

Unit 9

Education and Social Change

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Learning Objectives

After reading this unit, you should be able to understand the:

- meaning and process of social change;
- interplay between education and social and economic development;
- relationship between education, the underprivileged and democracy; and
- relationship between education and social change in Indian society.

9.1 Introduction

The relationship of education with social change is not a simple, unilateral one, as perhaps many would like to believe, for education is not only instrumental in bringing about social change, it is also quite interestingly instrumental in maintaining the status quo. In other words, education plays both a 'conservative' and 'radical' role, i.e., it helps both in 'maintaining' and 'changing' different aspects of the social system.

Social scientists have held diverse positions on the relationship between education and social change. There are some (Althusser 1972) who treat education as the most important 'ideological state apparatus' appropriated by the ruling classes to pursue their own ideas and interests. They maintain that education is an instrument forged by the ruling classes to serve and preserve their own interests and largely to maintain the status quo in the existing economic and political power structure. At the other end, are many social scientists, politicians, educationists and educational planners who consider education as an important instrument of social change, particularly in the context of third world countries. Here, education is treated as effecting economic development and social change. In post-revolutionary Russia, for example schools were assigned the task of destroying old bourgeoisie values and creating new values appropriate to a socialist society. We have seen that the educational system is responsible for encouraging innovation in the material and technological spheres. This may involve training the labour force in these skills, challenging traditional attitudes, or promoting social mobility and allowing new elites to threaten and replace those before them. Some of these expectations are, to a large extent, contradictory. The radical and innovation functions of education are hard to reconcile with its role in the transmission of culture. Also, schools and universities are themselves a part of society subject to pressures from other parts of the social system. In a highly stratified society, for example, it is unrealistic to expect schools to inculcate strongly egalitarian principles. They are likely to function in these societies as important agencies within the stratification system training the young for adult roles. Only where egalitarianism is accepted as part of the dominant value system of a society is it likely either to influence the organization of education or to be part of the moral and social training imparted at school. Developments in the

education system are largely also influenced considerably by economic and technological factors. Education in turn may also influence social and economic change as a consequence of the role it plays in the processes of discovery and dissemination of newly acquired knowledge.

In this Unit we will focus on an analysis of education in the context of social change, but before doing that we will examine the concept and meaning of social change and factors that are instrumental in causing it. We will also discuss the goals and structural pattern of the formal education system.

9.2 Concept of Social Change

Social change has been defined by sociologist Wilbert Moore (1963) as a significant alteration over time in behaviour patterns and culture, including norms and values. It is important to understand how the rate and nature of change brings about alteration in society. In simpler societies, change is unusually slow: tradition, ritual, rites of passage, and social hierarchies—these are some of the basic elements that have held such societies together. These elements weaken in the event of culture contact, and disasters such as wars, disease and famine.

Terms such as 'progress', 'evolution', 'process' and so forth are often used, when understanding the concept of social change. R. M. MacIver and C. H. Page (1950) have discussed and distinguished between these terms. The word, 'process' implies the idea of continuity; 'all that is meant by process is the definite step-by-step manner through which one state or stage merges into another'. Nothing is said here about the quality, of the process. It is simply a way of describing how things happen in society; and also the way in which people adapt to certain elements in their society, or are assimilated to certain forms of activity, or adjust themselves to specific modes of behaviour.

The term evolution implies a scientific concept of development and change, an unrolling or unfolding, a movement in some particular direction. MacIver and Page (1950) consider that societies may be classified as more or less evolved according to the complexity of their differentiation. More evolved simply implies a greater complexity and differentiation within the society; but again, evolution is not merely a quantitative process. For MacIver and Page, 'wherever in the history of society we find an increasing specialization of organs or units within the system or serving the life of the whole, we can speak of social evolution.' The words progress and process are frequently used in popular discussion as interchangeable words, but in the context of social change, at least, progress involves judgment whereas process is simply descriptive of continuity. Value—judgments are relative, and what may constitute social progress for one may represent retrogression, decay or stagnation for another. It all depends on the sort of ideal one has of society itself and the goal at which one is aiming.

W. J. H. Sprott (1967) presents a clear and simplified scheme of social change within a very narrow spectrum. According to him there is, firstly exogenous change which is caused by agencies external to society itself. Such factors as invasion, colonization, settlement, culture contact and disease are highly unpredictable and capable of effecting social disequilibrium and change. Secondly, there is endogenous change, which occurs from within the society. Sprott divides endogenous change into two main types according to their degree of predictability. There is 'episodic change' which is brought about within a society by some event, which could not have been predicted from one's personal knowledge of the state of our society. This applies particularly within the realm of inventions, which may have devastating effects upon the whole fabric and lifestyle of society. In fact the invention in itself (e.g. radar, atomic energy, laser beams) is neutral. It is the use to which one puts an

invention that decides whether society will progress or retrogress; but it will certainly change. There is, however, also 'patterned change' within the society, which permits a more precise prediction. Such prediction is of short-term nature and it depends upon the increase in a society of mutual concern, planning, rationality and an organized programme of social welfare, as well as political and economic consensus.

Most of what has been said here can be reduced to a consideration of change under three main types of factors or conditions: physical and biological; technological; and cultural. A consideration of physical and biological factors involves such problems as the changing size and average age of a population, the varying balance between deaths and births, and the variations in the race, colour and culture in the differing elements of population. Geographical factors, environment, habitats and ecological modifications may also affect society in terms of the occupations people pursue. Technological factors may mean the vast improvement in mechanical devices, in fertilizers and seeds, and in the acceptance of the importance of management, economics, accountancy, and genetics - not as extras or sidelines, but as intrinsic dimensions of agriculture itself. Other technological advances have included the development of physical transportation by means of rail, aeroplane and automobile, and discovery and harnessing of atomic energy.

Reflection and action 9.1

What is social change?

9.3 Goals, Objectives and Structural Patterns of Education

It is true that some of the so-called 'universal' or 'society - oriented' goals of education in a society articulate the thinking of the philosophers and social reformers of the times many of whom project a future in terms of ideal society. This can be illustrated by examples of many western and eastern educational philosophers. At this juncture, you may refer to units 1, 3 and 4. In actual operation it has been shown that, in most countries, the system works (both in its form and content) with a decisive social bias, heavily in favour of the upper or dominant strata of society. At the same time, it provides occupational and social mobility to a small number from the social strata. The educational system is largely conditioned by the prevalent socio-economic and political power structure. Its expansion, growth and development are tuned to the requirements of this social structure; the changes in it are directed by the changes in this structure and particularly by the changes in the economic, social and political distribution of power. An education system which is a social product and part of the entire social system, acquires a collateral relationship with it. This relationship, however, cannot be of one to one correspondence.

Imbalances and incongruities do occur giving rise at times to dissatisfaction and dissent, disharmony, dissonance and even revolt. In other words, along with correspondence and collaterality there are contradictions too. First, the social situation, together with its underlying socio-economic structure and the political power structure are never static. These have their repercussions on the education systems as well. In the course of its development, the education system acquires certain autonomy and its own dynamics of development. It can generate conflict in the over values of different components of a system or over values of one or more components. Finally, education has a dual character. Although the process of education socializes individuals to conform to the norms and values of society, it also has the capacity to generate a spirit of enquiry and question the accepted norms. It

has the potential to encourage people to question the dominant values and norms in society, and to make them rebel against the existent societal constraints.

9.4 Education and Change in Society

It is with reference to the cultural factors of social change that one talks of education from a conventional perspective. Education mediates and maintains the cultural heritage of the society. But, whilst seeking to conserve, education must also ensure that culture lag in society is minimized. This means that there must be some attempt to adjust the old culture to new conditions in order that individuals within a society may keep up with technological change. Patterns of culture and of institutions change rapidly, even though the average member of society may be virtually unaware of the transformations taking place around her.

Schools exist not merely to reflect and mediate the cultural inheritance of a society and current change; they exist also to assist in the promotion of social change and reform. One need only look at such countries as Germany, Russia, India and Pakistan, and the evolving societies of the continents of Africa and South America, to see that education has been, and is being, used as an agent of social change. A great deal, of course, depends here upon the nature of the political system of any particular society.

Durkheim (1956) argued that there was not just one form of education, ideal or actual, but many forms. There were, in fact, many different forms of education. So, society as a whole, and each particular context would determine the type of education that was realized or could be realized. Durkheim explained that education was crucial in terms of preserving a certain degree of homogeneity, and ingraining the essential elements of collective life. He, however, felt that it was also very important to ensure that there was a certain amount of diversity in society, without which any form of co-operation would be impossible.

There is, and must be, an interaction between education and society. It is not just a one-way process in which education is wholly determined by the state or by the demands of society. The institution and structure of education can, in turn, change and modify the social structure. Society at large may dictate the change, through the free election of political parties to power. In turn the programme, form and schedule of education which, to a large extent are directed and controlled by the political and social aims of society at any particular time, may contribute to the change. A study of comparative education will adequately reveal the fact that the ideologies, the political ideals, and the social aims of countries like China, the USA and the USSR, France, Germany and England, are reflected in their educational systems. Education, however, does not merely reflect society, it serves to bring change in it too.

Karl Mannheim (1960) also explored the problem of social change and social progress in relation to education. He explained that there was a lack of awareness in social affairs as well as a lack of comprehensive sociological orientation. The leaders of the nation, including teachers, should be educated in a way which would enable them to understand the meaning of change. Mannheim argued that in the present situation no teaching was sound unless it trained people to be conscious of the social situation in which they find themselves, and to be able after careful deliberation to make their choices and take decisions. Education, some philosophers believe, must therefore be for mobility, for flexibility of thought and action, for producing individuals with a high general level of culture so that they adapt to changing economic and social conditions

According to Kamat (1985) there are four positions regarding education and social change (i) Education is for itself and has nothing to do with social change; (ii) Education is determined completely by social factors and can therefore, play no role in changing society. It follows social change; (iii) Education is an autonomous or relatively autonomous factor and therefore can and does induce social change; (iv) Educational change and social change must take place simultaneously (Kamat 1985: 172). There are a few who maintain that either education and social change bear the no link with each other or that education has no role to perform in changing society.

If social change refers to fundamental structural changes in society, it is clear that the socio-economic factor and the political factor rather than education have primary importance in the process of social change. Education can facilitate the process of social change as a necessary and a vital collateral factor. It often contributes to igniting, accelerating and sustaining the process by disseminating and cultivating knowledge, information, skills and values appropriate to the changing socio-economic and political structure. Moreover in a rapidly changing situation, for example in a post revolutionary period, when fundamental structural changes are taking place rapidly, education can undoubtedly operate as a powerful means to demolish the cultural and ideological superstructure and to build in its place an altogether new structure appropriate to the situation which would be in harmony with the newborn society. In some countries, a whole new system of education evolved replacing the old system after revolutionary socio-economic and political structural changes. For example, after the British conquest of India a system of modern education was introduced under the aegis of the British rulers.

The liberating and renovating characteristics of education get enhanced by counter-posing an alternative ideology which is in accordance with the emerging social situation. This entails challenging the existing ideology. It would be a hyperbole to say that education is the main instrument or the single most important factor of social change. Statements such as this are made for rhetorical purposes, sometimes even to confuse the common people, particularly when they are delivered by politicians. Often, they reflect (i) an incorrect understanding of the role of education; (ii) an incorrect assumption that a far-reaching structural transformation is already taking place and that education therefore should come forward to play its crucial role in consummating the transformation; and (iii) an essentially social reformist and welfare perspective with no bid for a far reaching structural transformation. Education is expected to play its role in the furtherance of economic growth and social change within the present socio-economic structural framework.

The role of education as a factor of social development is defined by the twin facts that education is permeated by the social biases of society and that those who seek education are social actors who retain the orientations of their specific position in a society. It is for these reasons that education is controlled by the dominant groups of society who lay down the priorities in a society. Education is an independent factor in society only to the extent that its organizational forms provide buffer from direct control from the outside and to some extent that the effect of education cannot be planned or anticipated. In essence, education has a bearing on social concerns; educational change follows social change. More importantly, education conditions development, but is itself a product of prior social and economic changes in society. It is an independent factor in social and economic development generating intended and unintended consequences and conflicts of values and goals. Naturally the relations between education and developments are not mutually exclusive.

Education can be planned to produce social change. We know, for example, that literacy does stimulate economic and social development. Large-scale

literacy programmes are important tools in the development of many countries. Yet, education is permeated by the existing social structure, which limits the extent of planned change and often produces consequences unintended by the educational planners. Educational innovation is more likely to produce a desired change if innovation in education is co-coordinated with changing other parts of the social structure. This is to say that effective planning cannot be piecemeal. An illustration of what this implies is given by current attempts to improve elementary education, which are carried out by increasing facilities, the numbers of teachers and offering financial incentives to families. The intention is to effect a planned change in educational standards, which has positive consequences for social and economic development. The planned educational change is usually not coordinated with changing the social context that has depressed educational standards. In most developing countries, there is an enormous unsatisfied demand for education because it is perceived as the gateway to an improved social position. The outcome is the rise in the number of literate people in society for whom few jobs available. In its turn, the fact that there are few opportunities in many of these societies for occupational and social mobility through education discourages the poor people from obtaining education. Because the poor people have for so long been outside the decision making process in their countries they do not feel part of the society. They are not likely to value the goals of development that have never brought them benefits. Consequently, parents are not motivated enough to encourage their children to seek basic education or undertake higher studies. Children do not see any real material benefits that education brings. Educational change in such societies cannot proceed effectively without changing other aspects of their social structure.

Where education is a condition of social and economic change, it is more likely to produce intended consequences. This happens because educational change follows other changes in society; the social context is thus favourable to social change. We must remember that even when the above warnings are taken into account the best laid plans of people are likely to go astray. Unintended consequences always emerge because we cannot estimate the precise relationship between the many components of change. The study of unintended consequences is thus an important and continuing part of the sociologist's contribution to understanding and planning social change. This is not to say that unintended consequences essentially challenge social and economic development.

The contribution of education to development is thus dynamic and multifaceted. Partly because they are organized, educational systems are able to secure some of their intended aims even when they come into conflict with the aims of those who control society. Given the length and complexity of the educational process, it is impossible for outside authorities to exercise a sufficiently detailed control to plug the infusion of undesirable ideas or information. Further, the length of an individual's exposure to education and the centrality of educational qualifications for jobs in modern society make education a crucial sector for bringing about planned social change. Also, the unintended consequences and conflicts that arise in the educational process are important and unplanned sources of change in all societies. At the most basic level, they allow a large numbers of people the time to think and to read with relative freedom from the constraints of job, family or government and ensure a constant critical re-examination of society.

Reflection and Action 9.2

Speak to at least five elderly people and find out how, in their opinion, education brings about social change.

Let us now look at the relationship between education and a few other indicators of social change.

a) Education and Economic Development

There has long been a widespread understanding in academic and government circles that education is the main determinant of economic growth. Especially, in the post-World War II period, the relationship of education to economic development received serious attention in national and international forums. Education was conceived as one of the more important factors in economic growth. This belief also provided a justification for the massive expansion of education and allocation of large funds for the education sector. It was soon discovered that education only strengthened old inequalities and created new ones, on the one hand, and perpetuated the existing outdated internal politico-economic power structures on the other. This means that the causes of underdevelopment lie in structural factors and not so much in educational backwardness.

Education was thought to be the main instrument of social change, especially cultural rather than structural change in the social sphere. Education, it was realized, by and large works to maintain the existent social situation and support the ideas and values of the privileged social classes and their economic, social and political interests. To reiterate, it seems that however imperative it is for the educational process to keep pace with the demands made by economic and technical development on the labour force, there is a very real sense in which educational expansion is a consequence rather than a cause of economic development. It may also be argued that to concentrate upon the relationships between education and occupation is to overlook the significance of changes in attitudes and values. From this point of view, education is seen as introducing the developing society to new needs and expectations. In short, education helps to wean the developing society away from the old and lead towards the new social order, it inspires a belief in progress, in efficiency, in achievement and in rationality. At the same time, education may be seen as creating the conditions for political as well as economic development by laying the foundations of a democratic form of government.

b) Education and Democracy

It is believed that the higher the education level of a country, the more likely is it to be a democracy. Within countries, moreover, there is an even stronger relationship between education and democratic attitudes. Lipset's (1960) studies show that the higher one's education, the more likely one is to believe in democratic values and support democratic practices. At the same time there is evidence to suggest that there is no necessary connection between education and democracy. World War II Germany and Japan were examples of nations, which combined a high level of literacy with a totalitarian form of government. China is still another example, with a high literacy rate but a communist form of government. The content of education is a significant factor in this context. Most totalitarian regimes attempt to use their schools to inculcate conformity and submissiveness and uncritical loyalty to the state. In the Soviet Union, for example, the emphasis in schools had been on the indoctrination of conformity and obedience as also in love for the Soviet system. The atmosphere was pervaded with a spirit of discipline and hierarchy. Teachers were warned not to coax students but to demand obedience, for only in this way would students develop the desired moral qualities. The influence of education upon political attitudes is much more complex than has sometimes been supposed, and although it maybe correct to argue that a high level of education is necessary for effective participation in democratic government, there is no guarantee that education and democratic attitudes are necessarily related.

Box 9.1: Democratic Ideal of Education

“It is not enough to see to it that education is not actively used as an instrument to make easier the exploitation of one class by another. School facilities must be secured of such amplitude and efficiency as will in fact and not simply in name discount the effects of economic inequalities, and secure to all the wards of the nation equality of equipment for their future careers. Accomplishment of this end demands not only adequate administrative provision of school facilities, and such supplementation of family resources as will enable youth to take advantage of them, but also such modification of traditional ideals of culture, traditional subjects of study and traditional methods of teaching and discipline as will retain all the youth under educational influences until they are equipped to be masters of their own economic and social careers. The ideal may seem remote of execution, but the democratic ideal of education is a farcical yet tragic delusion except as the ideal more and more dominates our public system of education” (Dewey 1976:98).

9.5 Education and Social Change in India

One of the dominant themes in educational reforms in both the 19th and 20th centuries has been the extension of educational opportunities to wider sections of the community. In general, this has taken the form of free schooling, scholarships and maintenance of grants for needy students, with the objective of providing equal education opportunity for all classes in the community. However, the provision of formal equality does little to eliminate educational privilege. Whatever changes we make in our selection mechanisms, or in the scope of our educational provision, many children because of their family background are unable to take advantage of the opportunities. Accordingly, attention is now being turned not simply to the removal of formal barriers to equality, but to the provision of special privileges for those who would otherwise be handicapped in terms of educational achievement.

Such provision is not new. The fact that a hungry child cannot learn was officially recognized at the beginning of the last century. The provision of school milk and meals and school health facilities became the established features of the British education scene. Yet it has taken a long time to see beyond the purely physical needs and to grasp the concept of what has come to be understood as, ‘cultural deprivation.’ Moreover, although the idea of equal educational provision for all classes in the community is now accepted, it has by no means been translated into everyday practice. Even today children from slum homes are all too often educated in slum schools that are quite untypical of schools elsewhere. Yet increasingly, it is being believed that for these children, even equality is not enough. Therefore, the need for positive discrimination was emphasized in favour of slum schools. It is argued that schools in deprived areas should be given priority in many respects —raise the standard of schooling and infrastructural facilities. The justification is that the homes and neighbourhood from which many of the children come provide little scope and stimulus for learning. The schools must provide an environment that compensates for the deprivation. Some people argue that compensatory education cannot in itself solve problems of health, housing and discrimination and that these must be tackled by agencies outside school. None of these arguments attack compensatory education. While acknowledging that formal equality of opportunity is an inadequate basis for an egalitarian policy, underline the interdependence of education with other aspects of the social structure.

Box 9.2: Education and the Disprivileged

“To the extent the previously disprivileged are brought within the ambit of institutionalized education there are three modalities of articulation between the system of privileges and the education system: (a) education reproduces and perpetuates inequalities between the privileged and the disprivileged, or (b) education enables a part of the disprivileged to attain upward social mobility without affecting privileges as a system, or (c) education plays an adversarial and even subversive role, challenging privileges or inequality as a system. The first mode preserves homeostasis, the second subverses homeostasis through co-optation of the upward mobile, the third proposes metastasis or a subversion of the regime of privileges” (Bhattacharya 2002: 19).

Kamat (1985) conceptualized the relationship between education and social change in India in three stages. In the first stage, he talks about the early British period to the end of the 19th century. In this period, the colonial socio-economic and political structure was established in India. However it also played a kind of liberating role in breaking down traditional norms and values, which were in consonance with the older feudal, socio-economic politic and were a hindrance to itself. It also sowed the seeds of new norms and values — of a bourgeoisie society and modern nationalism. This liberating influence was internalized and worked in two directions:

- i) Towards a close scrutiny of the indigenous social systems and culture leading to powerful movements of social and religious reform and protests movements like Satya Shodak Samaj
- ii) Towards the process of self-discovery, self-assessment in the context of the new situation, leading to the creation of an alternative center of social cohesion, the anti-imperialist movement for national liberation.

In the period between the two world wars, education assumed a mass character. Occupational and social mobility occurred among segments of population that were hitherto unnoticed. So far education had spread mainly to the upper caste and urban upper strata in society. Now it began to percolate to sections lower in the social hierarchy, the middle castes and middle strata. This carried the process of nationalism and social awakening still further, to the working class in the towns and to the peasantry in the countryside. The process considerably strengthened the movement for national liberation as well as the movement for social change. Meanwhile, the growth of the colonial system of education was developing serious contradictions within itself and also *vis-à-vis* the colonial socio-economic structure. This provided added edge to the principal contradiction between the British imperialism and the Indian people. This contradiction was reflected in large-scale unemployment among the educated on the one hand and the liberating influence in the strength and militancy of the powerful student and youth movement on the other.

In the third stage, i.e. from post-Independence period up to the mid-sixties, the process of social and political awakening has taken further strides. Its two aspects, conformity and liberation, are also operating. At the same time, the contradiction within the education system i.e., in relation to the development, socio-economic structure have also sharpened.

9.6 Conclusion

According to Olive Banks (1968), the precise relationship of the education system to social and economic change is extremely complex and it is almost impossible to draw conclusions that are not misleading. The concept of education as producing or impeding social change is enormously complicated

by the fact that the education system is a part of the society, which is itself changing. Consequently the real issue is that of the inter-relationship between educational institutions and other aspects of the society. Moreover, it is this inter-relationship which makes it so difficult to use the educational system to produce conscious or planned social change. The education system cannot be seen in isolation from its social context. The realization that educational reform is not a universal panacea should not, however, lead us to minimize the importance of knowledge about the educational institutions in society. This simply means that the relationship between education and social change is very complex and no simple generalizations can be drawn regarding them.

9.7 Further Reading

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