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## Sociology of education and the national education policy (NEP) 2020: A sociological analysis of inclusion, functionality, and social transformation in India

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### Abstract

The sociology of education provides a critical lens for examining how education, as a social institution, functions within broader social structures. It analyzes the interconnections between education, culture, power, and inequality, highlighting how educational systems simultaneously reproduce and transform social realities. This paper explores the sociological foundations of education with special reference to India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which marks a paradigm shift toward equity, inclusion, and holistic learning. Drawing on classical and contemporary sociological theories—Durkheim's functionalism, Marxist and Althusserian conflict perspectives, Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction, and symbolic interactionism—the paper examines how education both sustains and reshapes social order. The analysis situates NEP 2020 within this theoretical framework, illustrating its alignment with global objectives such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) on inclusive and equitable education. The paper further discusses the school as a social system, the processual dimensions of schooling, and the sociological significance of inclusive education in transforming the Indian socio-educational landscape. Ultimately, it argues that NEP 2020 embodies a shift

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from a utilitarian view of education toward a sociological and humanistic understanding that integrates cultural heritage, critical reasoning, and social transformation

**Keywords:** Sociology of Education, NEP 2020, Functionalism, Social Inclusion, Cultural Reproduction, Educational Equity, India, Social Change.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is universally recognized as a cornerstone of social and national development. Sociologists view it not merely as a means of acquiring knowledge or skills, but as a fundamental institution that transmits culture, shapes identities, and reproduces social structures (Durkheim, 1922; Ballantine & Hammack, 2012). In every society, education both reflects and reforms the social order—it sustains norms, values, and hierarchies while also serving as a vehicle for modernization, mobility, and empowerment. In the Indian context, education has been central to both the colonial and postcolonial social transformation. The post-independence education policies—from the Kothari Commission (1964–66) to the National Policy on Education (1986/1992)—sought to democratize access to education and align it with national development goals. However, despite these efforts, disparities based on class, caste, gender, and region persisted (Tilak, 2015; Jayaram, 2016). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduces a comprehensive framework that reimagines education as a lifelong, inclusive, and multidisciplinary process. It seeks to integrate traditional Indian knowledge systems with contemporary global competencies, emphasizing ethical reasoning, creativity, and critical thinking (MHRD, 2020). NEP 2020 resonates with the sociological perspective that education must balance cultural continuity with social change (Dreeben, 2005).

The purpose of this article is to provide a sociological analysis of NEP 2020 through four interconnected lenses:

1. The nature, characteristics, and scope of the sociology of education.
2. Schools as social systems and processes.
3. Theoretical perspectives—Functionalist, Marxist, Cultural Reproduction, and Symbolic Interactionist.
4. The relationship between education, stratification, and social change.

Each section combines sociological theory and policy analysis to demonstrate NEP 2020's alignment with, and points of divergence from, major sociological frameworks. This approach critically assesses how NEP 2020 addresses social inclusion and transformation through educational reform.

## 2. NATURE, CHARACTERISTICS, AND SCOPE OF SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

### 2.1 Nature of Sociology of Education

The sociology of education investigates the interaction between education and society, exploring how educational institutions reflect, reproduce, and transform social structures (Brown, 2011). It is rooted in the understanding that education is both a social product and a social process (Hurn, 1985). As such, it occupies an interdisciplinary space, drawing from social theory, pedagogy, economics, and cultural studies. Durkheim (1922) was among the first to systematize this relationship, arguing that education is “the means by which society perpetuates itself.” For Durkheim, education serves to internalize collective norms and values, thereby fostering social solidarity. His framework laid the foundation for later functionalist theories that

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conceptualize education as an instrument of integration and social order (Parsons, 1959; Merton, 1968). In contrast, critical theorists such as Karl Marx and Louis Althusser viewed education as an ideological apparatus that reproduces class inequalities (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). In their analysis, education becomes a mechanism through which dominant classes maintain hegemony, legitimizing social hierarchies under the guise of meritocracy. Contemporary sociology extends these debates to include gender, ethnicity, language, and disability, emphasizing education's role in either perpetuating or challenging intersecting inequalities (Arnot & Dillabough, 2000; Apple, 2019).

## **2.2 Characteristics of Sociology of Education**

The discipline of sociology of education is characterized by several features:

1. **Interdisciplinary Focus:** It bridges sociology, psychology, economics, and philosophy to understand education in its social context.
2. **Analytical and Empirical Orientation:** It uses empirical research—quantitative and qualitative—to analyze patterns of access, achievement, and inequality (Coleman, 1966; Bernstein, 1971).
3. **Critical Examination of Power:** It interrogates how social institutions perpetuate or resist domination, particularly through curriculum, pedagogy, and policy (Freire, 1970).
4. **Dynamic Perspective:** Education is not static but evolves with social transformation—technological advancement, globalization, and policy reform (Ball, 2008).
5. **Global and Local Relevance:** Sociology of education links local educational practices to global agendas such as UNESCO's SDG 4 and OECD's equity frameworks.

## **2.3 Scope of Sociology of Education**

The scope of sociology of education is vast, encompassing the following dimensions:

1. **Education as Socialization:** The process of transmitting cultural values, norms, and skills necessary for social participation (Durkheim, 1922).
2. **Education as Stratification:** Examining how access and achievement are shaped by class, caste, gender, and region (Bourdieu, 1977; Willis, 1977).
3. **Education and Mobility:** Investigating education's role as a pathway to social mobility and occupational success (Blau & Duncan, 1967).
4. **Education and Policy:** Analyzing the formulation and impact of policies like NEP 2020, which aim to democratize education (Tilak, 2021).
5. **Education and Globalization:** Understanding transnational influences on curriculum, pedagogy, and governance (Meyer & Ramirez, 2000).

Sociology of education thus provides the conceptual and analytical tools necessary to evaluate educational reforms, such as the NEP 2020, within their broader social and historical contexts.

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### **3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIETY AND EDUCATION**

The relationship between education and society is bidirectional—society shapes education, and education in turn shapes society (Dreeben, 2005). This dynamic can be observed in three principal dimensions:

#### **3.1 Education as a Reflection of Society**

Education systems mirror the cultural values, economic structures, and political ideologies of their societies. In capitalist economies, education often emphasizes competition, productivity, and credentialism (Collins, 1979). In socialist frameworks, collective welfare and equality are prioritized. India’s education system reflects its constitutional commitment to justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity (Constitution of India, 1950). The NEP 2020 embodies this relationship by aligning educational aims with national goals such as sustainable development, cultural preservation, and inclusive growth (MHRD, 2020). It situates education as the foundation for “an equitable and vibrant knowledge society” (p. 6).

#### **3.2 Education as an Agent of Social Change**

Education is a key driver of modernization and social mobility. It fosters critical thinking, democratic participation, and innovation (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970). In India, education has historically been the primary tool for breaking caste barriers, empowering women, and promoting secularism (Ambedkar, 1948). NEP 2020 reinforces this transformative potential by integrating values of critical inquiry, multilingualism, and gender sensitivity. The policy’s emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy (Section 2.2) and vocational integration (Section 16) illustrates education’s role as both a social equalizer and an engine of national development.

#### **3.3 Education and Social Control**

While education promotes change, it also serves as a mechanism of social control, maintaining social order by internalizing norms. Schools discipline students through structured routines and assessment systems that reward conformity and obedience (Foucault, 1977). The NEP 2020 seeks to balance control with creativity, proposing pedagogies that encourage experiential learning, critical thinking, and ethical reasoning rather than rote memorization (Chapter 4).

### **4. Concepts, Aims, and Importance of Inclusive Education**

#### **4.1 Conceptual Foundations**

This section introduces the main concepts, aims, and importance of inclusive education, setting the stage for a discussion of its theoretical and practical significance.

Inclusive education is rooted in the principles of equality, participation, and human rights. It emerged globally through movements for educational equity and was codified in the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994), which urged nations to adopt inclusive education as a fundamental policy. Sociologically, it challenges exclusionary practices and promotes the idea that diversity—whether of ability, gender, class, or language—is a resource rather than a deficit (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson, 2006).

#### **4.2 Aims of Inclusive Education**

1. **Equitable Access:** Ensure that all learners, regardless of background, can participate fully in the educational process.

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2. Elimination of Discrimination: Dismantle barriers—physical, linguistic, cultural—that marginalize learners.
3. Holistic Development: Foster academic, emotional, and social growth in inclusive environments.
4. Empowerment through Participation: Enable learners to become active members of society and contributors to social progress.

### **4.3 Inclusive Education in the Indian Context**

India’s inclusive education framework has evolved from special education models toward integrated and rights-based approaches, as reflected in:

1. Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE Act).
2. Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016.
3. National Education Policy, 2020.

NEP 2020 conceptualizes inclusion as both a moral imperative and a developmental necessity. Chapter 6 emphasizes Equitable and Inclusive Education: Learning for All, recognizing that educational disparities are rooted in structural inequalities such as caste, class, gender, and regional imbalance.

Key strategies include:

1. Establishing a Gender-Inclusion Fund.
2. Developing Special Education Zones for marginalized communities.
3. Adopting Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to accommodate diverse learners.
4. Promoting multilingual instruction to overcome linguistic barriers.
5. Integrating digital platforms to reach remote and differently-abled learners.

### **4.4 Sociological Significance of Inclusion**

From a sociological perspective, inclusive education embodies the principle of social justice. It addresses intersectionality—the overlapping systems of disadvantage that shape access to education (Crenshaw, 1989). Inclusive education thus not only equalizes opportunities but also democratizes the very culture of learning. NEP 2020’s approach aligns with the Freirean idea of education as liberational process that transforms both teacher and learner through dialogue and empathy (Freire, 1970). By embedding inclusion within the broader agenda of equity and excellence, NEP 2020 reaffirms the sociological understanding of education as an instrument of both integration and transformation.

## **5. ISSUES AND PROCESSES IN EDUCATION**

### **5.1 School as a Social System (Talcott Parsons)**

Talcott Parsons’ functionalist theory of education provides one of the most comprehensive analyses of the school as a social system. According to Parsons (1959), the school acts as a “bridge” between the family and

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wider society. It introduces children to universalistic norms and achievement-based evaluation, preparing them for adult roles.

In his view, the school performs three primary functions:

1. **Socialization:** It transmits the core values of the society—achievement, equality, and discipline.
2. **Selection and Allocation:** Schools classify individuals by merit, guiding them toward occupational roles that align with their skills.
3. **Integration:** Education fosters social cohesion by cultivating shared cultural and moral values.

These functions collectively contribute to what Parsons called value consensus, which ensures societal stability. Schools thus operate as sub-systems that maintain the equilibrium of the larger social order (Merton, 1968). In the Indian context, the school serves as a critical institution for social integration, given the diversity of caste, religion, language, and region. NEP 2020 reinforces this by emphasizing constitutional values, ethical reasoning, and inclusive participation (MHRD, 2020). By promoting multilingualism and civic engagement, NEP 2020 aligns with Parsons' vision of education as an instrument for unity in diversity. However, critics of functionalism argue that the model underplays the persistence of inequality. Structural-functional theory assumes meritocracy, but empirical evidence suggests that educational success is still largely determined by social background (Bourdieu, 1977; Bernstein, 1971). Hence, while Parsons' model explains the integrative function of education, it must be complemented by critical perspectives to address structural disparities.

## **5.2 School as a Process**

While Parsons emphasized the structural functions of education, later sociologists such as Bernstein (1971), Hargreaves (1982), and Meighan (1989) viewed education as a social process—a dynamic and interactive experience shaped by relationships among teachers, students, parents, and administrators.

### **5.2.1 School as an Interactive System**

In this perspective, education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but a process of communication and interaction. Teachers and students co-create meanings, negotiate identities, and shape the learning environment. The classroom becomes a microcosm of society, reflecting power relations, cultural codes, and linguistic practices (Mead, 1934).

### **5.2.2 Hidden Curriculum**

A central concept in the processual view is the hidden curriculum, the implicit lessons about hierarchy, conformity, and obedience transmitted through daily routines and institutional practices (Jackson, 1968; Giroux, 1983). These unspoken lessons often reinforce social stratification. For example, children from privileged backgrounds adapt more easily to the behavioral expectations of schools, while marginalized students face cultural dissonance.

NEP 2020 seeks to reform the hidden curriculum by introducing experiential learning, ethical reasoning, and critical thinking, reducing the emphasis on rote learning and authoritarian pedagogy. The shift toward student-centered education reflects a recognition of education as an evolving social process rather than a fixed structure.

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### **5.3 Ivan Illich and the Deschooling Perspective**

Ivan Illich (1971) offered a radical critique of institutionalized education in *Deschooling Society*. He argued that schools had become instruments of social control, perpetuating consumerism and inequality rather than fostering learning. According to Illich, “the pupil is schooled to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education, and a diploma with competence.”

#### **5.3.1 Illich’s Key Arguments**

1. Institutional Dependency: Formal schooling creates dependence on credentialism and bureaucratic systems.
2. Commodification of Knowledge: Learning becomes a market commodity rather than a democratic right.
3. Reproduction of Inequality: Schools legitimize privilege by claiming meritocratic neutrality.

#### **5.3.2 Learning Webs and Radical Alternatives**

Illich proposed learning webs—decentralized, community-based networks that promote self-directed learning. These webs allow learners to connect with others who share their interests, promoting egalitarian and lifelong education.

#### **5.3.3 NEP 2020 and Illichian Resonance**

Though NEP 2020 does not advocate deschooling, it reflects Illich’s spirit in its support for:

1. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) through platforms like SWAYAM.
2. Vocational integration and experiential learning.
3. Lifelong education and digital learning ecosystems.

NEP 2020 thus bridges the gap between institutional education and the ideals of democratized, self-motivated learning. It transforms Illich’s critique into a constructive framework for equitable educational reform.

## **6. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION**

Sociological theories provide conceptual frameworks to interpret education’s relationship with society. Four major traditions dominate: Functionalism, Marxism, Cultural Reproduction, and Symbolic Interactionism. Each perspective reveals distinct dimensions of educational reality.

### **6.1 Functionalist Approach (Émile Durkheim and Parsons)**

Durkheim viewed education as an essential organ of the social body, responsible for transmitting moral values and maintaining solidarity (Durkheim, 1922). For him, schools cultivate the collective conscience—a shared moral code that binds individuals together.

Durkheim’s functionalism rests on two central premises:

1. Education integrates individuals into society by instilling discipline, respect, and collective values.

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2. Education contributes to social differentiation, preparing individuals for specialized roles in a complex division of labor.

In NEP 2020, Durkheim's principles manifest in the emphasis on ethics, empathy, and social responsibility. The policy aims to balance individual excellence with collective well-being through value-based education and community participation. Critics such as Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that functionalism overlooks education's role in reproducing inequality. Yet Durkheim's insight remains relevant in the NEP's focus on moral education, civic values, and social cohesion within pluralistic India.

## **6.2 Marxist and Althusserian Approaches**

Karl Marx perceived education as part of the ideological superstructure, shaped by the economic base of society. Schools, in his view, reproduce class hierarchies by legitimizing capitalist values such as competition, punctuality, and obedience (Marx, 1867; Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

Louis Althusser (1971) extended this argument through his concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)—institutions such as schools, churches, and the media that propagate ruling-class ideology. Education, while appearing neutral, molds individuals into compliant subjects of the capitalist order.

From a Marxist standpoint, NEP 2020's goals of innovation, competitiveness, and skill development could be interpreted as aligning with neoliberal globalization. However, its focus on equity, ethics, and inclusion represents a conscious attempt to counterbalance capitalist tendencies with social justice.

The NEP's call for education as a public good (MHRD, 2020, p. 14) reflects a move toward humanistic education, consistent with Marx's vision of liberating individuals from alienation through creative labor.

## **6.3 Cultural Reproduction Theory (Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron)**

Pierre Bourdieu's *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1977) transformed sociological understanding of how education perpetuates inequality. His key concepts—cultural capital, habitus, and field—explain why students from privileged backgrounds succeed more easily.

### **6.3.1 Core Ideas**

1. Cultural Capital: Non-economic assets (language, style, tastes, education) that confer social advantage.

2. Habitus: Deeply ingrained dispositions shaped by class experiences.

3. Field: The structured social arena (such as education) where competition for capital occurs.

Schools reward students who possess dominant cultural codes (standard language, elite manners), often marginalizing working-class or rural learners. As a result, the education system reproduces social hierarchies under the guise of meritocracy.

### **6.3.2 NEP 2020's Response**

NEP 2020 recognizes this inequity and promotes:

1. Mother-tongue instruction up to Grade 5 (Section 4.12).

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2. Localized curricula reflecting cultural and regional diversity.
3. Context-sensitive pedagogy that values indigenous knowledge systems.

These reforms resonate with Bourdieu's critique, aiming to democratize access to cultural capital by acknowledging linguistic and cultural pluralism.

#### **6.4 Symbolic Interactionist Approach (William Labov and Basil Bernstein)**

Symbolic interactionism focuses on the micro-level interactions that shape educational experiences. It examines how teachers' expectations, language use, and peer dynamics influence students' identities and achievement (Mead, 1934; Becker, 1952).

William Labov (1972) challenged the notion that working-class children were linguistically deficient. His studies on African-American vernacular English demonstrated that non-standard dialects are linguistically rich and rule-governed, but stigmatized in school contexts. Similarly, Basil Bernstein (1971) showed that "elaborated" and "restricted" codes reflect class-based communication patterns that affect educational success.

##### **6.4.1 Implications for NEP 2020**

NEP 2020's promotion of multilingual education and language flexibility aligns with these insights. Validating mother tongues and regional languages reduces linguistic prejudice and enhances social inclusion. Moreover, its emphasis on learner-centered pedagogy echoes the interactionist focus on identity formation through dialogue and participation.

#### **6.5 Humanist and Critical Pedagogy (Paulo Freire and John Dewey)**

John Dewey (1916) argued that education is a process of living, not a preparation for future living. Schools should cultivate reflective thinking and democratic participation.

Paulo Freire (1970) extended this into a radical pedagogy of liberation. He criticized the "banking model" of education—where teachers deposit knowledge into passive students—and advocated for dialogic learning, where learners become co-creators of knowledge.

##### **NEP 2020 in Freirean Light**

NEP 2020's emphasis on critical thinking, creativity, and value-based education embodies Freire's vision. Moving away from rote learning toward dialogical and experiential education positions students as agents of change rather than passive recipients.

#### **6.6 Weberian Perspective: Education, Authority, and Bureaucracy**

Max Weber (1947) analyzed education through the lens of rationalization and bureaucratization. He argued that modern education systems are governed by credentialism—the formal qualification-based legitimacy that sustains bureaucratic hierarchies. In India, this manifests in the obsession with degrees over competence, a trend that NEP 2020 seeks to counter through multiple entry–exit systems and competency-based education. Weber's concern with rational-legal authority also explains the growing institutionalization of education, which NEP 2020 attempts to humanize through decentralization and autonomy.

#### **6.7 Feminist Perspectives**

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Feminist scholars such as Ann Oakley (1981) and Madeleine Arnot (2002) critique education for perpetuating gender stereotypes through curricula, pedagogy, and institutional structures. NEP 2020 directly addresses these concerns through its Gender Inclusion Fund, promotion of STEM participation for girls, and integration of gender-sensitive pedagogy. These reforms resonate with feminist sociology’s emphasis on equality, representation, and empowerment.

**Table1. Comparative Integration of Theories**

Theoretical Framework	Core Idea	Relevance to NEP 2020
<b>Durkheim (Functionalism)</b>	Education promotes social solidarity and collective consciousness.	Emphasis on ethics, citizenship, value-based education, and national integration.
<b>Marx/Althusser (Conflict Theory)</b>	Education reproduces class inequality and ideological control.	Policies on equity, social justice, and inclusion seek to reduce structural inequalities in education.
<b>Bourdieu (Cultural Capital Theory)</b>	Schools reward the dominant culture and reproduce social advantage.	Promotion of multilingualism, localized curricula, and inclusive pedagogy to value diverse cultural backgrounds.
<b>Labov/Bernstein (Language and Symbolic Theory)</b>	Language and communication patterns influence educational achievement.	Support for mother-tongue instruction and linguistic diversity in early education.
<b>Freire (Critical Pedagogy)</b>	Education should promote critical consciousness and liberation.	Focus on critical thinking, experiential learning, creativity, and learner-centered pedagogy.
<b>Weber (Bureaucratic Theory)</b>	Education is linked with credentialism, rationalization, and social mobility.	Flexible curriculum structures, competency-based education, and multidisciplinary reforms.
<b>Feminist Theory</b>	Educational institutions reflect and reproduce gender inequalities.	Gender inclusion, empowerment initiatives, and equal access to educational opportunities.

**Note.** This table presents a comparative integration of major sociological theories of education and their relevance to the reforms proposed under the National Education Policy 2020. The table highlights how different theoretical perspectives explain the role of education in society and how NEP 2020 attempts to address issues related to social solidarity, inequality, language diversity, critical pedagogy, credentialism, and gender inclusion in the Indian education system.

## 7. EDUCATION, SOCIETY, AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

Education and society are inseparably linked in the process of human development. Sociologists consider education not only as an instrument of social control but also as a powerful medium of transformation. Education facilitates the transmission of culture, fosters innovation, and cultivates the moral and intellectual capacities necessary for a democratic society. NEP 2020 embodies this dual role of education — as a mechanism of continuity and a catalyst of change.

### 7.1 Education and Socialization

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Socialization refers to the process through which individuals internalize the norms, values, and behaviors necessary for social participation (Parsons, 1951). Education is the most formalized agency of socialization, complementing the family, peer groups, and media.

Durkheim (1922) considered education the “methodical socialization of the young,” ensuring the continuity of collective life. Through discipline and cooperation, schools instill moral order. In the Indian context, education also reinforces national identity by promoting constitutional values such as secularism, democracy, and social justice.

NEP 2020 explicitly emphasizes socialization through “value-based, character-building education” (Chapter 4). It encourages moral and civic instruction alongside academic excellence. Initiatives such as Art-Integrated Learning, Environmental Education, and Constitutional Awareness aim to develop ethical and socially responsible citizens.

Furthermore, the NEP’s holistic approach integrates emotional intelligence, cultural literacy, and community service — resonating with Gandhian Nai Talim and Deweyan experiential learning. It positions education not merely as information transmission but as a formative process nurturing compassion, empathy, and solidarity.

## **7.2 Education and Social Stratification**

While education is often portrayed as a leveler, sociological research demonstrates its ambivalent role in reinforcing existing inequalities (Collins, 1979; Bourdieu, 1977). Stratification in education reflects broader divisions along class, caste, gender, and regional lines.

### **7.2.1 Class and Caste Dimensions**

In India, caste and class continue to shape access to educational opportunities. Upper-class and urban students have greater access to private institutions, English-medium instruction, and digital resources, while marginalized communities face structural barriers (Desai & Kulkarni, 2008).

Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital explains this phenomenon: privileged groups possess the linguistic and cultural competencies rewarded by schools. Conversely, lower-caste and tribal learners face symbolic disadvantages that impede achievement.

### **7.2.2 Gender Inequality**

Gender disparities in education remain significant despite improvements. Feminist sociologists argue that schools often reproduce patriarchal norms through biased curricula, unequal participation, and limited role models (Arnot, 2002; Nussbaum, 2011).

NEP 2020 addresses these disparities through the Gender Inclusion Fund, gender-sensitive pedagogy, and targeted outreach for women in science, technology, and leadership. The emphasis on safety, sanitation, and digital inclusion enhances access and retention for female students.

### **7.2.3 Regional and Linguistic Inequality**

India’s linguistic diversity has historically created educational divides. English-medium dominance marginalized local languages and rural learners. NEP 2020 mitigates this through mother-tongue instruction and multilingual education, thereby democratizing linguistic capital (Labov, 1972). By recognizing socio-

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linguistic plurality, NEP 2020 seeks to reduce structural stratification — a step consistent with the symbolic interactionist emphasis on language as a medium of identity and equality.

### **7.3 Education and Social Change**

Sociologists from Durkheim to Freire have recognized education's transformative potential. Education is a primary vehicle for modernization, democratization, and national development (Inkeles & Smith, 1974; Freire, 1970). It cultivates the intellectual and moral capacities required for social reconstruction.

#### **7.3.1 Education as an Agent of Modernization**

In developing nations, education fosters rationality, innovation, and scientific temper. NEP 2020's emphasis on STEM integration, critical thinking, and research foundations reflects this modernizing function. The establishment of the National Research Foundation (NRF) promotes interdisciplinary inquiry and scientific excellence.

#### **7.3.2 Education as an Agent of Democratization**

Education supports democracy by enabling informed participation, tolerance, and civic responsibility (Dewey, 1916). NEP 2020 promotes democratic governance in education, decentralizing authority through school complexes, autonomous institutions, and participatory management. This aligns with the sociological principle of educational democratization, which distributes power and voice among all stakeholders.

#### **7.3.3 Education as an Agent of Cultural Transformation**

Through cultural education, schools transmit heritage while fostering innovation. NEP 2020 emphasizes Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), arts and humanities, and values-based education, balancing global competence with cultural rootedness. This synthesis mirrors Bourdieu's argument for reconciling cultural capital with social reform.

### **7.4 Role of the State and Social Transformation through Education**

The State is a critical actor in shaping education policy. From a sociological standpoint, it functions as both a regulator and redistributor, ensuring that education serves collective welfare (Weber, 1947; Apple, 2019). NEP 2020 redefines the role of the Indian State as an enabler rather than a monopolistic controller. It promotes autonomy, accountability, and innovation while maintaining public oversight. This transformation can be understood through the neo-Weberian framework of governance, where bureaucratic rationality coexists with participatory decision-making.

Key state functions under NEP 2020 include:

1. Regulatory Reform: Establishment of the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) for transparent governance.
2. Universal Access: Expansion of early childhood care and secondary education.
3. Public Investment: Increased GDP allocation to 6% for education.
4. Equity Measures: Implementation of inclusive funding models and social justice mechanisms.

Sociologically, this reflects the welfare-state model of education, balancing economic efficiency with social equity. It acknowledges education as a public good essential for social transformation (Tilak, 2021).

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## **8. CRITICAL EVALUATION OF NEP 2020 THROUGH A SOCIOLOGICAL LENS**

### **8.1 Functionalist Evaluation**

NEP 2020 aligns closely with functionalist theory by emphasizing the integrative role of education in promoting unity, stability, and social cohesion. Its holistic learning framework resonates with Durkheim's notion of moral education. However, excessive focus on unity risks homogenizing cultural diversity — a concern for plural societies like India.

### **8.2 Marxist and Conflict Evaluation**

From a conflict perspective, the policy's embrace of vocationalization, privatization, and technology could reinforce capitalist ideologies (Apple, 2019). The challenge lies in ensuring that equity goals are not undermined by neoliberal competition or market-based reforms.

### **8.3 Bourdieusian Evaluation**

The NEP's multilingual and culturally responsive pedagogy directly addresses Bourdieu's critique of cultural reproduction. Yet, unequal distribution of quality teachers, digital infrastructure, and parental resources may continue to privilege dominant groups.

### **8.4 Feminist Evaluation**

NEP 2020 is progressive in promoting gender equality, but its success depends on implementation. The persistence of gender bias in textbooks, leadership roles, and digital access remains a challenge (Subrahmanian, 2005).

### **8.5 Symbolic Interactionist Evaluation**

The NEP's emphasis on communication, creativity, and experiential learning aligns with symbolic interactionism. Classrooms under NEP's vision become spaces for dialogue and identity formation, reflecting Freirean democratic pedagogy.

### **8.6 Postcolonial Evaluation**

From a postcolonial perspective, NEP 2020's integration of Indian knowledge systems represents decolonization of education. However, balancing traditional epistemologies with scientific rationalism requires critical reflexivity to avoid cultural essentialism (Kumar, 2017).

## **9. CONCLUSION**

The sociology of education reveals that education is both a social construct and a transformative force. NEP 2020 exemplifies the evolving sociological understanding of education as a means of achieving equality, inclusion, and national development. It reinterprets classical sociological theories—Durkheim's solidarity, Marx's critique, Bourdieu's cultural capital, and Freire's dialogical pedagogy—within a contemporary policy framework. By positioning education as a public good and a human right, NEP 2020 seeks to reconcile the dual goals of social cohesion and social justice. Its success, however, depends on equitable implementation, sufficient funding, and continuous sociological evaluation.

In conclusion, NEP 2020 marks a significant step toward realizing the constitutional promise of "Justice—social, economic, and political." It envisions education as both an instrument of national regeneration and a

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pathway to global citizenship, harmonizing the sociological imperatives of inclusion, functionality, and transformation.

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