**Notes 2**

**Louis Althusser**

In his essay “ Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus”, Althusser poses the question of ideology in the context of the ‘ reproduction’ of conditions of existence by a class that rules the society in a particular epoch. We must note here that always in the history of the development of humanity, we are always goverened by some ‘ classes’ or a ‘ class’ that assumes the form of the state. With the rise of the different governments in the West, this question has become very tenuous and serious to be understood. Drawing on Marx’s idea of the “ class”, Althusser develops this idea further. He points out that the reproduction of the labour power as well as production of relations takes place not where production happens usually – such as in the factories and all; but in certain other places/ spaces such as the family, the School, the University, the residential institutions, the Church etc. These places are important in the overall social act of production. They ensure a continuous flow of human resources into society for its preservation.

The State in Althusser’s essay is a form of repressive machinery. The State produces different systems such as the institutions and other organizations that ultimately control the individuals through ideology.

**Ideological State Apparatus**

**I**deology being a set of ideas, educated ones, and a system of beliefs is produced by certain peculiar institutions which Althusser refers as “ ideological state apparatus” ( ISA). The school, the university, the church and similar institutions form the ISA. What they do is by the mechanism of instilling knowledge, they instill certain codes of knowledge in the minds of the individuals that ultimately function hand in hand with the notion of the state. For example, the songs, the dress, the assembly songs, hymns of the church and many other things are typically the codified systems of compulsory learning for all students. By doing so, they get into a pattern of regulation. Here we must remember that the individual is co-opted into the system of ideology as the “ positive valence”. Such individuals are supposed to generate through their learning similar contexts of ideology, which ultimately would help the institutions to express the desire of the state. One must remember here that the institution won’t be able to fight against a particular code – such as the national anthem being sung in the school or teaching and learning process already set by the authorities of learning. If they do so, the situation would be de-contextualized from learning and in more modern times we call that ‘ unlearning’. The exercise of ISA is strong upon the individuals that they have to take it as such as learning and perpetuation of knowledge through a system of constant observance.

It is clear that Althusser here evokes the power relations of ideology. When the Church combined religion and eduation, all over Europe, a new sense of church education began, which ultimately helped the state to have its full reliance on papacy. This started in the pre-capitalist times. The relation between the church and the state reconstituted individual lives as obedient servants to the church. The revenue of the church was also controlled by the state.

England in the 17th century and France in the 19th century are the best examples of the above. Later , education began to get utomost importance in the reproduction of the relations of productions and the bourgeois consistently used to produce its ideology by stressing the role of the state in these educational institutions. The bourgeois compromised with the State in various ways to produce their own set of people from these institutions. A whole range of mechanics and technicians thus were produced by these institutions who catered to the interests of the bourgeois class after their education. In other words, in our contemporary times, the so called “ skilled education” the state is stressing can be seen as the best example of the bourgeois class and its influence on the state to produce syllabus and curriculum such as the above. What really matters here is that inside the educational institutions, through the syllabus and curriculum produced by the bourgeois class in conjunction with the state, the ideology of the bourgeois wins. All thinkers, technicians, skilled workers are engaged in the production of a knowledge system ( ideologically empowering) for the sake of the bourgeois interest.

**Repressive State Apparatus**

The next condition of ideology is exercised by the repressive state apparatus ( RSA). By repressive state apparatus,we mean the police, the military, the surveillance mechanisms in the more modern sense, which reduce individuals by force and exercise the ideological elements. The contemporary political events of our country can be seen as the best examples of the same.

Althusser offers two theses on ideology. In the first one, he states: “ Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence”

In the second one, he states: “ Ideology has a material existence”.

Here, Althusser develops his concept called “ Interpellation”. “ Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects”.

The RSA has a function here. For example, when you go on the road on a lockdown day in Delhi, a police calls you from the other side of the road : “ Hey, You there…” What essentially happens here is that you are made to stop and you come to the awareness that you are not supposed to walk on the road as the lockdown is announced from the state. You become conscious of your violation. Here there is an authority that stops you – whether it is the police, military or someone from the state. You immediately realizes that your crossing of the road or even walking is taken as an offence by the state. The state exercises the power of authority and ideology here. You being the individaul is “ interpellated “ here as the subject – in other words, as the subject of violation.

Althusser then states that “ all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects”. By this what he means that any subject creation is an act that is done by ideology exercised by the state. The verbal calls, the whistles and even the sheer recognition of the individual is considered as an act of interpellation. The state exercises its power by making you a “ Subject” to be questioned, interrogated through the act of interpellation.

One must notice here that this particular position of Althusser had a lot of influence on Michel Foucault. This clearly states that how in more modern societies power mechanisms are constituted and what such mechanisms are doing to create a completely uneven society. In other words, a society of discipline and punish ( to paraphrase Foucault’s terms).

Althusser then goes back to Freud and offers a criticism of his idea of the “ Subject”. ( Please read the potion very carefully). Freudian notion that individuals are already abstracts “ with respect to the subjects they already are” is critiques by Althusser. However the formation of this “ abstract” and the “ Subject” is critiqued by Althusser to make the individual not an “ unconscious” entity , but someone who brushes with the many happenings in the society by encountering the RSA. The repressive state apparatus is therefore more a strategic apparatus that perpetuates ideology through the “ interpellation”.

Let us also remember here that Althusser’s idea of “ interpellation” functions against the Freudian “ unconscious”. And Althusser and Jacques Lacan marked a definite anti- Freudian idea of the formation of the individual and the “ Subject”. Perhaps this is one of the real contributions of the structuralist and poststructuralist turn.