



Culture, Ideology and Education/Interpellation through Literature

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ABSTRACT

The idea of culture as a source of wisdom and truth was once seen as something to be imparted to the masses to cultivate civilized societies. Literature served as both a repository and a medium for transmitting this wisdom across generations. However, Marxist critics challenged this view, redefining culture as an ordinary and comprehensive way of life— a framework through which people understand the world.

This paper examines the complex relationship between culture, literature, and education. It critiques traditional notions of education and reveals the underlying structures that shape what is considered wisdom. Additionally, it analyzes how readers are interpellated during the reading process, demonstrating that every interpretation is influenced by ideological structures. Thus, meaning-making not only reproduces ideology but also has the potential to position readers within it.

Culture, Literature, and Education

Culture, as we know it today, has several aspects and different senses in which we understand it. It is one of those notions that are hard to define in any one sense. There are, broadly speaking, two significant interpretations of culture in intellectual history. One, where culture is an intellectual or imaginative endeavor, the storehouse of timeless values or a form of knowledge and wisdom of transcendental nature, and the other, where culture is the whole way of life of people in the ordinary sense by which they understand themselves as people as well as the world around them. Culture in the latter sense is said to transform human beings into different identities. The notion of artistic culture has in some sense originated from Aristotle's idea of literature. He separated life and literature by describing life as what is and literature as the imitation of life as it ought to be. Culture is life imagined and experienced through literature rather than real life. Art is believed to preserve and transmit culture, which in other words means the ideal/imaginative life or what has at times been referred to as life in truth and beauty. Culture in this sense must act as a mirror or guide to the actual life of people. Art was perceived as the embodiment of ideal or imaginative truth, again by romantic critics like Wordsworth and Coleridge, among others, in the first half of the nineteenth century. Truths or ideals imparted by literature have been believed to be a different kind of truth than the empirical ones that we observe by ordinary senses or that govern the activities of our day-to-day lives (Williams 27).

The later sense of artistic or intellectual culture, also known as high culture, as Williams (1981) observed, is said to have evolved from another term 'cultivation,' which means the process of growing crops at some place under proper supervision. Culture carried a similar sense to humanities. Cultured people would therefore mean properly educated people. The process of cultivation of people would, by and large, mean proper education. Cultured, in other words, would mean civilized and not anarchic. Culture evolved into something that Matthew Arnold (1960) regarded as "the best that has been thought and said in the world" (Arnold 88). Though *Culture and Anarchy* forms the idea of culture as the 'best self,' Arnold's idea seems to have been shaped by the idea of general nature discussed at length in eighteenth-century literary circles. Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson, among others, were the prominent advocates of the idea of nature. Pope, in *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), writes:

"First follow NATURE, and your judgment frame

By her just standard, which is still the same:
 Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
 One clear, unchang'd, and universal light,
 Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
 At once the source, and end, and test of art." (Pope 73)

For Pope and Johnson, the discovery and subsequent propagation of "nature" is what makes literature timeless. "Nature" for Pope and Johnson is unchanging and timeless. Ancients have discovered and then imitated it in their writings. "To copy nature is to copy them" (Pope 74). Nature in this sense is unchanging and timeless, and so is Arnold's 'best self.' Nature is general to us all, says Johnson, and the same is true for Arnold.

For Arnold, culture, deemed perfection, is not an endeavor meant to be found and learned only. Still, it must prevail over everything else so that its character of moral and social goodness is manifested. Culture, as described by Arnold, has a great passion for sweetness and light. The aim of culture is achieved only if this sweetness and light of the few are imparted to the masses so that it pervades every aspect of life and prevails over all else. Culture, equated with our 'best self,' is that which is inborn in all of us irrespective of our differences. It is that for which we are always curious and by which we can see things as they are. It is that too by which our concern is the reason and will of God, and we do our best to make it prevail. Humanity present in us all, irrespective of the class or section to which we belong, says Arnold, precisely defines the best self in us. Culture is where we find the best self or humanity expressed and accumulated. It transmits the same from one generation to the other. Culture, in this sense, was an attempt to find some common ground for unifying the people of the world. Arnold regarded culture as a savior for human beings from anarchy. This function of culture, Arnold observes, is becoming more relevant and essential in the contemporary mechanical and superficial world (Arnold 102).

F. R. Leavis, another dominant figure in cultural criticism, also considers *Culture and Anarchy* as the seminal text of his notion of culture. He writes, in *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1930), that when he would be asked what he means by culture, he would refer to *Culture and Anarchy*. Though his views of what culture is do not differ too much from Arnold's, he nevertheless introduced a new debate of culture being the concern of a minority and argued against the notion of mass civilization. He writes in the first page of *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture*:

"In any period it is upon a very small minority that the discerning appreciation of art and literature depends: it is (apart from cases of the simple and familiar) only a few who are capable of unprompted, first-hand judgment. They are still a minority, though a larger one, who are capable of endorsing such first-hand judgment by genuine personal response. The accepted valuations are a kind of paper currency based upon a very small proportion of gold" (Leavis 10). It is this minority of people, Leavis states, who possess the power to keep alive the subtlest and most perishable parts of the tradition. The majority, as a whole, is benefited from the finest human experiences only when preserved and then passed from one generation to another. Leavis's description of culture has become influential in critical circles. It was, in any case, up to the minority of people to judge what is valuable and what is not, which implies what is to be imparted as education and what shall not. As already mentioned, what he referred to as culture was largely derived from *Culture and Anarchy*. His ideas have turned into a standard of the time. His judgments of whether something is or is not valuable served as the outlined principles of studying literature for a very long time. Leavis and Thompson (1933) distinguish high or literary culture, captured in artistic tradition, from all else, which they referred to as mass culture. His distinction between high and mass culture became the basis for the formation of the literary canon (Leavis and Thompson 75).

Culture in this sense is therefore supposed to operate in some way or other as a critique of our ordinary day-to-day social practices and hold a somewhat idealistic mirror to them. It forms that wisdom and social order that the humanities departments in the universities in general and literature departments, in particular, were supposed to impart (Williams, *Culture and Society* 57). People in humanities departments at some point believed in the existence of timeless ideals and values which they were thought to unfold and then impart to people so that they could analyze and develop a healthy critique of the existing ordinary social practices. Literature, with other arts, is viewed in this sense as that which functions as guardian as well as transmitter of culture (Eagleton 34).

Culture as a form of education or wisdom of timeless ideas, ideals, and values at some point in the history of modernity has presented itself as a plausible candidate for displaced theology. It was at one point thought to be a surrogate religion (Said 99). This idea of culture aspired to build some kind of universalism which was thought to become the basis for unifying the whole of humanity irrespective of their so-called superficial differences. It was apparently an attempt to solve the problems of antagonism between different people, nations, classes, regions, and the like. The only contender to present somehow a concrete form of this idea of culture was art. Art had to embody and subsequently transmit the universal values of culture. It was under the impression that art being transcendental and universal formed an important part of the process of civilizing the uncivilized in the colonies (Bhabha 122).

Though there are several flaws in the idea of culture as a form of wisdom, as thinkers of the contrary view of culture would say, nobody could deny its claim that there exists a certain form of wisdom. Even if it is not a

set of ideals and values, it is wisdom and intellect by which we analyze or scrutinize everything around us irrespective of who we are and what we believe (Williams, *Marxism and Literature* 115). It is this wisdom by which we challenge the existence of artistic culture too. If there is not any form of wisdom, then what else do we use to do what we do even in cultural studies? The difference, however, is that the form of wisdom is contextual and historical rather than timeless and transcendental (Hall 45).

The idea of artistic culture was put into trouble by the commercialization of literature itself. The novel as a literary form emerged almost at the same time when literature started to become a commercial commodity (Bakhtin 84). Literature until now was more or less like a monolithic narration of the world. It belonged to a class and was about their life, presented in truth and beauty but of that class only. The novel, unlike the literary genres before it, is more democratic and representative. It, like mass media, is a commodity of the general public and has to represent most of them (Adorno 76). The novel as a genre is the first, even though soft, challenge to the monolithic character of literature in the first place. It challenged the dominant worldview presented in literature until then. The multi-voiced nature of the novel sows the seeds of subversion within the literary world. Adorno in *The Schema of Mass Culture* put the dilemma of the novel as high art in these words:

In the case of the socio-critical novels which are fed through the best-seller mechanism, we can no longer distinguish how far the horrors narrated in them serve the denunciation of society as opposed to the amusement of those who do not yet have the Roman circuses they are really waiting for (Adorno 91).

The situation in which the novel emerged as a genre is not different from a film or any other popular art because, like popular art, it had to reconcile popular appeal and cultural distinction. The novel as a form is not different from Gershwin's music that mixed jazz with classic music to meet the popular appeal and have cultural distinction. Some of the Hollywood movies in a similar fashion picked up high cultural ideas and themes and mixed them up with popular culture, and the result was an amalgam (Benjamin 78). The categorization of high and popular art or culture, as a result, itself became a problem in such a situation (Storey 112).

Besides this, perhaps the two fundamentally flawed claims of the artistic sense of culture are its ignorance or rejection of all that makes people different and its claims of being timeless (Williams, *Culture and Society* 89). The former claim, in particular, did not fit in the emerging political climate of the world around that time. With the rise of a revolutionary nationalistic world order in the first half of the twentieth century, any attempt at universalism was less likely to flourish. The new wave of nationalist politics required the differences between the people of the two nations more than their similarities. A different understanding of culture was in vogue in nineteenth-century anthropology, associated with Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. Culture, in this sense, constitutes "the whole and distinctive way of life" of the people of a community (Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown 112). It was almost opposite to the artistic culture in the sense that it includes whole practices of people of a nation. This notion of culture served better in this new world of politics. The culture of a nation became a cohesive force for her people to be similar as well as a way of differentiation from others. This new way of thinking about culture created different national or cultural identities in the world.

The artistic idea of culture, developed from Arnold to Leavis, was openly disapproved, perhaps for the first time in intellectual circles, by Marxist critics of the 1930s. Marxian ideas did not become widely popular during his lifetime but gained prominence much later, in the early twentieth century. The Marxian assertion that "it is not the consciousness that determines our being, but, on the contrary, our being that determines our consciousness" (Marx) formed the foundation from which Marxist critics launched their attack. If this is so, then any product of consciousness cannot be considered independent of social existence.

Marx's distinction between base and superstructure is central to all Marxist criticism of the early twentieth century. The common interpretation of this dichotomy suggests that the economy forms the base while everything else constitutes the superstructure. However, Friedrich Engels clarifies in a letter to J. Bloch (1890) that he and Marx only asserted that "the determining element in history is ultimately the production and reproduction in real life." Engels warns that reducing this idea solely to the economic element renders it meaningless and absurd. The critical point here is that the base determines consciousness, and whatever emerges from consciousness is part of the superstructure. We may also conclude that consciousness defines ideology, and every superstructure is both its product and a disguised form of the same ideology. When art is categorized and explained as part of the superstructure, the culture it imparts is inevitably ideological. Following these developments, the notion of artistic culture, particularly its claims of universal truths and timeless values, becomes invalid.

The final blow to the artistic notion of culture or high culture was the late twentieth-century shift in philosophy in general when whole new concepts like ideology, deconstruction, discourse, and hegemony took center stage in Western thought (Foucault 22). These new notions changed the way we perceived the world around us until then. After the emergence of this understanding, it was really hard to believe anything to be innocent. The artistic form of culture began to be perceived as something behind which other powers, like bourgeois structures of domination, were advancing (Gramsci 144). Knowledge or truth of any kind lost all claims of timelessness and transcendentalism. Artistic culture is then nothing more than temporarily stabilised meaning imparting system or regime. It defined knowledge and truth for a time or an epoch. This

made thinkers like Raymond Williams employ this alternative model or idea of culture which would define people as who they are rather than describe everybody in terms of some kind of universalism.

It was around the late twentieth century that a new understanding of culture as the whole way of life was introduced into critical circles. Williams (1981) regarded culture as the ordinary meanings and practices of people (*Marxism and Literature* 132). From here, everything that was thought about culture till then changed. Culture, in this new sense, was that by which we understand or make sense of the world around us. We are subjects of culture, and it provides a common code for all of us. We are not born subjects but made so by the culture in which we grow up (Hall 67). This notion of culture has been associated with identity. One's culture defines one's identity. Culture in this way defines people who they are in comparison to others. The emergence of this new meaning of culture is closely related to the notion of ideology and discourse. This understanding of culture did exactly the opposite of what it did before. It divides people into cultural groups or cultural identities instead of uniting them.

For Williams the meanings and practices of ordinary people constitute culture. Culture is the tapestry of texts, practices, and meanings generated by ordinary men and women when they live their lives. Williams' anthropological sense of culture, observes Barker, has at least two implications for Western societies. The stress on the ordinariness of culture and the active, creative capacity of common people to construct shared meaningful practices suggests that we are all cultured. We all know 'how to go on' within our form of life. Within the context of English literary criticism, an anthropological definition of culture offered a critical and democratic edge. Comprehending culture as a 'whole way of life' had the pragmatic consequence of splitting off the concept from the 'arts', legitimizing popular culture, and opening up television, newspapers, dancing, football, and other everyday artefacts and practices to critical but sympathetic analysis. (Barker, 2002:67)

The ordinariness of culture stresses equality of all forms of living or cultures. One way of living is equally legitimate as another irrespective of place and time. This notion of culture aims to democratize what has been a privilege to a class only. There was no basis in the first place for prescribing one thing as high and another as mass culture. The distinction between high and popular art is itself artificial which has no other purpose than dominance to serve. If there are any bases where cultural theory distinguishes one form of culture from another, it is only political. When we describe people as masses, says Williams, our intention is nothing but exploitation. When others are seen as masses, the purpose is most of the time to prescribe for them the ways how to be. Masses are meant to follow what the rulers prescribe. Cultural studies adapts the anthropological idea of which is characterized as a 'whole way of life'. Culture is constituted by a system of signs which is governed by its own mechanism. It acts as a system by which its members interpret the world. Meaning in culture is generated in it through signification.

Literature, Ideology, and Interpellation

Marx in *The German Ideology* talks about two notions of ideology. One, constituting an individual's beliefs and values, reflects his material condition of existence. The second notion is the ruling class ideas, reflecting their material interests, which form the ruling ideas of the age. Louis Althusser in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus* puts forth slightly modified notions with regard to ideology. He differentiates between the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) that is the state and its law-enforcing agencies and the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) in which the ideology of the state apparatus is imparted. Ideological State Apparatus includes religion, ethics, law, politics, and aesthetics. Ideology, he says, is in general omnipresent, eternal, and immutable. Ideology, for him, "is a 'Representation of imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence'" (Althusser 162). The consciousness itself is ideological. Individual members of society may not have the same ideas or in other words, they may not have the same representation of imaginary relationship with the real condition of existence but they always have a representation or ideology which may differ from group to group. This representation, he says, is perceived as truth or something given and it becomes social and material practice. Ideology, for Althusser too, is false consciousness, as Marx has conceived it, but at the same time he regards it inevitable. His notion of ideology is 'the imaginary relationship' or 'misrecognition of the reality' as well as that which brings subjects into being or enables humans to make sense of the world (Ibid. 162). This seems to be a puzzle because ideology, despite being misrecognition, is the only way to understand the world. This concept of ideology seems to articulate what Foucault calls subject position in a discourse. A subject position is 'a set of regulated meanings' offered by a discourse to the concrete people which, on one hand, enables them to make sense of the world and, on the other, subjects them to the regulatory power of discourse (qtd. in Barker and Jane 269). As soon as a person starts to speak, he takes up a subject position and is transformed into a subject. Further, there doesn't seem any possibility of generating a non-ideological view to expose ideology or Althusser's misrecognition of the real. Althusser believed that the rigors of science can expose ideology but that too is not a plausible solution, for the scientific paradigm too is a discursive formation of epistemology which is reformulated after every new theory.

Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'hegemony' is a modification of the Marxist theory of 'ruling class ideology'. He writes in "The Formation of Intellectuals" (an essay from his *The Prison Notebook*), that hegemony is 'manufactured consent' created through the articulation of intellectuals in the public sphere. A stable state, he says, never rules by repression alone but by a combination of coercion and consent (12-13). Thinkers like

Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser among others have unveiled the ideological basis of what was known as 'culture' from Arnold to Leavis and what is being categorized as high culture in opposition to mass culture by some cultural critics. The separate and special significance that literary studies used to enjoy faded away once it was regarded as part of cultural practices like film, media, etc. By such developments in the concept of ideology, the basis of high culture and thereby of the literary canon was shattered. There seems to be no ground for including one work of literature into the canon to the exclusion of others.

In his essay "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology': Return of the Repressed in Media Studies," in order to equate ideology with the structure/discourse, he invokes Eliseo Veron who projects ideology as a structure or system of coding reality rather than some content containing images and concepts ("The Rediscovery" 67). Ideology as a structure/discourse, then, is something autonomous about consciousness or intention. It is something that operates as an inter-subjective aspect of subjectivity (unconscious dimension). From the time ideology has been conceived as the structure that produces signification as its effect, it has been associated in one way or the other with the unconscious. For presenting ideology as something omnipresent, trans-historical, and immutable, Althusser invokes Freud's unconscious. He goes on to say that he finds a comparison like this theoretically justified because ideology in general and unconscious are not unrelated. Ideology has no history, says Althusser, precisely because it operates as an already existing and transcendental reality (161). The Marxian notion of history that is said to have established it, is practically absent from it. Not only that, it is as the structure is itself absent/invisible from itself. Ideology, for Althusser, is the imaginary representation of the real/factual world which, if stated differently, means the social reality by which we all live. It is what matters not the real/factual world precisely because it governs our conditions of living. There is no other way for an ideology to function than through the subject. The concrete individuals, argues Althusser, are interpellated into subjects by and through ideology. Without a concrete subject, there is no ideology and ideology cannot function except through a subject. "The category of subject," writes Althusser, "is constitutive of all ideology" (171). Any ideological analysis, as we see, involves subjectivity. He cites St Paul to tell us that it is meaning as the ideological effect that we live by and that forms us as subjects (Ibid 171). Ideology is present to us as a group in the form of obvious truth and the correct. Althusser concludes his essay by saying that we do not become subjects at some point in time in our life but we are always already subjects. The implication is that there is no way for us to be except ideologically interpellated subjects. Describing psychoanalysis as "a principal twentieth-century elaboration of the subject" (32), Alan Davis traces the decisive influence of psychoanalysis on contemporary cultural studies through Teresa de Lauretis and Kaja Silverman and the significance psychoanalysis has in contemporary film studies and women's studies. Several scholars discuss Lacan's influence upon Althusser's notions of ideology and the centrality of Lacanian theory of subject in the 'screen theory' of the film (Curran et al. 19-20).

Another pertinent thing to note is that reading literature forms part of the process of subjectivation/interpellation. The master signifiers that are reproduced through the unconscious of the text interpellate the reader/consumer. As discussed above, the interpellation process involves desire that is knotted together with the symbolic/master-signifier itself. The Law in the sense of being cultural law precisely operates as the unconscious master signifier —name-of-the-father, capitalism, religion, socialism, Marxism, liberal humanism, and so on. The demand of the Other as nation, religion, state, knowledge, morality etc is precisely that through which a subject is interpellated. The Other demands the subject to have success, grades, marriage, children, faith, morality, ethics etc which are all, by and large, determined by Law/master signifier/ideology. But the Law, as discussed above, is intertwined with desire even though the latter seems to repress the former. It is the fuel that facilitates the interpellation of the law/master signifier. It is in the very repression or negation of the Law that desire remains alive in the sense that fantasizing about the subversion of the Law in the unconscious is the source of jouissance for the subject. This means that ideological indoctrination is something that brings about repression. More repression means more fantasy and more fantasy means more jouissance. What is to be noted here is that reading a literary artefact involves desire and desire may facilitate or it may hinder interpellation. Desire, as Lacan puts it, can take the form of being or to have which also corresponds to Freud's narcissistic and anaclitic libido. This can simply be understood as a two-way objective of desire —to be the object of desire for the Other and to have someone embodying the Other as the object of desire. The child's first desire is to gain all the attention of the mOther and s/he wants to be her object of love/desire. When the child comes to know that s/he is not the sole object of her love and finds out that it is the father who really is, his/her desire shifts to the father, the bearer of the phallus/name-of-the-father and cause of the mother's desire. He is the one who embodies the law/master signifier. Male, as well as female children, develop the desire for the father as representative of law/name-of-the-father, the first master signifier, differently. The male child being (+φ) or having the imaginary phallus identifies with the father. He desires to be the father and embody the law/name-of-the-father. The female child being deprived of the imaginary phallus (-φ) desires to have the phallus or someone who embodies the law/name-of-the-father. The male subject's desire vis-a-vis master-signifier/ideological-structure would always be in the form of to-be or identification while as female subject's desire vis-a-vis master-signifier/ideological structure would always be to have or to possess someone who embodies it. What is important to note here is that the association of the law/name-of-the-father with biological males is not in any way essential but cultural/historical. It is because of the binary sex/gender normativity of culture that biological male and female correspond to cultural male and female. For Lacan, it is quite possible that a

biological female can take the male/masculine position and develop desire to be and vice versa. The father as name-of-the-father is master signifier which is later metaphorically substituted by other master-signifiers/ideologies like religion, knowledge, morality, nationalism, secularism, liberalism, and so on. One master signifier leads to another forming a signifying chain along which desire moves from one thing to another. The subject may at one time identify with the father, the embodiment of the law, another time with religion, embodied by someone else, and so on. To identify or to be someone apparently involves the demand of the Other —name-of-father, religion, society, knowledge, ethics, morality, nation, literary tradition, and the like— and in the process the subject embodies them which is precisely how s/he is interpellated. The subject while fulfilling their demand sacrifices himself/herself to be their embodiment. Master signifiers, from name-of-the-father to whatever form they take, play a decisive role in structuring the subject. Whatever signifiers are loved by the Other/master-signifier, the subject desires to be them or identifies with them. Liberal, nonviolent, rational, intellectual, constructive, humanist, humanitarian, author, reader, and so on and so forth are some of the signifiers that are loved by the Other qua liberal humanism. When the Other shifts from mother to father and then to religion, society, or nation, its demand for subject changes accordingly. As the symbolic/Other projects its demand for the subjects, the latter desires to fulfil the Other's lack which is his/her own lack too because the two lacks coexist. For example, a nation admires patriotism and demands its subjects to be patriots because a nation is nothing without patriots. The subject offers himself/herself as a sacrifice to become what the nation wants him/her to be. The subject in the process of becoming a patriot has to repress everything else. The active and passive narcissistic desire is in action in our ordinary activities like reading a novel. A character in a novel or a play may embody some master signifier which the reader identifies with. The embodied master-signifiers/ideologies form ego ideals for the reader who then identifies with them. Much of the interpellative forces of culture are thus operative unconsciously through these master signifiers which largely determine the identity and make-up of the subjects at large. The master signifiers embodied by concrete people become identities and those identities create active narcissistic desire in people. The cultural practices of various kinds are the repetitive attempts of the subjects to assert those master signifiers that structure them.

Signifiers produce sense by differing and deferring from other signifiers in the system/structure, which is the mechanism provided by language because all cultural forms operate as signifiers in our minds. However, the differing and deferring process would have been endless had there not been the cultural law in the form of a master signifier, ideological structure, or discourse functioning as a signifying structure that constrains endless differing and deferring. The symbolic or cultural law, therefore, determines what signifiers signify. The conventions and constraints on signification occur through some privileged master signifiers or ideological structures that determine the dominant cultural forms, which are reproduced and sustained by different cultural artifacts. The master signifier(s) operate unconsciously as meaning-producing structures. A master signifier, like the "name-of-the-father," quilts all the other signifiers with a certain signified and thereby fixes their meaning (Lacan 268). It is purely a structural phenomenon in the sense that the master signifier does not signify anything itself but determines the signified of the rest of the signifiers. The meaning of any text is impossible without the unconscious operation of a master signifier. Every text, therefore, essentially presupposes or reproduces some master signifiers or ideologies that constitute cultural reproduction. Literature, in this sense, inevitably reproduces culture and master signifiers. As mentioned earlier, literature is studied or analyzed as a signifying and meaning-producing practice in cultural studies. One ideological or signifying structure functioning as the ultimate master signifier resolves all conflicts between different ideological positions voiced in the novel. It operates as the ultimate perspective, determining the meaning universe and the basis for the judgments of the narrator.

Consider Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*. Set in the 1950s, this novel is an account of life in post-independent India. The novel, as suggested by the title, tells the story of Lata's mother searching for a suitable boy for her daughter. The novel records different events in four families across different cities in India over 18 months, dealing with politics, history, and social life. Spread over more than 1,300 pages, the novel covers people of several classes, castes, religious groups, places, and professions. Conceived as realist fiction, the novel seeks to describe the social environment of India as it is. However, in doing so, it inevitably falls into the trap of ideological underpinnings and preconceptions. Realist literature, among other things, rhetorically persuades the reader to accept things as they are, misjudging the role of ruling ideology in producing the reality the author witnesses (Jameson 12). The task for ideological analysis would, therefore, be to isolate the particular way of what Lacan refers to as "quilting," which constitutes the ideological or signifying structure. In this novel, different ideological structures confront each other to assert their claim to truth. Several master signifiers quilt the signifiers under their direction. Different characters in the novel have been subjectivated under the influence of various ideological or signifying structures. The assumption is that all the characters in the novel are subjects of some master signifier or ideology. This analysis, in particular, demonstrates how different ideologies and master signifiers intervene when different characters interpret the world. One ideological or signifying structure functions as the unifying ideology of the novel and post-independence Indian society. The narrative, in this sense, serves as an allegory of post-independence India during Nehru's era. As Neelam Srivastava notes, the omniscient narrator represents a kind of national consciousness that unifies multiple realities of that time (21). The narrator or authorial voice explains and judges things and

events based on underlying secular and liberal humanist ideals and values, which exhibit the general outlook of the novel. The omniscient narrator's consciousness is projected as a common-sense perspective.

With the reproduction of master signifier or ideology, a literary text also articulates the Real, which forms its essential void, lack, or incompleteness. There are several ways to understand how readers are interpellated while reading this novel. Reading the novel would be similar to an enacted event of *Ramlila* within *A Suitable Boy* itself. *Ramlila* is presented as the triumph of what is perceived as truth and good over falsehood and evil. Some characters, like Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor, identify with characters embodying goodness and truth in *Ramlila*. There are three significant representations of evil: the ten-headed Ravana, the embodiment of armed evil, who wields a weapon in each of his twenty hands; his brother, the mighty Kumbhkaran, fat, vicious, idle, and gluttonous; and Meghnad, his arrogant son. Evil must appear tall and powerful to give the impression of a worthy villain for a worthy hero, Ram. The audience excitedly anticipates the climax: the destruction of evil and the triumph of good (Seth 1188). In other words, this marks the triumph of the master signifier or ideology. They delight in witnessing the fall of evil powers one by one. The characters embodying goodness and whose triumph they enjoy function as the Other for the audience. The audience imagines themselves as characters embodying the good or the Other, imagining themselves accepted, admired, and loved by the Other. Winning the Other's love has already taken the shape of desire (Žižek 42).

The master signifier, or *point de capiton*, in this case, is Goodness or Hindu gods, which subjectivate the audience in the Lacanian sense. The $S/\$$ matheme represents the master signifier as the upper 'S' and the barred subject as the lower '\$' (Lacan 279). The barred subject, in this case, is the evil—Ravana or Kumbhkaran—excluded from or repressed by the ideology interpellating the audience. This exclusion signifies what is consciously hated and unconsciously desired. The subject is produced by meaning, which is itself produced by the master signifier or ideology as the signifying structure. Notably, where there is meaning, there is no being. The barred subject or excluded part of ideology takes the shape of *objet a* in the unconscious, connecting the subject with being (Žižek 67). The audience cheers and claps "when all the actor-demons lay dead in the dust" (Seth 1190), symbolizing the exclusion of evil from their world—meaning the world of signification itself. It is a day of joy and celebration because "it was the day when the people would see their Lord return to them, to rule over them and to establish perfect righteousness not only in Ayodhya but in the entire world" (Seth 1197). The Lord represents the master signifier or ideology without which the subject is nothing or meaningless. It forms the ideology that governs the world of meaning. The spectators' eyes fill with tears of joy as they shower flowers on the *swaroops* (Seth 1198), symbolizing their love for the Other or gods. Their happiness comes from identifying with the Other, attempting to fill their lack. The four ideals of *Ram Rajya*—truth, purity, mercy, and charity—serve as the pillars of religion, upholding the world's edifice. *Ram Rajya* functions as a signifying structure where the meaning of signifiers is fixed. All that the gods eliminate constitutes the repressed of this ideology. As Tulsidas describes:

Devoted to duty, the people walked in the path of the Vedas, each according to his own caste and stage of life, and enjoyed perfect happiness, unvexed by fear, or sorrow, or disease.

Conclusion

The paper contests the idea of imparting education through the canonical texts. What has been regarded as education may also cause indoctrination. Knowledge in the present circumstances would empower us only by knowing how we know what we know. If knowledge is consumed in the state in which we find it available without securitization, it is quite likely that it may enslave rather than empower us. The way we know things depends to a great extent upon who we are or under what circumstances we were formed as subjects. As seen in the analysis of *A Suitable Boy*, literature functions as a site where ideological tensions are negotiated and resolved under the influence of an overarching signifying structure. The unconscious operation of master signifiers ensures that cultural reproduction takes place, shaping the way narratives are structured and understood.

Furthermore, from a Marxist perspective, the ideological function of literature is inseparable from its socio-historical context. The traditional notion of artistic culture as a vehicle of universal truths and timeless values was critically challenged by Marxist critics. Literature cannot be divorced from its ideological function. Through the unconscious reproduction of ideologies, literary texts both reflect and shape the ideological landscape. This underscores the importance of ideological analysis in literary studies, as it allows us to uncover the mechanisms through which literature sustains or challenges dominant ideologies.

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