are anchored in the social set up and thus become part of the system. So, if the changes come to the economic or political subsystem it impacts the education and another subsystem as well which lead to change in the whole social system. So, each system has mutual and multiple influences over one another.

Functionalist view of education focuses on the positive contributions made by education for the existence of the social system. Functionalists view that education serves the need of the society. The overt role of education is to transmit knowledge and skills from one generation to another.The hidden function of education is that it socializes people according to the need of the society. The primary role of education is to preserve and transmit the culture and it also facilitates its transformation.Education contributes towards value consensus and maintains the social solidarity.

Functionalists also view that education compartmentalizes as it separates students on the basis of merit. This leads to stratification in the society. Functionalists view this stratification as necessary, as no society is ever unstratified. This compartmentalization selects the most capable for the high-status occupations.

Education is viewed as one of the systems within the larger system. Different structures exist in formal education systems which is considered as the part of the main system of education. In India, school education can be divided into primary, secondary and higher secondary. If we take school education as a system, primary, secondary and higher secondary educations reflect as the part or subsystem within it. Suppose primary education is deteriorating, this deterioration will hamper the secondary education of the child as well. If a child is not taught properly the basics in primary school, it will be difficult to teach him/her the appropriate or

concerned subjects of secondary school; and this will take a toll on his/her higher secondary education, This could further result in his/her droping out. The lack of proper education will take away employment opportunities which will affect his/her economic status. If we look at education as a system, it is imperative for its subsystem to work in coherence; otherwise, education as a whole system will fail. If we extend the notion of education as a subsystem of the social system, it affects the other subsystem like economy, polity, culture etc.

The functionalist perspective of education concerns itself with primarily two areas of investigation. These two areas of investigations could be put forth in the form of these two questions i) In a society as a whole, what is the function of education ? This perspective leads to an appraisal and assessment of the contributions rendered by education towards the maintenance of the value consensus and the solidarity of the society. ii) The other area explores the functional relationship between education and the other parts of the social system. For e.g. this investigates the relationship of education and the political system. How does education integrate with the idea of making political choices is one of the area under and consideration.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1. Who perceived human society as organism?

Q2. What is the hidden function of education in society?

4.3 EMILE DURKHEIM

Emile Durkheim was born on April 15, 1858, in Epinal of France. During his career as a teacher at the University of Bourdeax, Durkheim taught courses in education to school teachers, and his most important course was in the area of moral education. Thus Durkheim contributed directly towards the theory of education. He was influenced by the moral degradation that he encountered in the French society. So he tried to communicate a moral system to educators so that they could extend the

same to the young people. He did not feel the need of revolution to change the situation but propagated the idea to patch up through common morality that keeps the society functioning. In 1906 he was named professor of the science of education, a title that was changed in 1913 to professor of the science of education and sociology. Durkheim was opposed to violence and agitation. Durkheim in his time was considered as a liberal, but today most often his influence within sociology is considered a conservative one. Durkheim, the classical sociologist, first introduced the need of a sociological approach to understand education.He integrated the notion of functionalism with education.Earlier societies were kept united by a strongly held common morality or strong collective conscience, which declined gradually because of the complexities of modern societies. According to him, education should be such that it helps in the maintenance of the unity in society. He emphasized on moral values through which unity and integrity of society can be ensured.He viewed that through social reform the disorders in society can be reduced.

Durkheim considered education as closely related to the structure of society.Education teaches society's norms and values and how to socialize. Through the norms and the values, society becomes stable and social solidarity is attained. He viewed school as a society in miniature. It transmits general values which provide 'necessary homogeneity for social survival' and specific skills that provide the 'necessary diversity for social cooperation' (Haralambos: 2011:173).

Durkheim envisioned the role of education as the channel of transmission of norms and values concerning the society. He retorts that society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity. Education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the child from the beginning the essential similarities which collective life demands. ' He finds these notions as an imperative aspect of social life. Durkheim is of the view that group of individuals must be a source of social solidarity. This comes from the feeling that social unit is more salient than the individual. He states that to become attached to society the child must feel in it is something that is real, alive and powerful

which dominates the person and to which he also owes the best part of himself. The bridge between individual and society is laid by education especially by the teaching of history. History makes the child realize the importance of social group over individuals and this will infuse the sense of commitment towards that social group. Durkheim's views can be encapsulated by the Indian educational curriculum that portrays Dr Bhim Rao Ambedkar as the torch bearer of the Indian constitution. He also signifies the values of equal opportunity and a voice against oppression.

The schools are seen as a model of the social system where individuals learn to cooperate with those who are neither their kin nor their friend. The set of rules in school prepare a child to respect the rules in general and develops the habit of self-control. Durkheim argues that education prepares the individual with skills necessary for his future occupations.

Formal Education in today's society becomes more important since, in industrial society, the mere transmission of knowledge from one generation to another is not enough. Specialised training for occupation is needed in complex societies based on the division of labour. The integrity of industrial society is based on the mutual interdependence of such specialised skills. Durkheim views that schools transmit general values which provide homogeneity for social survival and skills that provide necessary diversity for social cooperation.Transmissions of the norm, values are covertly part of the curriculum of education.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q3. Fill in the blanks.

a. Durkheim was opposed to.....

b. .....makes the child realize the importance of social group over .....

c. Specialised .....for occupation is needed in .....societies based on the division of labour.

4.4 TALCOTT PARSONS

Talcott Parsons was influenced by Durkheim's views on education. Talcott Parsons was born in 1902 in Colorado, America. Parsons was also greatly Influenced by Max Weber's work.

Parsons applied functionalism to understand education. He identified two vital issues in the context of education in society- i) School is an agency of socialization and training. It instils capacities among children in school and prepares them for the adult role. ii) Allocation of human resources within the role structure of adult society. Parsons explained these with two concept namely commitments and capacities, which are developed by the school. The school instils values of the larger society and commitment to the perform the specific roles. Capacities means the skills to perform individual's role. School also works as an allocation agency- which prepare human resources and allocates them different roles He observed that completion of high school becomes minimum satisfactory educational attainment in society. The performance of a child at elementary level decides his future education. Like Durkheim, he also viewed that educational system provides a different status which is not biologically given.

Parsons viewed school as the socializing agency. He argued that family is the source of primary socialization but after that school plays the crucial role in the socialization.The school acts as a bridge between family and society as a whole and prepares the child for his/ her adult role. In the family, a child is treated individually, in terms of particularistic standards rather than judging him/her in terms of standards which can be applied to every individual. The teacher remains effectively neutral and treats everyone equally. Within the family child's status is ascribed but in a school a child has to achieve his/her position/status.

The school also develops the workforce. The workplace assesses the skills, conformity to authority, discipline etc. School socializes the basic values of society. Like the other functionalists, Parsons was also of the view that value consensus is essential for the survival of society. He talked

in the context of American society. he said, schools instil two major values- the value of achievement and the value of equality of opportunity.

In Indian society, schools also are expected to sow the seeds of discipline and obedience. Schools also magnify the value of achievement by rewarding and encouraging students to strive for the higher ladder of academic pursuits. The value of equality of opportunity is fostered All the values that an individual imbibes from schooling have an important and everlasting impact in the society as a whole. Any society which strives for incessant progress needs a group of individuals with values that are inculcated by the formal system of education.

Parsons finds the educational system as an important apparatus for the selection of individuals for their future role in a society. According to him, the educational system functions to allocate human resources to perform the role of in the adult society. Thus the schools evaluate the capabilities of each individual and give them the roadmap for the jobs that are best suited to their abilities. In this context schools act as institutes for role allocation.

He explained that in the early stage of schooling, achievement is measured in terms of cognitive and moral values. Cognitive values refers to the intellectual ability of children in terms of written language and mathematical skills. Whereas moral components can be discipline, respect for the teacher, cooperative behaviour etc. which lead towards the making of a responsible citizen,Thus regardless of ascribed characteristics such as class, caste, gender, ethnicity, all are treated equally. in school It is based on meritocratic principle. However, differential attainment is also based on family motivation, individual ability or interest in education. So, school is considered as the major mechanism of role allocation, through test and evaluation.Depending on one's ability, merit, the best-suited job is allocated. Thus schools justify different reward for different achievement.

Parsons analyzed four functional prerequisites, in any given system, often called as AGIL model. Every society must perform this four fundamental functions i.e. adaptation, goal attainment, integrative and latency. School and family handle the latency function by transmitting culture, norms and

values to the actors and allowing it to be internalized by them. Thus, education also serves the function of integration in society.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q4. When did the book, Social System got was Published?

Q5. Which institution acts as a bridge between the family and the society?



4.5 LET US SUM UP

- Functionalists view society as a system.
- Society as a system works in co related manner for the maintenance of the whole.
- This system has a subsystem and a subsystem may work as a system which accordingly will have a subsystem.
- Functionalists focus on unity and integrity.
- Education is considered as a social institution which is a societal subsystem.
- Functionalist view of education focuses on the positive contributions made by education for the existence of social system.
- Durkheim, the classical sociologist, first introduced the need of a sociological approach to understanding education. He integrated the notion of functionalism with education.
- Parsons applied functionalism to education and identified two vital issues in the context of education in society- 1. School is an agency of socialization and training. It instils capacities among children in school and prepares them for the adult role. 2. Allocation of human resources within the role structure of adult society.



4.6 FURTHER READING