

## SOCIO-POLITICAL CRITIQUE THROUGH A MARXIST LENS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONTEMPORARY REALITIES IN PAKISTAN AND GOD'S OWN LAND

Muhammad Haris<sup>1</sup>, Amna Parveen<sup>\*2</sup>, Muhammad Saad Ullah<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>M. Phil Scholar, Department of English Literature, Government College University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan; <sup>\*2,3</sup>BS English Literature, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

<sup>1</sup>[mhharis842@gmail.com](mailto:mhharis842@gmail.com) <sup>\*2</sup>[amnaparveen66@gmail.com](mailto:amnaparveen66@gmail.com)

Corresponding Author: \*

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### ABSTRACT

The study explores the importance of ISAs and RSAs within a state and how they contribute in domination of upper classes. By applying Althusser theory of Ideological state apparatuses and repressive state apparatuses the paper examines Shaukat Siddiqi's novel *God's Own Land* to reveal the processes through which a state supports ruling class to sustain over working class. The novel digs deep to describe state's brutalities and narrates how ISAs and RSAs collaborate with each other. ISAs stands for institutions like schools, churches, mosques, media and culture while RSAs deals with police, military and political bodies of state. The paper examines that how ISAs create a favorable environment for RSAs to work and support ruling class. ISAs develop a certain ideology that metamorphoses common masses into subjects. The subject formation through the help of ISAs provides a favorable chance to ruling class to sustain their power. The study examines the key role of ISAs and RSAs in perpetuating class dominance, and highlights the relationship between ideology, state, subject and power. The paper concludes that how the whole mechanism of state is in build to suppress working class and support dominant class.

**Key words:** RSAs, ISAs, Dominance, Ideology, Subject, Suppression, Politics, State.

### INTRODUCTION

In capitalist societies, bourgeoisie and proletariat have defined roles as discussed by Karl Marx and his followers. Both these classes have certain roles to perform in society rather than independent individuals. The social functions performed by these classes are characterized by socio-economic ideologies. According to a Marxist philosopher, Althusser, these ideologies are guided by institutions like School, media, religion, and other institutions like it. People internalize certain ideologies which transform them into subjects without any independent thinking. This metamorphosis of individuals within a society helps dominant classes to sustain their power in society. When individuals internalize bourgeoisie created ideologies, they take it as their performative responsibilities and oppression of dominant classes becomes inherent for them. The phenomenon of transformation into subject is

discussed by Althusser, he states, "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way as to 'recruit' subjects among individuals (it recruits them all) or 'transforms' individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) through the very precise operation that we call interpellation or hailing" (Althusser, 2014 p.29). According to Althusser, dominant classes not only dominate, but they produce certain ideologies to decide how the society perceives itself. The social meaning of life is extracted from these ideologies and it is inevitable for lower classes to accept it because it provides them a sense of social identity. Hence, a research to investigate the effects of ISAs on society is significant to conduct for better understanding.

This research aims to study the effects of Ideological state apparatuses, described by Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, on a society plotted by Shaukat Siddiqi in his novel, *Khuda ki Basti*,

which is translated by David Mathews under the title of *God's own land*. Shaukat Siddiqi, is a Pakistani novelist who wrote many works in Urdu. His magnum opus includes *khuda ki basti* and *jangloos*. The most prominent themes of Siddiqi's works are class struggle, corruption and sad lives of oppressed classes, that is why he is known as Charles Dickens of Urdu literature.

*Khuda ki Basti*, is a story of a family which is poor and respected, entangled by corruption and degradation. There is no hope for a better life and dire economic conditions force them in the hands of unruly entrepreneurs who exploit each of them mercilessly. The plot of the novel deals with the life of poor masses and how they are exploited by minor yet powerful dominant class. Every poor character of the novel tries to prevail upon his or her fortune designed by dominant ideology but their every effort is foil in state supported capitalist class. The main character Nosha, a teenage boy, suffers a lot in the hands of dominant class, which force him to adopt a life of thief and criminal. Nosha's sister Sultana, a teenage girl, faces poverty and degradation. Their mother is forced to marry a person who is interested in Sultana. Khan Bhadur's character is very significant because it represents politicians of the society and narrates a tale that how oppression is done by politicians through the use of religion and certain state institutions. This character provides an insightful view to the working pattern of dominant classes along with other characters like Niyaz and Dr.Mottu. Through the help of these characters, Shaukat Siddiqi, presents class contradictions present within society which leaves indelible marks over individual's psyche. The main stand point of the novel is to show the class struggle present in society and how it forces individuals from the lower class to adopt criminal activities to sustain their lives. On the other hand, writer depicts how dominant classes use state and its institutions to suppress lower classes.

#### Literature Review:

A number of political theories suggest that 'state' is an institution, responsible for social order and security but there are theorist like Karl Marx and Max Weber, who purposed the idea that state has power to create conflicts in society. Antonia Gramsci, a Marxist philosopher, in letter from prison (Gramsci, 1971) states that cultural

hegemony plays a key role in domination of bourgeoisie class over proletariat class in a society. According to Gramsci, hegemonic powers support capitalists to dominate and prolong its rule over proletariat. Hegemonic powers are social and state laws that are the product of human activity, which are established by men and can be altered by men in the interests of their collective development. According to these theorists, social order is upheld by state and state works for the interests of the ruling class. If we talk about tensions between state and society in Pakistan, since independence there is a tension between institutions and individuals. Due the tension between political order and social order, Pakistani state is facing different crisis.

Ghulam Mujaddid (2017) observes that the state and society of Pakistan continue to remain involved in a deep-seated conflict, which is evident in their mutually opposing attitudes, institutional values, and actions. Consequently, the apathy in Pakistani state is due to control of state over society and it is the main cause behind existence of incompatibility between state and society. Shahida Pareveen (2017) sites that socio-political issues create negative impacts on working class. She states that due to capitalism working class struggles for their existence and rights, but due to lack of resources their approaches are in vain. Class distinction is main point of Marxist theory, which states that certain groups of people are different from certain groups on the basis of occupied land and resources. She writes that this unequal distribution of resources is the main cause of problem and tension among these classes. If we look at the conclusion of "Khuda ki Basti", it shows that how a state supported capitalist wins over whole group of lower class. The defeat of lower-class in the hands of state-connected bourgeoisie depicts that struggles of lower class to come out of poverty are in vain. The conclusion resonates with Marxist theory which explains that the state upholds the current social order, which includes the continuation of inequality, and works to further the interests of the ruling class.

A very renowned columnist, Nadeem F. Paracha (2014) states in his column in Dawn newspaper that biggest social and economic ill which diseased the society is petty-bourgeoisie capitalism. According to the columnist, "khuda ki basti" is an attempt to show how the capitalists exploit lower classes to make money and resources. This exploitation helps

them to retain their socio-political and economic hold in the area. Siddiqui captures the daily lives and struggles of the people and depicts effects of capitalism on them. Nur Ibrahim (2014), a dawn columnist states that “God’s own Land”, is the true depiction of lower class struggles to achieve a good life but they fail in this attempt because of capitalist society. She narrates that through bribes and resources newly minted capitalist exploit poor characters of the novel.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

A French Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser, explains the concept of power and stability in his essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)”. In his essay, he states that there are two kinds of state apparatus i.e., RSA and ISA. He further states that both these apparatuses have same objective to sustain the domination of ruling class but the ways of operation for these apparatuses are different. ISA stands for ideological state apparatus and RSA focuses on physical violence and repression. According to Althusser, state cannot uphold power domination without the help of ISA because ideological domination is necessary to uphold power and RSA functions on physical levels. So both these apparatuses are important for state domination. ‘Marxist theory of the state’ defines that state is the (repressive) state apparatus and this apparatus is used to possess state power. But Althusser, enlarge Marxist theory of state and includes ideological institutions like schools, parliament, religious institutions, newspaper, sport institutions etc as state apparatus that are used to propagate a certain ideology which helps to possess state power. He defines, “What constitutes an Ideological State Apparatus is a complex system that encompasses and combines several institutions and organizations, as well as their practices (Althusser, 2014 p, 81).

If we look at the definition of ideology, Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms, defines, “ ideology refers to the system of ideas used by the ruling group in society to justify its dominance” (Childs & Fowler, 2006, p.114).The concept defined by Routledge dictionary is directly linked with Marxist idea of repressive state apparatus and hence ideology is another form of repression used by dominant classes to sustain their dominancy over lower classes. Althusser proposes a difference

between these two apparatuses and suggests that the difference which distinguishes ideological state apparatus from repressive state apparatus is the way of functioning. In the words of Althusser, “Ideological State Apparatuses are distinguished from the state apparatus in that they function, not 'on violence', but 'on ideology” (Althusser, 2014 p.78). As we all know that RSA use physical violence directly or indirectly but when it comes to ISA, we are free to accept any ideology as we are free to go into religious institutions, buy newspapers, and enjoy sports. According to Althusser, all mentioned institutions serves for the perpetuation of state politics which is the politics of dominant class. He further mentions, “the bourgeoisie holds state power and exercises it by way of the Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus” (Althusser, 2014 p.81). Here we get an idea that state creates certain ideologies through the help of ISAs which change lower classes to mere ideological subjects which ultimately helps dominant classes to hold their power and status. This concept helps us to understand that how bourgeoisie exercises its power with the help of ISAs and insert their ideology into their subjects.

Agon Hamza sums up the main thesis of Althusser and states: “Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects, and therefore, individuals are already subjects.”(Hamza, 2016, p.81) Agon further explains that ideology is hypothesized as a reality because it links individual’s imaginary existence to real conditions of the individual. It is the point of creation of subjects, in words of Althusser, “all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, by the functioning of the category of the subject” (Althusser, 2014,p.190). Hence, ideology plays a key role for dominant groups of the state to hold their superior rank and it creates a sense of obedience in inferior subjects. Ideology makes these subjects an automatic machine which is driven by some codes defined by dominant classes of the society.

A Marxist critic, Eagleton’s idea of ‘art as production’ coincides with Althusser’s concept of ideology , Eagleton asserts the idea that literature is an industry to construct certain ideologies. It supports Althusser’s theory that every institution helps dominant class to hold its power. As Eagleton says, “Critics are not just analysts of texts; they are also (usually) academics hired by the state to

prepare students ideologically for their functions within capitalist society” (Eagleton, 1976, p.55). It explains the idea that literature and books are not body of meanings but these are tools used by state supported classes to sustain their rule over masses.

### **Role of RSAs in the State:**

Louis Althusser argues in his essay, ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’(1970), argues that the apparatus which includes institutions like the police and military forces, courts and administrative offices, political parties, etc. is RSA and it serves as a repressive mechanism for bourgeoisie to dominate working class .He argues, “Repressive suggests that the state apparatus in question 'functions by violence' - at least ultimately (since repression, e.g. administrative repression, may take non-physical forms)”. (Althusser, 2014, p.243) . Marx states that bourgeoisie employs RSA to uphold their power and to impose laws that are beneficial for their interests. Althusser coincides with Marx argument that RSA is a toll used by ruling class to dominate working classes. RSA is a basic concept in Marxist theory that depicts the mechanism of control and domination used of ruling powers to preserve their power and privilege, and the only way out from this is resistance by working classes.

The Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) operates essentially through violence which includes different forms as physical violence via police and military force, legal constraints, ideological violence like propaganda, etc. The main concern of RSA is to ensure power of ruling class and suppress working class through different modes of action. RSA is not rational or neutral apparatus but it serves as a tool of bourgeoisie to maintain its dominance. Althusser argues it roles, “The role of the Repressive State Apparatus, insofar as it is a repressive apparatus, consists essentially in securing by force (physical or otherwise) the political conditions of the reproduction of relations of production which are in the last resort relations of exploitation” (Althusser, 2014 p.247). Althusser argues that this exploitation and violence is not only helpful in the production of political and military dynasties rather it provides a way for the action of ideological exploitation too. RSA provides a shield for the activities of ISA and it is an intercession of the RSA that guarantee, “harmony’ between the Repressive State

Apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses, and between the different Ideological State Apparatuses (Althusser, 2014, p.248).” It is clearly understood that RSA and ISA work for each other, and it is helpful for dominant classes to keep their dominance because both the state apparatuses are helping each other.

In the novel, a tyrannical raid by the police helps Khan Bhadur in his election campaign. The police is bribed by Khan Bhadur to get skylarks out of election and the raid on Skylarks’ residence results in severe injuries of main party members and their main party members are hospitalized, that’s why skylarks are unable to take part in elections. This pre-planned raid by the police ensures Khan Bhadur’s victory and ultimately he becomes the chairman of the village. The whole incident depicts the role of repressive state apparatus (RSAs) in shaping political outcomes, and these institutions create a favorable environment for certain politicians to work freely. As Khan Bhadur’s strategy to get voter’s attention is notable as he offers lavish meals to those who join his political meetings , as it is stated in the text, “his agents would go around in flashy cars, and had no end of new methods for buying over the voters” (p.215).

He also offers monetarily incentives, such as, “ten rupee per vote”(p.216), and gives fifteen rupee to slogan shouters, while clappers receive one rupee each in his political shows. Additionally, his speeches are written by a newspaper editor to manipulate uneducated masses with green gardens. Despite all these corrupt practices of Khan Bhadur, he wins elections over the skylarks, demonstrating how RSAs and ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) collaborate to favor the dominant class, enabling their puppets to win desired seats. Consequently, politicians are compelled to serve the interests of the upper classes. Althusser articulates this dynamic, noting, “there is a tendency to add that this is only natural, since the workers who daily experience the economic exploitation whose victims they are not equally familiar with the mechanisms of political class struggle, and thus of political oppression and the ideological subjection exercised by the capitalist state” (Althusser, 2014, p.117). The lack of awareness in general masses regarding political mechanisms provides a favorable situation to upper classes to perpetuate dominance.

The novel narrates a grim tale of Pakistan's journey, in which country is unable to find any stability at economic or political level. Since the birth of country in 1947, the state is crumbling badly and struggling for its existence. The major problem is to behave like a capitalist state and political use of state departments which help dominant classes to sustain their rule over lower classes. Pakistan has practiced a long haul to establish itself as a stable state but all is in vain due to interventions of state apparatuses in politics. The novel, *Basti*, is written in 1960s but role of repressive state apparatuses is still same after 2000s. As a researcher states, "ongoing political protests in the capital may trigger a new round of direct military intervention in the country's governance." (Kronstadt, 2014), p.01). As police force helps Khan Bhadur to win elections against skylarks in past, military intervention is helping desired politicians to win in present, it shows that the role of repressive state departments is still same. "The Pakistan military is known to be the country's main power broker" (Allison Meakem, 2024), wrote an international analyst before 2024 elections which shows that the whole system is controlled by a single state department and it shows the importance of repressive state apparatus in state's politics. Allison Maekam also quotes Pakistan's former ambassadors' remarks about military role in which he states that military denies its role in politics but politicians are following the general's orders. If we look at the fundamental law of Pakistan then armed forces are under the control and command of federal governments but unfortunately these state apparatuses are always used to exhibit capitalist rule within the state. A renowned economist Ishrat Hussain states that the central problem of Pakistan is narrowly based elite's command of state apparatus to advance its private and parochial interests. The statement of Ishrat Hussain coincides with Althusser, "The state is explicitly conceived as a repressive apparatus. The state is a 'machine' of repression, which enables the ruling classes to ensure their domination over the working class. (Althusser, 2014, p.239)

It is undoubtedly clear that since its emergence state of Pakistan is in the hands of its dominant classes and repressive state apparatuses play a significant role in the domination of ruling class. As Khan Bhadur successfully established him as a

winner through the use of state apparatuses and skylarks are defeated, it narrates the grim tale of bourgeoisie's domination over working class. Through the analysis we come to know that situation of 1960s and 2000s is same, Khan Bhadur is present in both eras, culture of fake allegations is more strong in present, law maker and law breakers are still same but the only difference is in R/S value and difference between two social classes are still same.

#### **Role of ISAs in the State :**

ISAs play key role to dominate the minds of common masses as Althusser explains it that without the help of ISAs state is unable to function for the help of dominant classes. Althusser mentions different institutions of the society and Church is one of them. If we take this in Pakistani context, Church is replaced by Mosque and it plays pivotal role in people's ideology. Religion is very close to the hearts of individuals in Pakistan and dominant classes tries to use it for sustaining their power and status. According to Althusser, "Thus schools and [mosques] use suitable methods of punishment, expulsion, selection, etc., to 'discipline' not only their shepherds, but also their flocks." (Althusser, 2014, p.244). The Moulvi sitting in mosque tries to give certain codes of life to his listeners, who are unable to read and write, and plays his part intentionally or unintentionally in Elite-centric ideology.

The very same idea is discussed by Shaukat Siddiqi, in the mid of the novel, when a progressive group of society wants to build a hospital in the village as it has no hospital before. The progressive group is ready to start the construction of the hospital, but in a very short period of night, some people start building mosque at that place. When they appear on the sight next day, they are shocked to see and inquire about the situation. Here they receive a very interesting reply, an old man is standing there and says, "Last night when I was coming home ... the site was definitely empty. All I can say is that Allah must have sent his angels to do it. I can't think of any other explanation" (p.167). If we look at Althusser theory of ideology, old man is an 'ideological subject', who is speaking freely but in reality he is helping dominant people of the society, who use religion to remain in power. Althusser states, "In the modern world it is subjectivity, just as universal a principle: the

economy is subjectivity, as is politics, religion, philosophy, music, etc.” ( Althusser 2010, p.147). For Althusser, old man is a subject in the hands of dominant class, because he does not know that the mosque is built by Khan Bahadur, a politician, who is taking part in upcoming elections, who do not want to work for poor. For Khan Bahadur, sorry state of people always helps him to exploit them without any effort.

Khan Bahadur knows that this work of well fair is going to win a good number of votes, because no duty is important than religious duty. A man standing beside the new mosque, says, “Only Allah understands the secret of his works” and another one replies, “Yes, yes. It’s his power; it’s his miracle”(p.168). Althusser is right to define common masses as ‘subjects’, because these people are labeling Khan Bahadur’s miracle with a miracle of God. As one of the member from progressive society, known as sky-larks, questions Khan Bahadur, he replies, “This is a matter of faith and religion for which I would sacrifice my very life”(p.169). The place that is selected for hospital building, now having a mosque and people are praying for Khan Bahadur over his pious work. Now, people of the village accept it without any question and it is, “the cause of a hired maulvi”(p.173). Althusser rightly remarks, “A bourgeois party enjoys the resources and support of the established bourgeoisie, its [ideological] domination, its exploitation, its state apparatus, its Ideological State Apparatuses, and so on” (Althusser, 2014, p.226). Due to ‘hired maulvi’ Khan Bahadur is succeeded to win the hearts of people and it is fruit of this pious work that he wins the election and elected as a chairman of the village. Agon Hmaza, a Marxist critic gives solution to the very problem, and states, “The [mosque ] will have to reinvent itself. This can be done only if the exploited, the oppressed, and the excluded, join forces and work toward radical emancipation”( Agon, 2016, p.169). As progressive movement of skylarks is failed due to ideological subjectivity of masses, it is need of the time that people must join each other to emancipate themselves from these ideologies in order to get free individuality. Otherwise, state supported ideologies will perform their role to make common people subject of their will and it will help them to continue their domination over society.

Religion plays a key role in determining Pakistan’s voting preferences and it is used to construct socio-political attitudes of the people. Religion and its use in politics of Pakistan helps dominant classes to sustain their power because people of this state are very sentimental about religion and these sentiments regarding religion are the main cause of exploitation. As Althusser state: “ [Religion] ensure subjection to the dominant ideology, or else the 'practice' of it; every agent of production, exploitation, or repression, to say nothing of 'professional ideologues' (Althusser, 2014 p.52, ). Its practices at political level and use of religio-political narratives by the politicians help them to win their desired positions. Like Khan Bahadur many politicians of present use religion as a tool to dominate voters mind. In elections of 2018, the rhetoric of Riyasat-i-Madina model was used by a certain political party. Arifa (Noor, 2024), a dawn columnist writes before elections of 2024 that it is no party will immune to the use of religion and it is not last election in which religion is being used. She expands her argument by saying that inclusion of blasphemy as an election issue will make use of religion more lethal.

A researcher states, “Religion is understood as a transcendental force which operates in Pakistan as a political ideology.” (Waseem & Mufti, 2009, p.10). The use of religious ideology help politicians or perhaps it helps state to achieve its final destination of subject formation. As Althusser has described religion as an ideological state apparatus and its use by Pakistani state since its emergence has become clear from the above discussion. The use of ideological state apparatuses by any state has one important reason and it is to make people subjects. In Pakistan, religion is one of the most widely used ideological apparatus which helps dominated classes to sustain their rule over working classes.

### Conclusion:

This study has shown the key roles of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) and Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) within the context of Shauqat Siddiqi’s novel God’s Own and how the use of these apparatuses in 1960s are still in use by the state. The study depicts that working classes are always under the hegemony of ruling class and it becomes easy by the use of ISAs and RSAs. By utilizing Althusser’s theoretical framework the

study delves into the pivotal role of religion and state institutions in state politics. Moreover, the vivid illustration of state mechanism shows that ISAs and RSAs collaboratively work to sustain social hierarchies.

The study depicts that ideologies are man-made or perhaps state produces certain ideologies to preserve power dynamics within the state. The collaboration between RSAs and ISAs is not coincidental but it is deliberately linked by the state to help dominant classes. The research shows that since emergence of Pakistan as a separate state, role of politicians is same and they are willingly helping ruling classes to exploit working class. The analysis of the novel through contemporary realities of Pakistani state exhibit the gloomy fact that only name and rhetoric of politicians are changed but their use to sustain power within state is same.

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