

# Education and the School System: Ideological State Apparatus and Its Use in Literature

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## Abstract

Plato's text *The Republic*, a kind of treatise regarding many political and social concerns goes on about how one can produce a kind of proper education among children with the means of prose and poetry, be it fiction or otherwise and music as well. His major concern is with the Greek scenario wherein the purpose of education is to produce a group of young militia who are instilled with qualities of courage, self-control, honesty, excellence of character and so on. Althusser suggests that the "the ideological State apparatus which has been installed in the dominant position in mature capitalist social formations as a result of violent political and ideological class struggle against the old dominant ideological State apparatus, is the educational ideological apparatus.". He further says that the School has the capacity to drill into the child's brain a "certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology". Many educational philosophers have argued that education was never a neutral enterprise and it almost always involves a political act whether it is a conscious one or an unconscious one on the part of the teacher/ educator. The levels at which the school system and education varies in spreading its desired ideologies works through various routes. These include the curriculum and the subjects taught in the school, the punishments and the forms of disciplining, examinations and forms of assessment, ranking and grading system and systems of inclusion and exclusion. This paper tries to show the tools used by a School system which work in the making of an Ideological state apparatus; and the Education system as an ideological State apparatus to develop the dominant ideologies of caste, religion and language in society- with reference to two texts *Swami and Friends* by R.K. Narayan (1944) and *Marali Mannige* by K. Shivarama Karanth (1941).

**Keywords:** Ideology, State apparatus, Education, Literature, School System

If we wonder how ideology plays a very key role in producing literature in society, Plato's text *The Republic* can come in handy in understanding this politics. Most people believe that literature and other art forms are mere mirrors of society or just a fragment of the creative imagination of the poet or author. But the process of literary productions is not as simple as that. There are multiple layers of politics involved in how these literary texts come into being, how some texts become a major part of the literary canon, how other texts are lost in time, or further some texts are even subject to bans. This has a lot to do with the dominant ideologies of the time and place of a literary production. At one point, Marxist ideology had mostly to do with the economic production, but with further interpolations many

philosophers and critics were able to introduce Marxist ideology into the realm of literary production. Plato's text which is in fact a kind of treatise regarding many political and social concerns goes on and on about how one can produce a kind of proper education among children with the means of prose and poetry, be it fiction or otherwise and music as well. His major concern is with the Greek scenario, wherein the purpose of education was to produce a group of young militia who were instilled with qualities of courage, self-control, honesty, excellence of character and so on. He says, "Since the minds of the young are very impressionable, we must, if we are to educate them properly, make sure that the poetry on which they are brought up is suitable for the purpose." (Woolfolk,2006) He

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further says that "...when we are dealing with those who are young and tender, that is the time when they are easily molded and when any impression we choose to make leaves a permanent mark." (Woolfolk,2006) Clearly, Plato wishes to use education as a tool in order to make certain kinds of citizens from young students, so that they benefit the state when they grow up. For this, he uses literature and music as the tool. Later, we will see the nexus of literature, ideology and education in an elaborate manner.

For the time being, one can extend Plato's use of education as a tool to produce a certain ideology into the system of Ideological State Apparatus developed later by Louis Althusser.

In a very simple understanding of the word, 'ideology' is the science of ideas and a study of their nature and origin. Most people understand 'ideology' as a set of ideas or ideals, or beliefs commonly followed by a group of people, which lead to the production of norms in society. 'Ideology' is what makes a society aware of what is acceptable, normative and correct in a given social and political context. Many theoreticians have given different understandings of 'ideology'.

Althusser clearly differentiates between two kinds of state apparatuses that help in the running of any political, social system, here the State. These apparatuses are basically bodies or tools that use either physical or mental force to establish law and order in society. The body that uses violence or forms of punishment and run on the basis of 'fear' is called the repressive state apparatus and includes the government, the administration, the army, the police, the courts, the prisons and so on. They are repressive in nature and may take strict actions against anyone who falls out of the set law and order. On the other hand, the Ideological state apparatus plays at the mental level of its subjects. The people in society work in tandem on the basis of several social contracts that run within social institutions that guide the ideas which develop binaries of right and wrong, good and evil, nature and culture and so on. Althusser includes religion, education, family, law, political parties, press and media, along with arts and literature in his prescribed ideological state apparatuses. The major difference between the two apparatuses comes down to a binary of public versus private, where the former comprises the public domain; the later comprises the private domain. Clearly, education has its very roots in the subconscious level of the educator and the learner, and both or either may be unaware of the ideological implications of the education that is being provided.

According to Althusser, "The ideological state apparatus which has been installed in the dominant position in mature capitalist social formations as a result of violent political and ideological class struggle against the old dominant

ideological state apparatus is the educational ideological apparatus." (Althusser,2008) He further says that the school has the capacity to drill into the child's brain a "certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology." (Althusser,2008)

Many educational philosophers have argued that education was never a neutral enterprise and it almost always involves a political act, whether it is a conscious one or an unconscious one on the part of the teacher/educator. The concept of ideology works on a Marxist principle in that as a political act a set of ideology is incorporated in society in order to impose a dominant belief on the society. According to Apple, "The basic ways institutions, people and modes of production, distribution and consumption are organised and controlled – dominate cultural life. This includes such day to day practices as schools and the teaching and curricula found within them." (Apple, 1990)

The major role of education in society is to be able to produce a mass of children who can either be a part of the workers, laborers or peasants, i.e., basically the working class. Some students may carry on becoming a part of white collar jobs, where they get to be technicians, mechanics, or middle-class employees in some companies. There are still fewer numbers who are able to reach the peak where they are either the intellectuals, the philosophers, who find ways and means of introducing newer discourses into society through their writings, or administrators and capitalists who are able to exploit employees and laborers with the power of their position, owned land and money, or there are other authoritarians like priests and saints who turn into protectors of the dominant social ideologies. The power keeps running from the hands of these few into the newer generations, and those who are still in the former categories continue to remain there as their children and their children's children, continue to study in the same education system with the same models of morals, ethics and norms that were once followed by their parents.

The levels at which the school system and education varies in spreading its desired ideologies work through various routes. These include the curriculum and the subjects taught in the school, the punishments and the forms of disciplining, examinations and forms of assessment, ranking and grading system and systems of inclusion and exclusion.

This paper tries to show: i) the tools used by a school system which work in the making of an Ideological state apparatus; and ii) the education system as an ideological state apparatus to develop the dominant ideologies of caste, religion and language in colonial India – with reference to two texts Swami and Friends by Narayan and Marali Manige by Karanth.

Swami and Friends written by Narayan deals with the life of school-going boys, who are stuck in the day-to-day

routine of the school system, under the British Colonial regime, whereas Marali Manige deals with the story of three generations of a family who try to adjust with the ongoing changes in India, due to the colonization. These changes involve the introduction of English education and problems of migration along with conflicts of tradition and modernity. The two texts have been chosen, as both belong to the same decade and also both are set in the backdrop of Southern part of India, hence giving them a sense of comparable chronology, history and geography.

## Tools Used by a School System in the Making of an Ideological State Apparatus

### Curriculum and Subjects Taught

Apple says, "...not only does education allocate individuals to a relatively fixed set of positions in society – an allocation of positions determined by economic and political forces – but the process of education itself, the formal and hidden curriculum, socializes people to accept as legitimate the limited roles they ultimately fill in society." (Apple,1990) In his *The Republic*, Plato openly discusses what should and what should not be incorporated in the syllabus, in order to produce young adults that would be able to run a state in the manner that benefits it. "We shall for our own good employ story tellers and poets who are severe rather than amusing, who portray the style of the good man and in their works abide by the principles we laid down for them when we started out on this attempt to educate our military class." (Plato,2007)

In *Swami and Friends*, the syllabus was simply defined, "First of course there was arithmetic – those five puzzles in profit and loss: then there was English – he had to copy down a page from his eighth lesson, and write dictionary meanings of difficult words; and then there was geography." (Narayan,2015) History included chapters on Vasco da Gama, Clive, Hastings and others. If one is to ask why the stories of these particular people were in course, or from what perspective these were being taught, it would be simple to answer that the British regime which was now the ruling power in colonial India, taught a curriculum that was Euro-centric in nature. English writing and learning was given major importance as it was the language of the colonizer. Profit and loss were taught as the main purpose of the economic, capitalist society was to earn money through the hard work of its laborers. Further, they had a subject on scriptures, Swami goes on to describe, "He had taken the trouble that day to plod through *Bhagvadgita*, and this generous piece of writing lends itself to any interpretation. In *Ebenezer's* hand, it served as a weapon against Hinduism." (Narayan,2015) The curriculum is framed in such a manner so as to teach some moral values to the students that are embedded in the psyche of the people, as accepted in society. Even the questions and answers in the text books

and the examinations cater to such learning of morals to the children, rather than an individual understanding of a particular story. Interpretations are subjective, but moral learnings are objective and based on the dominant ideologies of a community. "What moral do you infer from the story of the Brahmin and the Tiger? Swaminathan never thought that this story contained a moral. But now he felt that it must have one since the question paper mentioned it. (Naeayan,2015) According to Kumar, "The moral education of the children of ordinary people would emphasize religious and quasi-religious literary learning aimed at imparting virtues such as obedience, modesty, rule-governed behavior and acceptance of one's station in society." (Kumar,2005)

Cultural context has been a part of the curriculum since a long time, and it continues to be so even today. But unnoticeable for the innocent child's eye, there is a hidden politics even in the simplest of sentences they come across in their mathematics word problems, for instance. "Rama has ten mangoes with which he wants to earn fifteen annas. Krishna wants only four mangoes. How much will Krishna have to pay?" (Narayan,2015) The use of names of Indian Gods is an attempt at religious ideological dispensation. Even in recent years, before the government revised the syllabus, many texts and curricula were a part of the hidden politics of ideology, for example, most text books consist of examples like: The mother is sweeping the floor, the father is watching television. The gender roles, taken as accepted by the society, were unconsciously dispensed through the hidden politics of the curriculum. Only recently when many educators raised issues of gender inequality or racism, sexism in texts – the syllabus was revised in order to make it more inclusive and rid it of some of the commonly accepted stereotypes that exist in society due to the dominant beliefs and ideas. The text is full of many such examples.

### Punishment and Forms of Discipline

The ideas of rules and regulations and the provision of punishment is based on the social laws, wherein anyone who does not follow the ways that the state considers proper or legal, or anyone who is in opposition to the dominant leaders and groups, is subject to punishment, or must at least receive a dose of discipline. The hierarchy of the school system is maintained in a similar manner, where the school prepares the students to be in utmost discipline and obedient towards its teachers and head masters, which in turn is preparation, for the future employee who has to be in obedience to his boss and other superiors. *Swami and Friends* discusses this at length. If the student questions the teacher's words or methods, he is subject to punishment. In this attempt, he becomes a rebel, a revolutionary of sorts, which is seen as a potential danger to the system hierarchy (here the school, later the state). When the

teacher at Swaminathan's school tries to degrade Indian gods by praising Jesus and insulting Krishna, the already existing Brahmin ideology, of Swami's subconscious, forces him to question the teacher. "If he was a god, why did he eat flesh and fish and drink wine?" As a Brahmin boy it was inconceivable to him that a god should be non-vegetarian. (Narayan,2015) At this, Swami's mouth was shut by the teacher's act of wrenching his ear, as a form of punishment. At many other occasions, Swami and other kids become subjects of punishment. He was asked to stand up on the bench in lieu of a wrong answer. If students answered out of turn or before the teacher's permission, they were snubbed. Students were punished for being absent from the class. Hitting on the knuckles with a cane, calling odd names such as a dog and pronouncing suspension, is also one of the common ways, of negative reaffirmation, for particular behavior types that can be tolerated within a school system and the state at large. In response to when a student answered back to the teacher, he was greeted with a whack or a smack on the back, with a cane. Until recently, corporal punishment was common in most schools of India, until it became illegal few years back. It was simply understood that any behavior can be discouraged by inflicting corporal punishment on the students, as the school apparatus, followed the simple equation of fear and punishment that works in the larger context of the state laws where a mistake or a crime demands a punishment.

### **Examination, Ranking and Grading**

For a long period in the history of humanity, there has been a common belief that only few people can be considered intelligent on the basis of their "(1) capacity to learn, (2) the total knowledge a person as acquired; and (3) the ability to adapt successfully to new situations and to the environment in general." (Woolfolk,2006) But a misunderstanding regarding the actual learning capacities of a child still persist, as societies tend to judge a child's intelligence by his/her performance in the examination, his/her marks, grades or rank in class, school, college and so on. Yes, the examination system had been developed in order to assess a student's learning over a given period of time in a particular subject, but with time, this concept of marks and the pressure of examinations in order to score higher and better than other students, rather than one competing with themselves, lost its way to the prescribed forms of assessment followed by educational institutions. These forms of assessments continue in all institutions, where work efficiency is required. In a capitalist society, a person's salary, their increment, incentives, promotion, or dismissal from a job are all based on their performance, as the capitalist society is a profit-based system, where in either you show performance, scores or improvements, else you shall be replaced by a better, more efficient, more 'intelligent' employee. This system of competition for resources, a survival of the fittest, makes the school

student, his teacher and parents fall under the burden of the examination, in order to judge the capacity of a child. Swami and Friends shows various examples of how examination system works in order to create fear and generate proficiency in the students. "Shankar, the most brilliant boy of the class...always managed to border on ninety percent...he could speak to the teachers in English, in the open class. He knew all the rivers, mountains and countries in the world. He could repeat history in his sleep; Grammar was child's play to him." (Narayan,2015) Who is to decide that these were the criteria for intelligence and brilliance? A fixed institution, based on a dominant set of beliefs decides that a child who knows things by heart, who is well versed in spoken English, is one who is worthy of the title of being intelligent. The colonial mentality, that one who knows English is civilized, is a Babu continues to exist even in the present day. Who decided this superiority, other than those few who were in power and gave prominence to a group of few over the others? "At school everybody seemed to be overwhelmed by the thought of the examinations. It was weeks since anybody had seen a smile on Shankar's face." (Narayan,2015) The generation of fear is the main concern of the state apparatus, and examination is the most fearful thing for people in their entire lives. "The news that Lachcha had failed that year reached them. Aithala was thunderstruck... his pride could not tolerate the fact that he would have to sit in the same class." (Manige,2003) The stigma associated with failing also came with the ideology that controlled the fear of examination. It is one of the biggest reasons for suicide in India in the present scenario. The belief that a child who fails is nothing but a nincompoop persists till the date and is based on the larger ideology of life's victories and failures, because there are no second chances in life.

### **System of Inclusion and Exclusion**

The system of education in traditional India was very widely based on the caste system. Only the children of upper caste families, i.e., Brahmins and in later period Ksatriyas, received education. Other castes were not eligible for sitting in a Gurukul or taking any form of education. Not just that, only the boys were allowed to step out of the house in order to receive worldly education and girls were supposed to learn cooking, stitching and house-keeping in their own homes. With the advent of the British education in India, not only the caste system was challenged through converting to Christianity, but also all caste students were included in the school education. This had a hidden politics behind it. Where on one hand, the British missionaries tried to gain popular support by including all caste students into the study system, it created a wider and wider gap among the already maintained Varna system in India. The problems associated with untouchability, and how students of lower castes were not even allowed to come near higher caste students, let alone sit with them is illustrated in Marali

Manige. "Those who go to government schools have no caste. Our teacher says that all sorts of low-caste children gather together there." (Manige,2002) The articulation of caste through education is discussed in detail in a later section of this paper.

## Education as an Ideological State Apparatus Used to Develop Other Ideologies in Society

### Religion

Swami and Friends, written in the colonial period, deals with the upheavals caused in the life of young Swami and his other friends in the imaginary land of Malgudi, where various protests against the British regime were taking place. These upheavals were at the cost of their day-to-day life and education. The dominant ideologies of caste and religion, which had been a part of traditional India, were experiencing a hegemonic shift at the hands of the British missionaries. At this point, the ideological state apparatus of education in school became an important tool in the hands of the missionaries to indoctrinate the minds of Indian children with notions of Christianity being the better religion and enforcing their own ideas on the kids. At one hand they were degrading the traditional and primitive forms of Indian customs and worship and on the other hand they were praising their own religion and culture. For instance, "Why do you worship dirty, lifeless, wooden idols and stone images? Can they talk? No. Can they see? No. Can they bless you? No. Can they take you to heaven? No. Why? Because they have no life...." The primitive forms of idol worship or animism were insulted and on the other hand Jesus as the supreme God was praised. "Now see our Lord Jesus. He could cure the sick, relieve the poor, and take us to heaven. He was a real God. Trust him and he will take you to heaven; the kingdom of heaven is within us.... Did our Jesus go gadding about with dancing girls like your Krishna? Did our Jesus go about stealing butter like the arch-scoundrel Krishna? Did our Jesus practice dark tricks on those around him?" (Narayan,2015)

It was not as if various ideologies existed in India and all had their own equal place in India before the British missionaries imposed their own ideology. But simply that one dominant ideology was fighting to replace another ideology. It is the game of power. The school is such a system that through its own course, its syllabus, its educators and its surroundings, unknowingly becomes a part taker in the indoctrination and imposition of a particular norm that suits the dominant group in that particular society. In order to enforce this, the use of punishment is the most common form. According to many philosophers, the ideological state apparatus as a tool works on the principles of fear and punishment. In the same light, in order to produce young adults who would fit exactly into the molds or roles cut out for them, in any society – be it feudal, capitalist and so on – the children

are punished, if they question the system, the educator, or the ideologies that they are supposed to develop within themselves. Now in the context of the above two texts this becomes especially so, as the existing system is faced with a colonial system.

According to Kumar, "In Colonial India, the job of deciding, selecting and shaping school knowledge was performed by the 'enlightened outsider'." (Kumar,2005) He further adds, "At the heart of the colonial enterprise was the adult-child relationship, the colonizer took the role of the adult and the native became the child...the agenda was to train the native to become a citizen."

### Caste

As discussed above, caste has been the focal point of Indian education from time immemorial. The ideological state apparatus, i.e., the education system, under the British regime, clashed with that of the traditional caste ideology persisting for centuries in India. In the wake of this conflict, many people compromised with the indoctrinated ideology of caste, in order to fit better into the colonial norms, whereas others continued to deal with conflicts in the two ideologies as illustrated in Marali Manige:

Ha, the craze for English didn't spare you either, Aithalare! It doesn't matter even if you let him study at home. But you shouldn't send him to a government school where children of all castes are sent. A boy of any blighted caste can get in there, remember. Look at our Karkada school for instance. I believe a new teacher has come to teach – a supervisor of laborers, or a weaver. To think the Brahmin children should get the taste of his cane! What has this age come to! (Manige,2002)

For ages, the Brahmins had maintained monopoly over the field of education and used caste as a weapon to keep other castes away from knowledge; else they would not be able to maintain their political position in the society. Now that they were faced with a challenge to their hierarchy by the very apparatus that they used for their own benefit. It was becoming an obstacle for their community and hence difficult to digest. Some, on the other hand, thought that Brahmins were not even eligible for English learning. "English cannot be spoken by the children of priests...English is not as easy as chanting Vedic verses." (Manige,2002 ) Further some of the caste ideologies clashed with educational ideologies. Traditionally, Brahmins were 'pure' and hence could not touch dead bodies or flesh. Hence, many occupations like being a doctor, though a highly paid dignified job in the eyes of the British, was contradictory to caste laws.

'Why shouldn't he be sent to do his B.A.? Or, he can become a doctor or something like that.'

'Become a doctor?' Aithala was amazed.  
 'Ha, you are Vaidik Brahmins! And you are not allowed to cut up a dead body.'  
 'You are making fun of us. Exclude that possibility. Tell me of something else he can do.' (Manige,2002)

The school system, which earlier gave privilege to one group of people now shifted the hegemony in the hands of another group. This power play works at the hands of the Ideological state apparatus, where the school system dictates the caste ideology.

### Language

In 1844, Lord Hardinge proclaimed that for services in public offices, preference would be given to those who were educated in English schools. It showed that education was imparted with the limited objective of preparing pupils to join the services. The emphasis was on producing good clerks. (Kochar,2005) In India, The dream of the English bourgeoisie merely provided the vocabulary with which a miniscule civil society could legitimize its rise in the midst of exploitation of the working population. The dynamics of colonial administration in India gave a very long life to 18th century English in which 'people' and 'citizen' meant only men of status or property. (Kumar,2005)

In trying to learn the language of the colonizer and the elitist implications it brought along with itself, the distinction between caste-based ideologies of the society would turn into class-based ones, following the English model of society. Hence the English education system used its own language education, discarding Indian texts as incompetent, in order to provide a temptation to people who would either be willing to take up Christianity or would want to become the employees of the British regime, hence making them a stronger imperial power in a foreign land. "In these days, no other profession commands the dignity of a lawyer or a tahsildar. If he learns English, in ten years he will have at least four large measures of land as his own to cultivate. He won't gain any respect if he takes up the profession of a priest." (Karanth,2002)

At the heart of this, was the capitalist agenda of creating a class divide, a distinction between the landed gentry, that would hold some power over the laborers but would still be under the control of the British government, as they would owe all that they possess to the jobs provided by the British and hence there would be lesser chance of any mutiny.

### Use of Ideological State Apparatus in Literature

As was stated by Plato, the literature that circulates in society should keep in mind the kind of education one wishes to propagate among the citizens. Where Plato's political treatise explicitly shows how ideology can be propagated by means of education and that literature is the means used in order to educate people, the ideological state apparatus of education and literature clearly become co-dependent. Where, on one hand education is propagated by the regulation of a particular kind of literature, on the other hand, many texts in literature help us to decode the ideologies that govern the society. The apparatuses that help in the governance of societies are all interlinked with one another, which in fact make literature and media itself an ideology. If one accepts a certain kind of ideology and follows it, the interpretation of any kind of literature, will be based on the social history of that ideology, as is understood by the interpreter. On the other hand, the kind of literature that will be allowed to be circulated in society and those that will come under the knife of censorship will also be decided by the popular social ideologies. Amidst the play of ideologies, one can only try to keep aside the learned signs of a giver signifier, in the form of the ideologies they signify, as Roland Barthes suggests, and try to de-codify the text with a neutral mind, in order to be able to enjoy the text to its fullest.

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