

Ideology and ideological state apparatuses. louis althusser

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In the article, 'Ideology and Ideological Apparatuses', Louis Althusser, an eminent philosopher has expounded on the wider meaning of ideas and ideologies that are subscribed by human race. He asserts that ideas are imaginary representations which men try to enact physically. He asserts that theory of ideologies depend on the social formations which are linked to production and creation of social class. Thus, ideologies have history but ideology in general has no history because is it abstract and is defined in the form of consciousness which is constant and remains same for all time. This is the main thesis of the article and author has explained it through social class and their history.

The article explains that ideologies are predetermined by the existence of platforms or apparatus that define their statutes or modes. Thus, one hears of religious ideology, political ideology, legal ideology etc. Althusser has defined these as social apparatus which are used to propagate different ideologies. In German Ideology, Marx had primarily defined ideology as pure illusion which people tried to fit with the physical reality. It is a 'pure dream, empty and vain, constituted by the 'day's residues' from the only full and positive reality' (p240). Author questions the 'need' to fit the reality with the illusion of ideology. He says Marx's ideology has different problematics mainly because it functions at various levels and is open to widespread interpretations.

Another very pertinent point made in the article is the need for subjects who bring into actions the modalities of ideologies that are practiced. Indeed, existence of ideologies it realized by the presence of subjects (man). Thus, ideologies have structures and functions which are carried by subjects.

Althusser better explains it when he divides his main thesis in two parts saying that ideology: is representation of imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence; has a material existence. These are important postulates that illusionary representations constitute ideologies which men try to relate in their real life. Prime examples are the religious scriptures which promote ideologies in the name of God and make men follow them in their real life. Most importantly, ideologies have material existence is proved when Althusser asserts that ' ideologies always exist in an apparatus (religious, ethical, legal, political etc.) and its practice or practices' (242).

The practice of ideologies under different apparatus may have different modalities that mainly depend on their ' imaginary relation to their condition of existence' (242). Interestingly, ideological representation infers that subject that practice them have their own consciousness. The subjects have the ' ideas' that their consciousness motivates them to act on their ' ideas', thereby giving him the ' free will' to act. In short, the illusion of ideas is internal but the action based on ideology is external that not only requires a apparatus but also a subject (man) who can act on those ideologies. Hence, ideologies have structure and functions which are used by subjects in their real life in relationship to their existing conditions. The subjects are also divided as ' free subjectivity, author of and responsible for its actions; and subjected being, who submit to higher authority' (248).

Thus, ideologies, as stated by author, can only be explained through social class within a social structure or society. It not only demarcates social class but also recognizes correlation between subject and subject, subject and

production that promote ISAs and their defined functions in social structure.

(words: 568)

Reference

Althusser, Louis. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses. 235-250, April 1970. (as provided)