INTRODUCTION

A man from the country comes before the door of the law for seeking justice. There stands a doorkeeper. He tells the man that his entry through the door may be permitted, but not at the moment. The man waited outside the door of the law for years and years, but does not succeeded in entering the first door itself. Before his imminent death, he asked the doorkeeper—‘everyone strives to reach the law, so how does it happen that for all these years no one but me begged for admittance?’ In the very last moment of his life the doorkeeper revealed—‘no one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it.’

Before The Law, the famous story by Franz Kafka\(^1\) evokes some questions: why was this man waiting for so many years for entering through the gate? Why did he wait for asking the question crucially related to his fate? Why did the doorkeeper not reveal the secret of the door much before, so that the man could return to his original home?

A further set of queries emerge. Was this man from the country a victim of some kind of false consciousness or illusion? What was the source of his immense belief in the law? What was the reason that obstructs him in decoding the “reality” of law? Was he in a state of illusion until the last stage of his life, or just that he could not articulate his doubts at earlier occasions? Is there a possibility that a man from the country does not know the exact character of the law, but at the same time, he realizes his helplessness before the powerful machinery of the state in the course of the time? Otherwise, why did he raise the key question at the last moment that exposed the futility of waiting before

\(^1\) Franz Kafka (1883–1924) was a German-speaking Czech writer and philosopher, widely regarded as one of the major figures of 20th-century literature. His works are notable for their dreamlike, bizarre, and nightmarish qualities, often exploring themes of alienation and existential anxiety.
the door? Was his silence a repression of the critique of law and why did he repress the critique? Did he do it knowingly or out of habitual docility? What are the sources of his docility and gullibility?

There can be many possibilities. We would look into some of them. Firstly, he might have some idea or gut feeling of the deceitfulness of the situation, but was unable to articulate that explicitly. Secondly, he might know the truth partially, but could not gather courage for asking the question earlier. Thirdly, he might know the merciless and obscure character of the law but at the same time held specific and formal procedure of entry in the world of law as quite legitimate. Was he thinking that the supreme authority of the law could be busy with important works related to the welfare of people and that authority can be approached only through its agents?

Moreover, if for a moment, one considers the door as the outer appearance of the law; could 'theoretical' unmasking of the essential mechanism of the law have freed the man from the helplessness and weakness that led to his death? The similar questions are being asked by social theory: why do people become participant in their own subjugation by the powerful? Why do they internalize the norms, which make them vulnerable before power?

One pertinent question Kafka himself asks through the character of the priest in Trial: who was really in a state of illusion, and subjected to the will of the hostile other, the man from the country, or the doorkeeper? In a sense the man from the country came on his own, however, the doorkeeper did not freely chose his job. He was waiting indefinitely for the man from the country, since the doors was meant only for him. What was the relationship between the law and its gatekeeper? The doorkeeper was in a position of power. His power lay in his capacity to constraint the passage to justice. His power restrains others. He possesses a negative power. His own power was derived from the power over the man from the country.
Does his domination over the man from the country constrain his own freedom. He could not leave the door of the law. Does the dominator also become the victim of illusion of masking of his own power? Let see a parallel narrative that Slovaj Žižek has constructed:

After a long wait, the man from the country breaks out in fury...You dirty rascal, why do you pretend to guard the entrance to some enormous secret, when you know very well that there is no secret beyond the door... The doorkeeper would answer him calmly: 'you see, now you've discovered the real secret: beyond the door is only what your desire introduces there...'\(^2\)

But if desire of the subjugated is taking part in the hidden transcript of domination, then the question arises is: how is desire formed and what is the role of socio-political existence of an individual in it? What are the factors that determine or influence the formation of social consciousness, which makes the acceptance of domination easy? This story by Kafka could be read as an unfolding of the processes of ideology. Wilhelm Reich remarks on power, which ideology holds over subdued peoples:

What has to be explained is not the fact that man who is hungry steals or the fact that the man who is exploited strikes, but why the majority of those who are hungry do not steals and why the majority of those who are exploited do not strike.\(^3\)

In fact, one of the basic questions, which concern the discussion of ideology, is how domination works. Why do people internalize their own domination? How do subjects become participant in and through their own control mechanisms? There are many explanations of ideology, but most effective are those, which deal with the mechanism of domination. Hence, the interpretation of ideology is related internally to the critique of power relations. If the phenomenon of ideology is being seen critically, then the interpretation of ideology is inherently a critique of ideology.

In the social sciences, one can hardly find a concept that is free from disputes, claims, and counter-claims. The concept of ideology is one of the most contested and elusive notions. There is no consensus about how to define or use the term. Malcolm Hamilton found twenty-seven different elements or
definitional criteria, while John Gerring examined over one hundred and fifty works and found thirty-five parts of attributes of the definition of the term. The difficulty with the term ideology is that it catalogues not only numerous theoretical connotations emerging out of different approaches, but also a variety of everyday usages, ranging from polemics to active politics. If characterization as a follower of any ideology is a matter of pleasure for someone, for others it may involve a worst kind of abuse. Many shades of both the negative and the positive connotations of the term are on hand not only in the domain of society but also in the realm of theory.

A brief glance over the history of the concept of ideology reveals that there have been many criteria for the use of the term by scholars. One's choice of a particular conception is shaped by what criteria s/he employs for portraying any phenomena as "ideological". The terms of contestation includes the epistemological questions related to truth and reason; normative critique; association of ideas with sectional interests; political or social function of ideas; nature of ideas like doctrine or commonsensical opinions; and relation of ideas to practice, etc. In different notions of ideology, one can find a variety of permutations and combinations of numerous attributes or elements. The mutually competing notions of ideology are not only different from each other, but also incompatible to a certain extent.

Broadly speaking the various conceptions of ideology can be classified into two parts. The first is the non-evaluative use of the concept or the neutral conception. The second is the evaluative use of the term, which can be, further divided into the negative and the positive senses of the term. The neutral conception of ideology can be described as "epistemologically and morally neutral", descriptive and explanatory rather than critical in character. This conception does not use epistemological or cognitive criterion in portraying any phenomena or discourse as ideological. It does not refer to ideology per se as distorted, false, misleading or illusory.
Secondly, this conception does not employ a moral critique or condemnation while characterizing any phenomena or discourse as ideology. This does not refer to ideology per se as aligned with the interests of any dominant or exploitative group. The neutral analysis of ideology is an act of describing the world-views, norms, or belief systems.\(^8\) The positivist and so-called value-free social sciences use the neutral conception. A number of Marxists such as Lenin, Georg Lukács and Antonio Gramsci also espouse the neutral conception, however with different emphasis.

On the other hand, the critical conception tries to unmask the veils of meanings and norms that conceal relations of exploitation and domination. It refers to social forms of consciousness and discourses, which distort social reality in the interests of the ruling classes. Karl Marx's conception of ideology was essentially critical, but some of the later Marxists blunted the critical edge of the concept and gradually the ideas of Marx himself were metamorphosed into an ideology.

The third type of the conception of ideology is a positive one—a view that does not conceptualise ideology as a distortion.\(^9\) For a critical conception, ideology per se is a negative entity, but when one holds, some ideologies as negative and some other as positive, then this approach involves a neutral position. Generally, this conception exists together with the neutral sense of the term and is distinguishable only for analytical convenience.

The positive conception discusses the contribution of ideology in the realm of human endeavour and practices, and holds it necessary in some way. Ideology in this sense has a prescriptive function. The positive conception holds a very wide view of ideology, so that ideology almost becomes synonym to the anthropological connotations of culture or mentalities existing in different cultural settings. The neutral conception describes the dimensions of human societies and polity that is, belief-systems, world-views, set of ideas, symbol-systems, psychological dispositions and value-systems, whereas the positive
conception appreciate the contribution of all these for the maintenance and betterment of society.

In the neutral conception, one describes or explains ideology and in the critical conception, one critiques the same on moral and cognitive grounds, whereas in the positive sense one valorises the same. One important difference between the positive conception from the neutral is that in it, ideology is not merely given but most of the time is 'to be constructed, created or invented.'¹⁰ The neutral and the critical conceptions of ideology form two very broad categories. In both the categories, a long range of variances is available.

The history of the concept of ideology shows that whoever tried to sit over the back of this horse has been humbled to the dust by it. Almost every attempt of explaining the phenomena of ideology is being described as ideological by others. One factor behind this tendency is the rivalry of political programs and movements, which emerged and strengthened after the advent of modernity and parliamentary democracy. Different types of political programs employ different criteria to characterize any set of ideas as ideological. One of the main points of the contestation in social and political theory has been the question of portraying ideas, beliefs, images and practices as "ideological".

If for the liberals, socialism and fascism, are the prime examples of ideology; conservatives link ideology with reason, science and modernity. Socialists maintain that ideology conceal contradictions of class society. In the same manner fascists claims that a view is ideological which is based on reason rather than passion or will to power. For green activists or ecologists all political programs are ideological which emerged out of industrialisation and advancement of technology. For a variety of religious fundamentalists and cultural nationalists secularism is "ideological", which they claim purges out the sacred and spiritual aspects from the human life-world. At the same time, religious fundamentalists see other religions in a negative manner. For the secularists, fundamentalism is an ideology, which evolved after an uncanny
relationship of religion and nationalism (or politics), which has lead to the formation of the ideologies of right-wing nationalism.11

One thing is quite clear: one cannot discuss ideology non-politically. However, the realms of the political and the ideological are neither identical nor exclusively distinct. Both the realms intersect and overlap. To borrow a metaphor from the structural Marxism of Althusser, both ideology and politics are conceived as "relatively autonomous" and distinct from one another, each in a state of continuous displacement and condensation from one another. The concept of ideology should not be restricted merely to "political ideologies" such as liberalism, socialism, fascism, feminism, etc. Every relation of domination has ideological underpinnings and every ideological configuration has political dimensions.

The journey, the concept of ideology has undertaken, has not been linear or uncomplicated. The concept took many detours, diversions, and bypasses. In this study, we shall be mapping the zigzags and criss-crosses created by the trajectory of the concept. We shall then retrace those routes and destinations, which are significant in the sense of explicating the present predicament and accomplishment of the concept of ideology.

This thesis will be examining the "end of ideology" (that emerged in the 1960's in North America) and its relation to the (French) schools of poststructuralism and postmodernism.

The postmodernists and the poststructuralists are the latest opponents of the concept of ideology and the tradition of ideology-critique. Their chorus against the concept of ideology is a re-composition of the tune of the American "end of ideology" school of 1960's. One thing is common between the poststructuralists and the postmodernist, is their attack on or avoidance of the concept of ideology. They complain that the concept of ideology is entangled with its Enlightenment origin, thus carrying an epistemological baggage with it. They either reject this concept outright or opine that its usefulness is doubtful.
We shall then be analysing Michael Foucault’s disapproval of the concept of ideology, which has become the source of inspiration for later poststructuralists and postmodernists. Other such theoreticians are J.F. Lyotard, Jean Braudrillard, Ernest Laclau, Richard Rorty, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, etc. shall also be viewed in this thesis. The political reasons behind this abandonment of the concept of ideology will be examined and why most of these thinkers openly embrace liberal or neo-liberal positions.

The poststructuralists and postmodernists present many concepts, which can fill the place of the concept of ideology in the realm of socio-political studies, such as “power/knowledge”, “discourse”, “micro-politics”, “metanarrative”. One of the criticisms of the concept of ideology is that it is implicated in the philosophy of consciousness and ignored the developments in the philosophy of language. It is also being argued that the concept of ideology is irrelevant in the view of the emphasis on language and communication. The charges of determinism, essentialism, psychologism, intentionalism, which are made against the concept of ideology by poststructuralists, shall be highlighted.

Nonetheless, despite the assault of the aforementioned academicians and pronouncement of the “end” and “death” of ideology, the concept of ideology is much alive not only in the political struggles and in analyses, but in the academic field. In spite of the “obituary” to the concept of ideology, a renewed interest flourishes in the concept of ideology since the past two decades. Even in the field of cultural theory and studies, the indispensability of the concept of ideology is recognised. Many contemporary theoreticians including sociologists, psychoanalysts, literary and cultural theorists, political theorists, and philosophers such as Anthony Giddens, Bhikhu Parekh, D.P. Chattopadhyaya, Étienne Balibar, Frederick Jameson, John B. Thompson, Jorge Larraín, Michael Freeden, Paul Ricour, Stuart Hall, Slavoj Žižek and Terry Eagleton have enriched the discussion of ideology.

Some questions emerge regarding the concept of ideology. Does the concept of ideology inescapably link itself to the problematic of the
science/ideology polarity? Can science itself become ideological? How can the ideology/critique polarity be differently from the ideology/science polarity? What are the merits and demerits of the neutral and the critical conceptions of ideology?

The works of Karl Marx still provide the most useful resources for a contemporary theory of ideology and it can face the challenges of the detractors of the concept and can integrate recent development in the conceptions of communication and language. However, Marx’s theory should be revisited and reconstructed to free it from the deterministic, scientist, reductionist and historicist interpretations. If ideology is viewed as mechanism of domination, then science and technology can also be ideological. The view of ideology as “non-science” then becomes untenable. However, this does not necessarily imply a total abandonment of the epistemological criterions, as “distortion” or “falsity” is not tantamount to being “non-scientific”.

The poststructuralist and postmodernist thought oscillates between the extremes of the “end of ideology” and “every viewpoint is ideological”. The equating of knowledge with power relations entails that power is everywhere, thus ideology is everywhere. But the tradition of ideology-critique resists the position of ubiquity of ideology, and therefore critiques the Nietzsche-inspired poststructuralist approach of seeing knowledge as the “will to power”, which attempts to get rid of ideology altogether. The key question of this thesis is how the concept of ideology can be reasserted and refocused as the process of legitimisation of power relations.

Giddens and Thompson reformulated the concept of ideology as “meaning in the service of power”, but they do it while abandoning the epistemological criterion of the characterisation of ideology altogether. Both the thinkers could not respond to the question as how legitimisation of sectional interests or manipulation of norms and meaning is achieved without using epistemological grounds. This thesis argues that the works of Marx provide the theory of
ideology with a dialectical framework for the integration of reality with consciousness, power, norms and significations.

The first chapter of this thesis "Ideology: A Historical Background" deals with the historical background of the concept of ideology. It claims that the concept of ideology emerged in the era of the European Enlightenment, but argues that the philosophical pre-history of the concept can be located further back in history. This chapter is restricted to the discussion of the intellectual circumstances, which provided the condition for the birth of the concept of ideology and which guided the trajectory in which this concept moved in nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This chapter would outline the thoughts of the forerunners and progenitors of the concept.

The second chapter "Ideology, Consciousness and Communication" discusses the concept of ideology in the context of the relationship between the concepts of reality, consciousness and communication. The deliberations in this chapter aim firstly, to distinguish between Marx's conception of ideology and the post-Marx modifications of it, so that Marx's conception may not be confused with the "Marxist" conceptions. Secondly, to identify those themes which have been the matter of controversy in the discussions of ideology and have direct fallout on our principal question: should one understand the conception of ideology from the science/ideology binary or rework it in association with the conceptions of power, communication and legitimisation?

This chapter also addresses the following questions. If reality and consciousness are both ideological, does the distinction between ideas and reality collapse in Marx? Do people receive ideology passively? Alternatively, are there two poles of the phenomena of ideology, one of ideologues and the other of popular culture? Does the critique of ideology emanate only from the critique of idealism or also from the critique of materialism? The third chapter also address the question of how should the conception of consciousness is accommodated with new understanding of language. It deals with the
relationship between the concepts of reality, consciousness and communication.

The third chapter “Strategies of Legitimisation” argues that the concept of legitimisation of class domination can be reconstructed from *The German Ideology*. This chapter also discusses the role of moral values in the legitimisation of power relations. The modes of legitimisation of domination such as reification and universalisation are delineated in this chapter.

The fourth chapter “Demystifying Domination” stresses that the process of mystification is an essential part of the formation of ideology. For this reason epistemological criterion of characterisation of forms of consciousness as ideological is necessary. This chapter criticises the neutralisation of the conception of ideology. The similarities and dissimilarities between the concept of false consciousness and the concept of ideology would be marked out. The chapter also discusses the relationship between the concepts of science and ideology.

The last chapter “Ideology and Power: a Critique of the Poststructuralist Approach” discusses the poststructuralist response to the concept of ideology. The postmodernist thought has a close alliance and likeness with poststructuralist thinking. The chapter deals with the general tendencies of these lines of thinking, while mainly discussing Michael Foucault’s critique of the concept of ideology, which is closely related to his conceptions of power and discourse.

NOTES AND REFERENCES


7 Tommie Shelby, 'Ideology, Racism and Critical Social Theory', p. 156.


10 See ibid, p.23.