

RESEARCH ARTICLE**Ideology and Politics**

Vinod Kumar (Dr.), Jagat Guru Nanak Dev, Punjab State Open University, Patiala,
vinodpru@gmail.com.

The present paper is focussed on the construction of general public ideology, it also examines the working of political system and governance. It studies how an ideology does take shape in the present historical and material conditions and how it is loaded with political implications. The paper argues that there is a complex relationship between ideology and political system which clearly reflects in governance. An attempt has been made to understand the system (socio-cultural and political) as a single whole.

Peter Singer observes that we are not free to live because “we do not control our own society. Economic relations among human beings determine not only our wages and our prospects of finding work, but also our politics, our religion, and our ideas” (Singer 91). Terry Eagleton lists sixteen major definitions of it, the main are: the process of production of meanings, signs and values in social life; ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power; false ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power; systematically distorted communication; that which offers a position for a subject; forms of thought motivated by social interests; the conjuncture of discourse and power, the confusion of linguistic and phenomenal reality; the process whereby social life is converted to a natural reality etc. (1-2). David Hawkes, in *Ideology*, writes “. . . the market economy produces a systematically false consciousness: an ideology” (1). Thus, ‘Ideology’ is a vast concept with a number of definitions.

Marx and Engels have contributed significantly as pioneers to the theory of ideology. Criticizing Feuerbach, a German philosopher, and others, they write that “it has not occurred to any one of these philosophers to inquire into the connection of their criticism with their own material surroundings” (*The German Ideology* 36). They add that “philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it” (617). They hold that our ideas or thoughts are shaped by the base (the material conditions of production). In fact, Marxist philosophy rests on the base and superstructure relationship. They write that “[t]he production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men – the language of real life” (42). Ideas alone are not enough to change the conditions of living, but a revolutionary materialistic practice is required because “[i]t is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness” (42). The forces and relations of production form the base, upon which rests the superstructure, which comprises law, politics, religion, art, ideology, etc. Superstructure includes the apparatus for the production of ideology. The function of ideology “is to legitimate the power of ruling class in society” (Eagleton, *Marxism* 5) because

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“[t]he ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas” (Marx, *The German Ideology* 67).

Luke Fretter observes that Marxism suggests to the people a way to govern their own lives: “[T]hey must come to recognize the ideologies in which they live in capitalist society misrepresent the reality of that society, so as to be able to change the system of relations of which it consists” (109). Talking about philosophy, in *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, Frederick Engels writes that “[t]he great basic question of all philosophy, and especially of more recent philosophy, is that concerning the relation of thinking and being” (24). Similarly, Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology* state that “consciousness can never be anything else than conscious being, and the being of men is their actual life-process” (42). However, ideology changes with time and material conditions. “When people speak of ideas that revolutionize society, they do but express the fact that within the old society, the elements of a new one have been created, and that the dissolution of the old ideas keeps pace with the dissolution of the conditions of existence” (Marx and Engels, *Manifesto* 72).

Antonio Gramsci is a major modern Marxist theorist of ideology. David Hawkes notes that Gramsci does not accept the view that ideologies are merely reflections of material forces because this view is “unable to account for the existence of ‘organic’ ideologies, which are necessary and in a sense true” (114). Gramsci thus rejects purely negative use of the term ideology; he asserts that all systems have a historical validity, and are necessary (115).

For Gramsci, philosophy in a general sense does not exist. Only various conceptions of philosophy exist, and one always makes a choice from among them. How do we make a choice? Perhaps it is not merely an intellectual decision, but a more complex one (Gramsci 326). Gramsci adds: “. . . [M]an is a process, and, more exactly, the process of his actions” (351). He also critiques the notion of ‘common sense’. He finds ‘common sense’ to be nothing more than the “folklore” of philosophy as it is a way of thinking about the world that is grounded in material reality. But unlike philosophy, it is unsystematic, heterogeneous and spontaneous (324).

Talking about social power, Gramsci states that it is not a simple matter of domination from one side or resistance from the other. The dominant groups or dominant alliances generally govern with the consent of their subordinates. Gramsci also rejects the view that power can be achieved once and for all; rather he conceives of it “as an ongoing process, operative even at those moments when a ruling class or group can no longer generate consent” (4).

Adding to the Marxist approach, Gramsci introduces the concept of ‘hegemony’. Hegemony is a more sensitive and useful critical term than ‘domination’. Gramsci holds that we internalize the prevailing ideologies and accept them by consent. Steve Jones observes that for Gramsci “culture, politics and the economy are organized in a relationship of mutual exchange with one another, a constantly circulating and shifting network of influence” (5). He notes that for Gramsci, hegemony is “a project that involves the formation of moral and intellectual consensus under the leadership of a particular social group” (95).

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Gramsci makes a significant distinction between civil and political society. Political society dominates directly, while civil society is a private realm in which the ruling values seem more natural and therefore unchangeable. There is a vast range of institutions which constitute 'civil society'. These institutions include the church, the school, sports teams, the media and the family. He argues that the state provides an important mechanism in connecting civil society to the economy. This becomes 'the ensemble of organisms commonly called 'private' and as a result ideology becomes a part of everyday life (32). Jones notes that for Gramsci a complex and well articulated society is necessary even after major upheavals (33). For Gramsci thus, civil society is the main route of hegemony. Jones observes that, in Gramsci, ". . . hegemony is moral and intellectual leadership which treats the aspirations and views of subaltern people as an active element within the political and cultural programme of the hegemonizing bloc" (55). Thus, hegemony is the process of transaction, negotiation and compromise that takes place between ruling and subaltern groups (10).

Louis Althusser observes that the relations of production not only produce material products but also reproduce relations of production. Thus, the existing system of domination and exploitation goes on. If the existing conditions of production did not reproduce the relations of production, the whole capitalist system would collapse. He asserts that "[t]he ultimate condition of production is therefore the reproduction of the conditions of production" (Althusser 1).

Explaining ideology, Althusser states that it "is a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of living" (24); secondly, it "has material existence: an ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material" (26). Ideology makes us happy and passive by concealing the real conditions of our existence from our conscious awareness.

Althusser analyses the apparatuses of domination in a class society and broadly divides them into two categories: Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) and Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs). RSAs include the government, the police, the military, the courts, the prisons, etc. ISAs include religion, the education system, family, culture, etc. He holds that against one RSA, there are numerous ISAs (11-12). The RSA dominates by violence, while ISA dominates by ideology. Ultimately, the ruling ideology is effectively realized through Ideological State Apparatuses (including literature). "All Ideological State Apparatuses, whatever they are, contribute to the same result: the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist relations of exploitation" (18). Any form of ideology - religion, art, literature or politics - "always expresses class positions" (21). Ideology recruits persons as subjects, by interpellating them: ". . . [T]here is no ideology except for concrete subjects, and this destination for ideology is only made possible by the subject: meaning, by the category of the subject and its functioning" (29-30). Althusser writes that ideologies are produced but they also produce the conditions of their own production.

Slavoj Žižek rejects the traditional conceptions of ideology as 'false consciousness'. For him, falsity lies in what we do, not necessarily in what we say. It is "reality itself which is already

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to be conceived as ideological” (Žižek 21). Christopher Kul-want and Piero write: “Žižek’s philosophy and ideas are from a position on the radical left of politics” (26). According to Žižek, Marx’s most basic definition of ideology is people’s ignorance about their subjection to it. As such, the understanding of reality is viewed as distorted by ideology. Žižek, however, argues that this is not the case today; subjects are aware of their subjection to ideology, yet they go on with it. “They know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know. The illusion is therefore double: it consists in overlooking the illusion which is structuring our real, effective relationship to reality. And this overlooked, unconscious illusion is what may be called the ideological fantasy” (Žižek 32-33). Thus, people live in fantasy and become ideologues in practice. They already know that just casting votes in a democratic system will not change the political system, yet they cast their votes; religion always teaches them to be pliable citizens but they follow it; the corrupt politician knows that he tells lies and people are aware of it but they oil this existing system by listening to him and casting votes. Žižek calls such subjects “cynical subjects”. Agreeing with Žižek, Tony Myers writes that “[a] cynical subjects, we know full well that our understanding of reality is distorted” (Myers 65). Myers notes that Žižek argues that it is not possible to see the world properly if you are part of it. Žižek’s argument is that the problem for Marxists is that “without an acceptable theory of ideology they are unable to explain how, in crude terms, the superstructure ensures the perpetuity of the base” (Myers 20).

Terry Eagleton lists sixteen definitions of it in his book *Ideology: An Introduction*, but finds that even these most important definitions are not sufficient to define ideology. At the same time, he does not reject any definition. He observes that both the wider and narrower senses of ideology have their uses (*Ideology* 7). According to him, the political left thinks of dominant modes of ideology, but “[a]re socialism and feminism ideologies, and if not why not? Are they non-ideological when in political opposition but ideological when they come to power?” (6). He also states that movements such as socialism may also emerge in distortion and mystification, such as when slogans are raised: ‘Workers of the world unite! You have nothing to lose but you chains’. We can study such slogans as a distortion of reality also because workers may actually lose their lives in acts of political militancy (26). He concludes that “by no means all ideologies are oppressive and spuriously legitimating” (6). He stresses that the term ideology should not be confined only to dominant forms of social thoughts; rather, a broad definition of ideology is required.

Eagleton argues that “ideology is a matter of ‘discourse’ rather than ‘language’. It concerns the actual uses of language between particular human subjects for the production of specific effects” (9). These specific effects may not compulsorily produce ‘false consciousness’, so it will be wrong to reduce ideology only to ‘false consciousness’. There are several reasons for thinking that this view is unconvincing. “One of them has to do with what we might call the moderate rationality of human beings in general, and is perhaps more the expression of a political faith than a conclusive argument” (12). Here he quotes Paul Hirst: “[I]deology . . . is not illusion, it is not

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falsity, because how can something which has effects be false?" (22).

Eagleton offers significant insights on the origin of the concept 'ideology'. If the critique of ideology sets out to examine the social foundations of a thought/idea, then logically it must be able to trace its own origin:

The concept of ideology, it can be argued, arose at the historical point where systems of ideas first became aware of their own partiality; and this came about when those ideas were forced to encounter alien or alternative forms of discourse. It was with the rise of bourgeois society, above all, that the scene was set for this occurrence. (106)

Eagleton concludes that there is a wide range of meanings of ideology. General meanings are inadequate to sum it up because it is a complex concept. Summing up the power and limitations of ideology, Eagleton notes:

The relations between ideological discourses and social interests are complex, variable ones, in which it is sometimes appropriate to speak of the ideological signifiers as a bone of contention between conflicting social forces, and at other times a matter of more internal relations between modes of signification and forms of social power. Ideology contributes to the constitution of social interests, rather than passively reflecting pre-given positions; but it does not, for all that, legislate such positions into existence by its own discursive omnipotence. (223)

The concept of ideology is meant to disclose the relation between an utterance and its material conditions of possibility (223). Talking about the relation of art and ideology, he remarks conclusively that it springs from an ideological conception of the world (Eagleton *Marxism* 15-16).

Thus, the living conditions and the administration affect an individual deeply and construct his/her ideology. Here it becomes very difficult to maintain a conscious life. So a balanced understanding of history and materialistic conditions of the time is essential for a healthy conscious life. If we see in the context of India, ordinary people are not politically so conscious that they could bring a revolutionary change in the political system. People still believe in the false promises of the politicians. Political ideology of common Indians is continuously being affected by some of the factors, such as religion, class, caste, illiteracy, unemployment, occupation, minorities versus majorities, regional fraternity, male dominating society, centre versus state, farmers, drugs, basic necessities of life and capitalism. It can be observed that for a good political system and good governance people should be aware about their conscious being.

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