**CRITICAL THEORY AND PEDAGOGY**

This unit introduces the learners to the theories that emerged in history and became the roots of critical thinking and pedagogy. Various theorists were later named as “critical theorists” as their theories fall into the classification of critical theory. This paradigm builds upon the assumption that reality is not only multi-layered and interpreted but can also be changed with conscious intervention of human beings. The class difference around the world was based upon economic and socio-cultural aspects. Thus, these theorists challenged both and paved way for re-thinking education to change the reality of this world.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES**

After completion of this unit you will be able to:

1. Understand the phenomenon of Politics of Education

2. Realize the issues of social disorders in terms of Social Class Theories

3. Critically analyze the challenges of Exclusion and Marginalization

4. Choose effective classroom pedagogy to enable critical thinking and conversation

**2.1 POLITICS OF EDUCATION**

Politics is usually defined as a process by which groups of people make certain decisions. Here the social relations are involved along with authority or power. Politics involve the use and the regulation of power, influence and authority, especially in the allocation of things which people want. No group of people could live together for long without effective controls over power. Rules have to be made and made known to everyone.

Politics in actual diffuses in most of our daily routine matters and certainly our education system. Under politics issues such as peoples’ rights, immigration, homelessness, unions, poverty, inclusion, funding, and social justice are raised. Thus the bottom line is that all acts of group decision-making in the education system are political. According to Owen (2006) educational politics revolves around three entities i.e. people, values and resources. The issue is the degree of teachers' understanding of the process by which such decisions are made, and the teachers' roles and participation in the process.

The decisions in the education system are made by the educational leaders. In order to have the choice to participate in the decision-making process of education system, it is necessary to have the knowledge of the key people who have power affecting these decisions. Educational leadership is usually associated with formal organizational position in schools. So discussions about school leadership tend to refer to one or more of the following: - District Officers - Head Teachers/ Principals - Deputy and Assistant Head Teachers - Heads of Department - Subject Specialists However, there are also informal leaders such as specialist leaders whose influence stems from their subject knowledge or skills with group of learners, or individuals who have social influence with their peers and control views and attitudes.

Decision making within the education system is in large part a political process, involving number of key players. In particular, concerns regarding equity, stemming from efforts of organized groups, federal legislation, and court orders, may affect decisions about resource allocations, testing, accommodations, and curricular offerings.

At local level, parents and guardians may work to ensure their children’s access to high-level courses well-prepared technology teachers, and culturally appropriate science programs. Education related decisions of officeholders and other policy makers are also influenced by media that convey information and shape public perceptions. At the local level, news stories and editorials centering on the lack of textbooks and laboratory facilities in urban schools may heighten public awareness of inequities in the education system. Local media coverage of students’ achievement scores also informs and influences community views.

The bureaucracy which administers the education services, especially in a developing country, is very much the instrument of political as well as educational decisions. Education, then, is a reflection of the political system of a nation, and always to some extent the instrument of the national government. Its shape and purposes will be determined not only in the conflict which results in legislation, but also by the competition for power, influence and authority between the legislature and the bureaucracy; between political parties; within the dominant party, and within the bureaucracy.

In a developing country, where the educational plan is a vital part of the national plan for economic development, how may economic development, for instance, be planned without planning for trained manpower from the educational system; or national support for the plan be won or the plan be feasible without planned educational activity? Therefore an educator must be prepared to question the principles on which the political and economic planners have operated. As the flowering of human potential, education is an end in itself. The responsibility of educational leaders is to ensure that students learn, regardless of political implications. Ultimately, the educational decisions made must be based on what is best for the students in the school and future life.

**2.2 SOCIAL CLASS THEORIES**

Social class is a set of concepts in the political and social sciences theory which focuses on models of social stratification where people are grouped into a set of hierarchical social categories. It is usually categorized commonly as the upper, middle, and lower classes.

The sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, and social historians consider class as an essential object of analysis. However, there is not a consensus on the best definition of the "class", and the term has different contextual meanings. In common parlance, the term "social class" is usually synonymous with "socio-economic class", defined as people having the same social, economic, or educational status, e.g., the working class or an emerging professional class.

**2.2.1 Early Theories of Class**

Theories of social class were fully elaborated only in the 19th century as the modern social sciences. The issues of social stratification and inequalities were discussed by political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. The French and English writers in the late 18th and early 19th centuries put forward the idea that a society’s form of political life is determined by the nonpolitical elements in society, such as the economic system and the family.

Karl Marx’s theory of class distinguishes one type of society from another on the basis of its mode of production(i.e., the nature of its technology and division of labour), and each mode of production creates a distinctive class system in which one class controls and directs the process of production while other classes are the direct producers and providers of services to the dominant class. The social classes formed within a particular mode of production that tend to establish a particular form of state, animate political conflicts, and bring about major changes in the structure of society.

**2.2.2 Contemporary Theories of Class**

Majority of theories of class are chiefly concerned with revising, refuting, or providing an alternative to Marxism. Early in the 20th century, German sociologist Max Weber questioned the importance of social classes in the political development of modern societies, pointing out that religious patterns, nationalism, and other factors played significant roles. But the Marxian emphasis on the importance of class conflict i.e. on the conflict and struggle between the classes for control of the means of production has been the most controversial issue dividing social theorists in their analysis of class structure.

Many opponents of Marxist theory have focused attention on the functional interdependence of different classes and their coordinated collaboration with each other. Finally, some sociologists have concluded that gradations in social and economic status are continuous in western societies, which suggests that class boundaries have grown less distinct.

Cultural capital holds central importance in the process of social reproduction because inequalities in cultural capital reflect inequalities in social class. But the reproduction of these inequalities is facilitated in schools where teachers’ pedagogic actions promote the cultural capital of the dominant class by rewarding students who possess such capital and by penalizing others who do not.

Thus, the school becomes one of the central agents of social exclusion and reproduction. This explains class inequalities in educational achievement. However, success and failure in the education system is seen as due to individual gifts or the lacking them. Despite the fact that lower class pupils are seriously disadvantaged in the competition for educational credentials, the results of this competition are seen as meritocratic and therefore as legitimate. In addition social inequalities are legitimated by the educational credentials held by those in dominant positions. This means that the education system has a key role in maintaining the status quo.

This suggests that the educational advantage and disadvantage which parents pass on to their children may not be entirely caused or resolved by economic factors and that the notion of cultural capital is therefore worthy of serious attention.

**2.3 SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND MARGINALIZATION**

Social exclusion, and marginalization, is the phenomenon of social disadvantage to the periphery of society. This term was first used in France and is now used widely around the world. It is commonly used in sociology, education, psychology, politics and economics where the exclusion becomes a major challenge.

Social exclusion is the process where individuals or group of people are systematically denied the full access to different rights, opportunities and resources that are supposed to be available to all members of society. These rights are usually fundamental to social integration within that particular group such as housing, employment, healthcare, education, civic engagement, and democratic participation.

The social exclusion is faced by people or groups of people usually referred to as ‘disadvantaged groups’. The ‘disadvantaged’ is a generic term for individuals or groups of people who:

* Face special problems such as physical or mental disability
* Lack money or economic support
* Are politically deemed to be without sufficient power or other means of influence

In common usage ‘the disadvantaged’ is a generic term for those "from lower-income backgrounds" or “from minority groups”. The "economically disadvantaged" is a term used by government institutions usually while allocating free services such as school meals to the students who are members of households that meet the income eligibility guidelines for free or reduced-price services.

Isolation resulting from social exclusion can be connected to a person's social class, race, skin color, ethnicity, living standards, or religion. Anyone who appears to be different in any way from perceived norms of a community may thereby become subject to offensive or subtle forms of social exclusion.

The outcome of social exclusion is that affected individuals or communities are prevented from participating fully in the economic, social, and political life of the society in which they live. Social exclusion appears at individual or group level in four correlated dimensions i.e. lack of access to social rights, material poverty, limited social participation and lack of normative integration.. The concept of social exclusion appears to be a complex and multidimensional phenomena.

Access and participation can be perceived as the key elements in the process of social exclusion vs inclusion. But the participation depends on the extent to which different societal groups have access to the relevant socio-economic resources, services, goods and structures as well as decision-making positions and processes. Another dimension is that full social participation also requires mutual trust. Wherever such trust is lacking, social bonding is disrupted.

Education is neither the sole cause of nor can be the sole solution for social exclusion. Nevertheless, there are good reasons to perceive educational achievement or rather, the access to and utilization of education, training and learning opportunities as a key factor in the process of becoming excluded.

Lack of equality in access to good education can contribute to or at least increase the chance on becoming excluded, since it highly determines the further educational career and with that the working career. At the same time, the access to 'high quality' education is not distributed evenly among different social groups. Families with a lower socio-economic status or children from low-skilled parents with either no work or relatively unstable, low-skilled and low-paid work appear to have less chance to complete upper secondary education or to enter tertiary education.

It has been indicated by many theorists that education; training and learning cannot guarantee success, but in the era of knowledge economy these modes and ways are becoming increasingly a necessary part of social success. Throughout the past century, a lot of attention has been paid to inequality of opportunities in education. There is substantial evidence that educational achievement and educational performance are highly correlated with the socioeconomic background of pupils.

Where do you live? What type of educational institutions are there in the locality where you live? Which subgroups of society come to these institutions?

Do you think all teachers and students feel socially included in those institutions? Who feels excluded in your view and why?

**2.4 WORK OF CRITICAL THEORISTS**

**Michel Foucault (1926 –1984)** was a French philosopher, historian, philologist and literary critic. His theories focused the relationship between power and knowledge, and how the power structures at institutional levels are used as a form of social control.

Foucault challenges the idea that power is wielded by people or groups by way of ‘episodic’ or ‘sovereign’ acts of domination or coercion, seeing it instead as dispersed and pervasive. ‘Power is everywhere’ and ‘comes from everywhere’ so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure. Instead it is a kind of ‘metapower’ or ‘regime of truth’ that pervades society, and which is in constant flux and negotiation. Foucault uses the term ‘power/knowledge’ to signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and ‘truth’:

‘Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.’ (Foucault, in Rabinow 1991).

Foucault was fascinated by the mechanisms of prison surveillance, school discipline, systems for the administration and control of populations, and the promotion of norms about bodily conduct. A key point about Foucault’s approach to power is that it transcends politics and sees power as an everyday, socialised and embodied phenomenon. This is why state-centric power struggles, including revolutions, do not always lead to change in the social order. For some, Foucault’s concept of power is so elusive and removed from agency or structure that there seems to be little scope for practical action. But he has been hugely influential in pointing to the ways that norms can be so embedded as to be beyond our perception causing us to discipline ourselves without any willful coercion from others.

Contrary to many interpretations, Foucault believed in possibilities for action and resistance. He was an active social and political commentator who saw a role for the ‘organic intellectual’. His ideas about action were, like Hayward’s, concerned with our capacities to recognize and question socialized norms and constraints. To challenge power is not a matter of seeking some ‘absolute truth’ (which is in any case a socially produced power), but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time. Discourse can be a site of both power and resistance, with scope to evade, subvert or contest strategies of power.

**Paulo Freire (1921 – 1997)**, was the Brazilian educationist, who left a significant mark on thinking about progressive practice. His work titled as ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ made a number of important theoretical innovations that have had a considerable impact on the development of educational practice and popular modes of education.

Four aspects of Paulo Freire’s work have a particular significance. First, his emphasis on dialogue that hit a very strong chord with those concerned with non-formal education. The non formal education is usually planned for those who cannot access the formal system due to one reason or the other. Second, Freire was concerned with praxis action that is informed and linked to certain values. For Freire the “dialogue” in education wasn’t just about deepening understanding but was part of making a difference in the world. Third, Freire’s attention to naming the world has been of great significance to those educators who have traditionally worked with those who do not have a voice, and who are oppressed. The idea of building ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ or a ‘pedagogy of hope’ and how this may be carried forward has formed a significant momentum to rethink education. An important element of this was his concern with developing consciousness, but consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform reality’. Fourth, Freire’s insistence on situating educational activity in the lived experience of participants has opened up a series of possibilities for the way educators can approach practice.

**2.5 ROOTS OF CRITICAL PEDAGOGY**

Freire (1970) distinguished between banking education and problem posing education. In the traditional view of education, teachers are pillars of knowledge; they know everything and students know nothing. In critical pedagogy this model is rejected because teachers should concern about society and to give human beings the opportunity to critically reflect and act on the position within society. In this model, students believed that power, authority and activity are held by the teacher and students are viewed as objects rather than human.

Critical pedagogy is a philosophy of education and social movement that combines education with critical theory. First described by Paulo Freire, it has since been developed by Henry Giroux and others as a praxis-oriented educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action.

Critical pedagogy includes relationships between teaching and learning. Its proponents claim that it is a continuous process of what they call unlearning, learning, and relearning, reflection, evaluation and the effect that these actions have on the students. In other words, it is a theory and practice of helping students achieve critical consciousness. Here the teacher works to lead students to question ideologies and practices considered oppressive (including those at school), and encourage freedom of collective and individual responses to the actual conditions of their own lives.

The primary concern of Critical Pedagogy is with social injustice and how to transform inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations.