

Introductory Sociology
Prof. A.K. Sharma
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

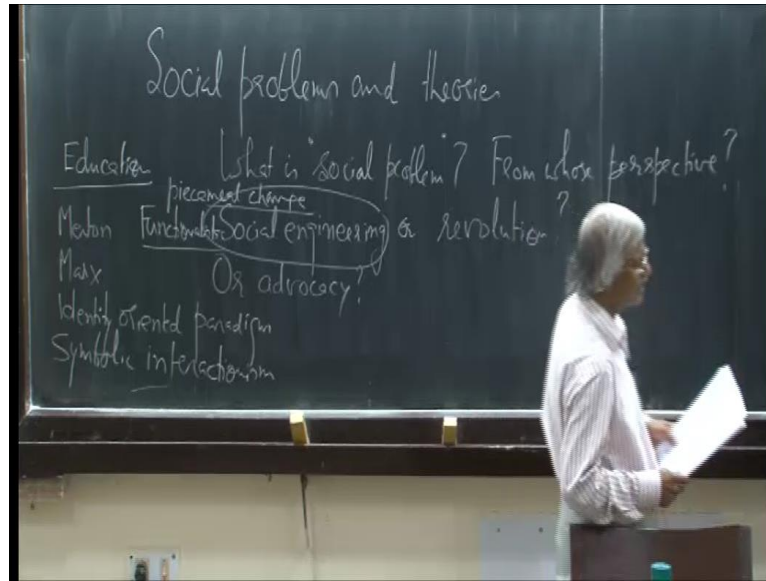
Lecture - 38
Social Problems and Theory

Friends, today we are going to talk about Social Problems and Theories. In the previous classes, we have discussed various perspectives in sociology and we have also touched upon various institutions of society. Now, let us see how do we analyze social problems or can sociologist offer a meaningful, useful, acceptable solution to problems of society many people expect that because, sociologists deal with society and because, sociologists understand dynamics of society, working of society, relationship between individuals and society better.

They must also help us in providing more feasible and more appropriate solutions to social problems. Now, let us see how do sociologists approach this, a sociologist will first ask what is social problem, whenever we discuss anything we have to define it, when we discuss religion we have to define it. In sociology of religion you will agree with me, religion cannot be the same thing as in religious communities, all religious communities have their own understanding of religion.

We are not interested in those concepts of religion, for us religion is a kind of belief system, which interacts with other institutions of society. Sociologists have therefore, their own way of defining religion. Like wise, when it comes to social problem, what is social problem you may identify a large number of problems as social problems, but what is your definition on the basis of which you can include some in the problems and exclude others.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:00)



Even in answering this question role of theories or theoretical perspectives will come in picture. Even in defining social problem, social problem from the perspective of government of India, social problem from the perspective of academicians and social problem from the perspective of people would not be same. Usually, as it is defined in sociology text books, social problems are those problems, which get defined as problems by, the government of a country.

And on which government spends some resources to eradicate them, but the moment I say so, am I not using the functionalist or the managerial perspective. Government of India will say that some of the problems of Indian society include population problem, high infant mortality, high maternal mortality, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy or high school dropout or communal conflicts, etcetera. A large number of sociologists are associated with universities, government and research institutions, which work for government.

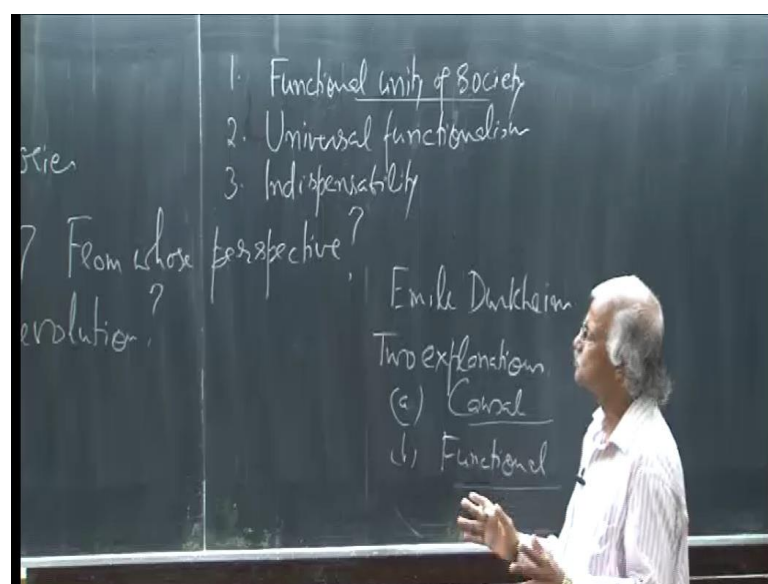
And quite often these sociologists are likely to adopt the social engineering approach. Functionalists function a lists are sociologists associated with government, will use the approach of social engineering, without going into genesis of this idea of social engineering I can say that it believes in piecemeal change. So, one problem gets identified at one time it is analyzed means it is socio economic, geographical, cultural roots are understood.

And specific strategies are developed to solve the problem. The problem of ill health or the problem of illiteracy and; obviously, the managerial perspective will advocate social engineering. Today, if I tried to relate what I discuss earlier, regarding theoretical perspectives. If I take the issue of education and apply all these perspectives, functionalist, Marxist, symbolic interactionist, identity oriented paradigm, ethno methodology.

Let me try how sociologists subscribing to these theories or views or postulates, axioms, paradigms, working in these paradigms will look at the problem of education. Actually, in doing, so I am not much up of your level I have not worked in the field of education, my area of research is population. So, I will be applying these theories which I discuss earlier to education, exactly in the manner you can think of, but why I am doing, so first I thought that if I if I take up this problem today I will be at your level and we will began to make an attempt to relate social problems to theories.

Now, let us just recapitulate what Merton said in functionalism we discuss Merton we discuss talcott parson's and couple of others. To recapitulate, Merton said Merton is one of the latest, most recent Merton's contribution is the most recent contribution in functionalism and therefore, it may be quite helpful to talk about Merton, Merton says that the whole functional theory can be reduced to 3 basic postulates.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:01)



One the postulate of functional unity of society, 2nd universal functionalism and 3rd postulate of indispensability. According to functional unity of society, society consists of interrelated parts everything is correlated with everything else one social fact is correlated with other social facts, one thing changes everything changes the whole society changes. Come talked about statics and dynamics statics was about relationships between different parts of society and dynamics was the relationship between one part of society and the whole society.

And society has both static aspects and dynamic aspects, when one part changes the whole society changes or when the whole society is changing as it a as it is becoming more modern, more advance, industrial, post-industrial then all parts of society are changing or Emile Durkheim would say that there are two types of explanations of social phenomena 1 two types of explanations, casual and functional. I thought that, I must mention this because, this also helps in clarifying what the meaning of functionalism or what the meaning of function is.

There can be two types of explanations of social phenomena or social facts causal, causal talks about how does something originate, history, background how does something originate. That is causal because, by definition causal means something which is followed by, something which we want to explain. So, somebody can say that industrialization leads to urbanization. So, urbanization is the effect and industrialization is the cause causal explanation, history background, factors which have given rise to some social fact or some social phenomena.

Functional explanation is another type of explanation and this explanation, explains a social fact or institution or a practice in terms of it is usefulness, it is function, it is usefulness for the larger society. There can be two ways of looking at causal explanations, in sociology or two ways of looking at explanations in sociology, explanations of also social facts one in terms of what are the causes means what happened in the past because, of which something has resulted.

And functional means, useful effect of something for the larger society, which explains why something exist. So, summarizing the functional perspective, another reason why I am talking about Merton specially because, some people believe in functional framework, that functionalism can also be as revolutionary as Marxism. And

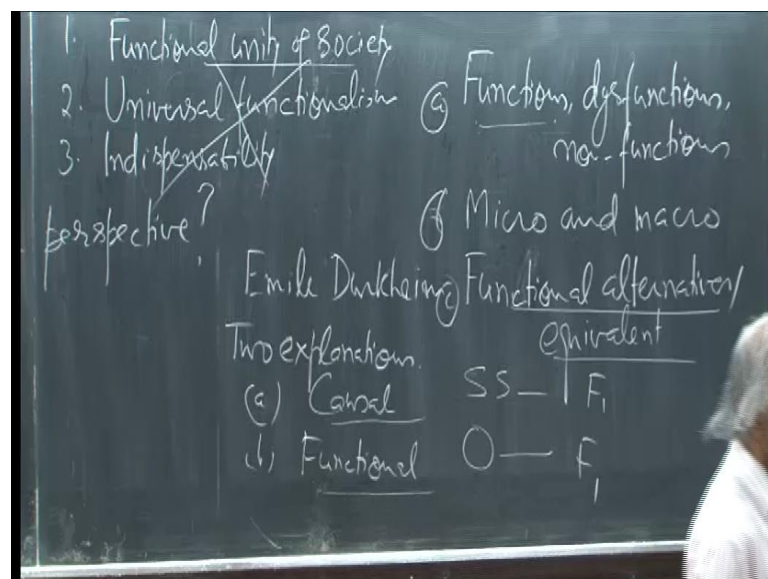
functionalism can earlier people thought that functionalism is only to justify things and functionalism cannot explain social change.

But, Mertonian framework of functionalism suggested ways of handling the problem of conflicts change even revolution Merton says that there are 3 major postulates in the entire functionalist analysis of social phenomena. Functional unity of society, universal functionalism, if something is functional it is universally functional, for all parts of society, for entire society for all institutions, as in biological organism if something exists, if liver exists, you can show why liver existence of liver is, so important for other parts of society and also for biological body.

If liver stops functioning body will not survive. So, if something stops, something which exists stops existing then the society will not survive, this was the kind of thinking though some people say that this way of looking at social facts is not correct because, unlike I biological beings societies do not die societies only change. So, if one institution say religion or economic institution or family or marriage stops functioning, it does not mean that society will die it will result into a different kind of social structure.

Now, Merton says that there is problem with all the postulates and indispensability means anything which exists has to exist, everything is interrelated all functions are positive and anything that exist, must exist because, otherwise the system will not survive.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:08)



Merton said that first of all you realize that things may be functional for one part of society functions, dysfunctions and non-functions and micro and macro and functional alternatives or equivalent. Merton says that for functionalism to take care of various problems of society and to handle charges, which are often labeled against functional theory, functional theory must incorporate these 3 things a b c.

Let it be clear that 1 2 3 these postulates are not what Merton is suggesting, Merton is saying that if you read carefully, works of sociologist who have worked in the framework of functionalism, then it appears that all of them tend to believe in these 3 things. This is not Merton's continues, Merton only suggest that functionalists seem to believe in these 3 things, these 3 postulates this is Merton's contribution.

Merton says that when you analyze things, you have to analyze them separately at the level of larger entity, society at the level of institutions, regions, cultures and groups, subgroups and it is quite possible, that something which is functional at one level may be dysfunctional at other level. And something which is dysfunctional at one level may be non-functional at other level.

I think I gave the example of economic development by, going for big dams Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru when he inaugurated, Bhakra Nangal dam said that these are the temples of modern India he believe that big irrigation projects like Bhakra Nangal and big industries of India will produce a new era in Indian history which will be characterized by, high level of advancement in all fields knowledge, industry, wealth, politics, industrially advance, economically advance, a much more democratic. That these new temples will bring India to the map of the world.

If you apply a Mertonian framework then you can easily see that, yes big dams are good for national economy big dams are good and perhaps they have been a major factor in green revolution in Punjab and Haryana. So, it is functional, if we did not have green revolution in 60 there was, so much scarcity of food in India, that our planners were worried what will happen if population continues to grow and there is a shortage of food production. So, certainly these big dams have solved the problems of food scarcity.

I remember that at one time Lal Bahadur Shastri now, very few people remember Lal Bahadur Shastri as the prime minister of India. You, so disturbed by food shortage in the country that he suggested that everybody should keep fast on one day, and people

respected Lal Bahadur Shastri when he said that you should keep fast on one day. So, that we can to some extent ameliorate the problem of food shortage then people kept fast.

Our big dams, big irrigation projects, big industries, socio economic zones, nowadays Nan dig ram one of the latest problem or controversy regarding big industrialization or socio economic zones, Nan dig ram or housing projects of greater Noida. They are functional for the society at last they are functional, but for several groups in society and may be for several institutions and may be for several regions and may be for several communities, they are dysfunctional or several families they are dysfunctional.

Those villages in Bhakra Nangal in Narmada in Sardar Sarovar dam in Sonbhadra Mirzapur region, Singrauli power projects you know 1000 of villages are dispossessed. They lose their home they lose their culture, they lose their means of subsistence and the kind of society we live, in which power only matters, even the promises made by government to families which are rehabilitated or often not fulfilled, from the perspective of Indian nation big dams Sardar Sarovar Narmada Bhakra Nangal they are functional from the perspective of those who have been dispossessed they are dysfunctional.

Merton say that functional theory, scope of functional perspective can be expanded to cover various things., functions as well as dysfunctions. So, it is functional for society big dams are functional for society, big dams are dysfunctional for the villages which are dispossessed and there may be non-functional for a large number of manual labors, in several parts of the country no consequence of that.

When fishing is modernized and you are using specialized, mechanized, technologically advanced boats and techniques of fishing it is functional you produce more fish, you can export fish you can satisfy the local demand, countries demands can be made and you can export un foreign exchange it is functional It is functional for the country as a whole it is also functional, for those people who have money and who can go for high-tech in the field of fishing.

But, it is dysfunctional for the traditional fishing community, for the traditional community of fishermen without money, without social power, without political power, without knowledge it is dysfunctional, they are just crushed, they lose their means of employment. They are not able to survive for them it is dysfunctional.

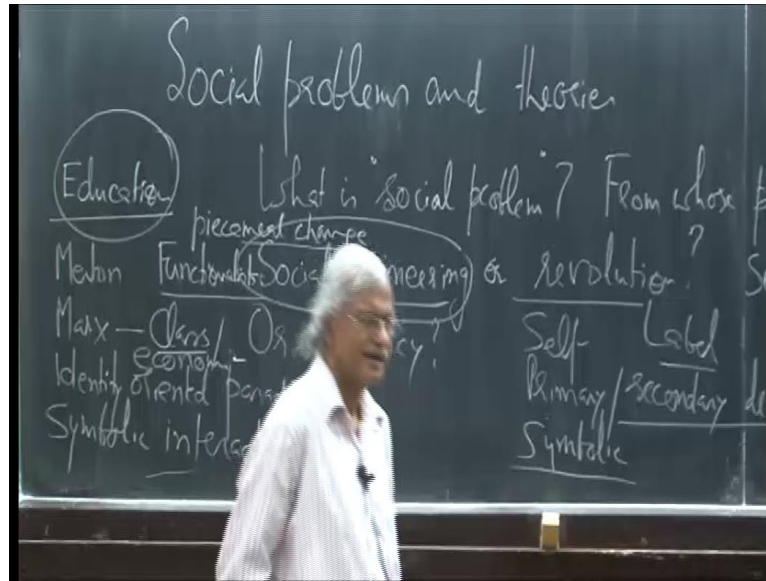
So, function and. So, functions things may have functions, dysfunctions, non-functions and they may be different at different levels micro and macro something, may be functional at micro level and dysfunctional at the macro level. Something may be functional at micro and dysfunctional and functional, Merton also says there is nothing which is indispensable because, societies will not die if you think that social stratification is inevitable because, social stratification exists everywhere, and social stratification has some functions you can apply Merton's theory and ask what are the functions of social stratification.

Why does social stratification exist, social stratification or social inequality exists in all societies. So, there on the empirical grounds and on the basis of the observation that social stratification is ubiquitous, functional sociologists say that it must exist because, it serve some needs of society. Now, Merton will say that functionalists need not assume, that just because, social stratification exist everywhere it is good and it must exist. You can think of other institutions or other ways of allocating roles.

So, if you agree with Kingston Davis and Wilbert Moore that social stratification is a way of role allocation. Then you can find other ways of role allocation without having social stratification in society. This is what Merton will say, that nothing is indispensable you can certainly explore what are alternatives, functional alternatives or equivalents, what are those things which will have equivalent function in society.

Social stratification has a function F 1 there may be some other thing O which also has the same function F 1 then we will say that O is functional alternative or functional equivalent of social stratification it is equivalent because, this O some other thing, some other way of distribution or allocation of roles in society, is as good as social stratification. So, there can be functional equivalent and functional alternatives.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:18)



Ethno methodology as a Marx Marx looks at everything in terms of class and class means, economic relationship. Symbolic interactionism is micro it looks at things in terms of self, self-image, primary and secondary deviance, it gives more importance to secondary deviance, which is generated by reactions of society toward the deviant. Label, self-fulfilling prophecy self-fulfilling prophecy or actualization of self-image, symbols, human communication is symbolic and the symbols what things are their interpretations they depend on our social interactions.

Ethno methodology we discussed yesterday ethno methodology, something closer to symbolic interactionism and ethno methodology suggested that, what we are discovering as facts, as new knowledge is situated in what we already know and indexicality means that the meanings are rooted in the social context. Now, let me after recapitulating Merton and symbolic interactionism and a bit of ethno methodology.

Now, let me take up the problem of education and tell you, what kind of questions will we ask by, sociologists belonging to different camps or subscribing or believing in different paradigms or perspectives or theories. I said that I am not a specialist in education, but still let me make an effort. So, my discussion on relationship between education and theories, must be seen from that perspective only the time trying to illustrate certain theoretical ideas, by taking the example of education.

But, they are not the final truth and they are not based on any evidence. Education is a topic in which I would say, that functionalist would be most interested. Government would be most interested, experts sociological, there are two types of sociologist, social engineers which produce that kind of sociology. That is of help in running society, that is of help to government, that is of help to dominant sections of society.

And there is another sociology which focuses on the relationship of social phenomena and the power structure, those who focus on relationship between social facts and power structure they produce another kind of sociology which can be subversive and which can lead to ideas not to reform society, but just to change society, to restructure society to create a revolution, to create a condition in which the power structure is completely change, it is reverse or it is completely change or a new kind of power structure develops.

Why are governments interested in education. I can say that it seems to serve several needs of governments, one that government can legitimize or the powerful sections of society or wealthy people or scientist, bureaucrats, politicians those in the government. They can explain poverty, unemployment, ill-health, high fertility, high maternal mortality, everything all social problems in terms of lack of education. And create an impression that as long as the level of literacy and education in our society is low, other problems of society cannot be solved.

Create an impression why is India poor because, of lack of education, why is India poor why is India with, so much of unemployment because, there is no education, literacy level is still very low as compare to the developed countries. Educational achievements are low, quality of education is low. So, you find false in the education system and create an image that if our education system is perfected and level of literacy and level of education achievement goes up all problems of Indian society will be solved create that impression.

It helps it helps in legitimizing the forms of government that you have, by diverting peoples attention to the real issue of power or political relationships or class struggle, if you divert their attention towards this that education, we need to provide education and it is only when people are more educated then all problems of Indian society are solved.

This is what functionalists will say. And if you apply Merton's framework; however, then you may show, that education may be functional, dysfunctional, non functional at different levels. And there are functional alternatives or equivalents to education, for whom is education functional. Education is functional not for everyone, education serve the ideological function of the government, I remember although then when I give my examples then it takes more time and I get sighted, but I have a temptation to tell you a story.

I was doing some fieldwork I did not do much on education, but you cannot ignore education. I was doing fieldwork in Sonbhadra district of Uttar Pradesh tribal and non-tribal areas. And what I have found there, that everybody all youths, this was the fieldwork among youths, that all youths seem to be dissatisfied with the level of education they had already achieved. They wanted more and they blame themselves or their family or their community or their social economic condition, for them not having the level of education that they desired.

So, you go to a person who is illiterate (()) what is your source of income, he will say I am I cannot do anything, I am illiterate I am I am a because, I am illiterate I am not able to find any meaningful work for me. That is understandable, he is illiterate although if you look at human history for lakhs of years illiterate people have produce everything. Literacy is a new phenomena, today we say that literacy is like leprosy and if you are not literate you cannot do anything, many great things have been done by illiterate people.

And for Lakhs of years we have been illiterate only human society has become literate only now, but you see somebody it is very good for society, if somebody loses self-confidence, self-esteem, develops inferiority and becomes marginalize, by feeling that he is illiterate he cannot do anything good for society, for the powerful people. Then I meet someone who says I am primary pass because, of my father's poor condition, I could not study much, if I had done high school I could have done something.

He will then tell you what he could have done, if you was high school pass. He was also unhappy, low self-image, low confidence, unemployed, frustrated, blaming himself then you meet intermediate pass, he will say you see I am only intermediate conditions of my family did not permit me to go to university or college what can intermediate pass people do today, (()).

They are also lacking in self-esteem, self-confidence they feel marginal they cannot do any very good for government, very good for Lalu Yathav, very good for Sonia Gandhi, very good for all political party the system will run because, these people Lakhs of such people in our country they feel they cannot do anything and they are useless you meet a an adult who is a graduate and he will also say the same thing, I am only B A my condition did not permit me to go for M Phil or PHD if I had done PHD I would have become a faculty member somewhere, I had to stop at B A what can BA'S do. ((FL))

My father did not have money to send me for engineering education or management education, if I had done MCA then things would have been different, why he is at the same level of mentality at which the illiterate person is ((FL)). When you meet M A pass people or PHD they also have the same thing PHD ((FL)) I am PHD from BHU or I am PHD from all a bad what can I do, is I am trying to get a contract position ((FL)) in contract position you can get only 5000 rupees in month. there are no jobs I do not have connections.

What will you do with that kind of education, you then to meet appier that this kind of education may be, functional for the society as a whole no doubt you need education macro and micro. So, this these experiences of mine can be interpreted in Merton I an framework as well as in Marxist framework. Merton will say, that as a whole education is good, we need education, we need I it is ISCS these and that, but it may be dysfunctional for many people.

And quite rightly many villagers, say that education is a useless thing, if you are educated then you will not find any employment for people like us in rural areas for youths coming from rural areas. Then will be no employment, but after getting educated these youths will not work in the farm, they will not like to work in agriculture. So, they in Hindi they say a ((FL)) pact of a washer man, ((FL)).

So, an educated person in rural area, he can neither take up agricultural activities, he cannot help in modernization of agriculture, for various reasons and he can also not find employment dysfunction, dysfunction function for a very large number of persons, education is serving, education is producing dysfunction for a large number of people macro, micro.

And if education is important can we not think of something, if education is important at all then can we not think of some ways of providing employment or ways of meaningful engagement of people who are illiterate. Illiterate people or less educated people can also do many things, if you make self help groups effective, then even without education people can earn money. And they cases of successful NGO'S microfinance, self help groups, show that education is not important for employment or for income generation for most of the people.

The kind of income that most of the people need can be generated in many other ways, they will be functional equivalent to education. Actually, they will be much much better for them. We sociologist must, it is our responsibility to look for functional equivalent or alternatives to education. Then many other types of questions can be asked, it all depends on whether you are a functionalist or a Marxist or you are a ethno methodologist or you are a symbolic interactionist.

The main thing is that all those sociologies, all those analysis of education or society. Which will lead to status quo or reform reformist implications social engineering, they will they will be done in functional perspective and they will be promoted by any government, one day I was saying that after socialist revolution in Russia, no matter what they call their social science, but much of their social science becomes functionalist only. Now, they have to run the system.

You need one kind of sociology to focus on power relations and to make people understand why they are poor, why they are unemployed, why they are in miserable condition, why they are alienated, why do they lose their self-confidence, self-image, why are the disgruntled and what actually, can provide them all of these things what actually, can provide them employment, confidence, meaning in life, participation, a good self-image you can do that kind of sociology also.

But, that sociology will be revolutionary sociology, a subversive sociology, subaltern sociology, that sociology will be quite disruptive and that will destroy the existing social structure, existing fabric of society that will be another kind of sociology. Somebody, can ask in education. Most people will correlate, most functional sociologist will correlate, education with economic development, but somebody at the micro level can ask a question.

When in what conditions does education lead to social mobility, does education lead to social mobility in all cases by studying conditions of marginal groups. So, called, say low caste, low classes, marginal group, well arrival groups, remote populations, you can find that education has not change anything. That education has not produce any social mobility. Education has only created a kind of alienation among, it has not it has not helped at all it has only harm their interest.

Long back in Hindu Swaraj 100 years back in Hindu Swaraj, mahatma Gandhi wrote that the kind of education, we are providing under British crown, will be harmful, it will not solve any problem of India it will create more problems in India. And looked at from one perspective, our education in post-independence India has harmed more people than it has helped. May be by, getting good education, professional education, from elite institutions, some people yes in some cases there has been mobility, some people have found good job they are earning lot of money.

But, I do not know whether in overall terms, education has helped them also. If you are if you become a software engineer and you are all your life is always uncertain, you may lose your job any time, you are earning lot of money, but you may lose your job any time there is lot of politics in the organization. And you are you are not sure that how will you repay the lose that you have taken for buying a house in Bangalore, it is not good it is only producing insane persons.

In if you give physiological test of mental health to software engineers or professionals in cosmopolitan cities you may find that majority of them, suffer from psychosis or neurosis. They have to suffer, they have been separated from the traditional family and traditional laws, they have developed very high aspirations, and they live in uncertain precarious conditions, they are they are not sure what will happen tomorrow.

And the knowledge on the basis of which they have got the job is also not the knowledge which can support them in the time of crisis because, that knowledge is not required actually, there is no correlation between their education, capital and the kind of job they have got. So, you are in education capital you are dual degree m tech from IIT Kanpur in chemical engineering.

But, if you lose yours job as sales manager or executive in a software company, your dual degree educational capital in chemical engineering does not help you at all it would

have been better if you are taken a job in a chemical industry, fetching much lower rewards at that time. When you become a software engineer. ((FL)) And if you join some core company ((FL)) who will go for core company, you will go for teaching, teaching you could have done MS or PHD and gone for teaching.

Life time compare, life time compare if you are in teaching your life long happy, when you are in software company your life long unhappy. ((FL)) lifelong unhappy and you are not even sure of money, politics is everywhere and when you lose a job at say age of 40 you can lose your job anytime. Then what you learned in educational institution, what educational capital you have earned, you have education we say that in modern societies your placement is on the basis of credentials not on the basis of ascription, but this credential will not help you at all.

You may have done, your dual degree chemical engineering ten years back, but when you lose your job as a sales executive in a software company ((FL)) nobody will take you as a chemical engineer at that time.((FL)) So, education is in majority of cases education is useless. So, one type of sociology makes connections of this type education for economic development, education for modernization, another type of sociology looks at the other side of the correlation has education modernized us has education made us more human.

Can you say that educated people have stronger beliefs in human values than uneducated or illiterate people Gandhi ji did not think, so Premch and did not think, so they thought that education will make people more clever, manipulating, dishonest, corrupt and harmful for society. I think that side of argument also hold some married, that educated people are more clever, maneuvering they more fraud. Now, So, one purpose of education is to maintain the system, one purpose of education is to show the other side of the picture.

There is one sociology believing social engineering piecemeal change, which will be more popular among establishment sociologists, planning commission, that education planning commission documents will show that this is literacy, these are achievement trades at secondary level, tertiary level we have opened, so many IIT'S IIM'S and all. And these are the strategies to promote more education, to reduce dropout rates this is

one kind of sociology of education, which you will find in the documents of planning commission.

There will be another kind of sociology, which will be found in writings of Marxist ethno methodologist, symbolic interactionist or spiritualist or people of some vision and that will show that education is not going to serve any of these purpose. Education does not produce social mobility, one of my PSG student is now, studying education in Mahasha community, a scheduled caste community, of Jammu.

And on the basis of fieldwork she is doing fieldwork and she tells me that sir education does not help them at all whether their children are primary pass or 8'th standard pass or high school pass or illiterate, they are bound to take up the same kind of job. It is rare only in some very, very rare cases has education produce social mobility. And one can examine then symbolic interactionists can examine under what conditions.

For some people education has produced social mobility, but in most cases education does nothing, the reverse is also true. If you study youths coming from the powerful classes, then without education also they occupy top positions, in some other industry or organization or something without education also. So, actually the kind of education some sociologist may say, that what kind of education we have depends on social structure.

It legitimizes social structure and then it means, that it is functional for the dominant class, but it may be dysfunctional or non-functional for the others. So, we stop here, we have to stop at some point I would say that, if you are not doing anything else then explore this interesting question for yourself, take application of Mertonian framework helps in understanding social stratification.