Antonio Gramsci’s Concept of Hegemony: A Study of the Psyche of the Intellectuals of the State

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on Antonio Gramsci’s Concept of Hegemony. How does the implementation of ideology of the intellectuals take place in society through the different institutions and apparatuses? Intellectuals make strategy to control the ruling system in which consent and coercion are included of the people. It also describes that every institution gives assistance to ideology, and moves under the supervision of the intellectuals.

Antonio Gramsci was one of the most prominent Marxist thinkers of the 20th Century. He propounded the Concept of Hegemony. A country is governed by a specified ideology that is made by its intellectuals. The meaning of ideology in broad sense is the embodiment of all apparatuses of the ruling system. The intellectuals establish self-servicing ideology which common men and working class cannot see through it. Gramsci makes an in-depth analysis of the posturing made by the intellectuals. In his volume Selections From The Prison Notebooks Gramsci defines Hegemony: “Hegemony as a form of control exercised by a dominant class, in the Marxist sense, a group controlling the means of production; Gramsci uses intellectual group to stand in euphemistically for class” (15).

It seems that everything is determined by Intellectuals because even thoughts, goals and dreams of the people are the products of their superstructure. Bobbio has been very rightly argued:
Gramsci’s hegemony implies not only a political leadership but also the factor of cultural ….

Hegemony has not closely related to a new and wider kind of society and a new conception of the world. (114)

About Hegemony, in his critique *Literary Theory Today* Nayar has quoted comments from Gramsci’s volume *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* that:

Dominant classes maintain their position not only through act of coercion but also through symbolic action…. Hegemony is the nexus of material and ideological instruments through which the dominant classes maintain their power. Hegemony thus mediates between the ruling ideas and the subjects. The hegemony of the ruling/dominant class is maintained through coercion and consent. The material sphere is a “structure” that is allied with a superstructure of ideas. These ideas are institutionalized in the civil society; the law courts, the bureaucracy, the religious and educational systems. The coercive apparatus is the state with its army and police apparatuses. (114) In case of hegemonic control, in his book *Literary Theory Today* Nayar has been very rightly observed: “School works as a positive educational function and the court as a repressive and negative educational function which are the most important state activities in the implementation of ideologies” (115).

Hegemonic apparatuses of the intellectuals are:

**Economic structure:** In man’s life economic conditions play very significant role because man’s life is almost determined with capital (prosperity). Livelihood affects relations with other persons, and with world. Intellectuals establish terms and conditions of economic structure of the country. They determine that who will be peers, assistants and subordinates
in economic structure. They set the policy for a society shrewdly, and even determine that, in reality which sections will gain the benefits of the policy and which will not. They also establish terms and conditions that how will run business and industry of the country. Gramsci has been rightly remarked:

… directed our attention to the key economic function of the ruling group, which requires the consent of the groups under its hegemony. He also made clear the force is used against the rival groups, not against the allied groups. (119)

**Class structure**: Ideology establishes the structure of the civil society, and what will be its cultural values, norms, faiths etc. It determines that how many sections and sub sections will be in society and how will work etc. Strinati rightly recommends about the concept of hegemony:

Subordinated groups accept the ideas, values and leadership of the dominant intellectuals neither because they are physically or mentally induced to do so, nor because they are ideologically indoctrinated, but because they have reasons of their own. (168)

Intellectuals are the base of the superstructure of the ruling system because their principles work as the rules and regulations of the ruling system of a country. The supremacy of the intellectuals is based on economic domination, moral leadership, ideological attitude etc. Intellectual class persuades the classes of society to accept moral, political and cultural values of the intellectuals because these are fine and valuable for a good life. They try to get the consent of the subject not only on the
base of peaceful manner but also sometimes they use physical force or coercion with wisdom. Strinati rightly remarks:

Intellectuals in society, including fundamentally but not exclusively the ruling class, maintain their dominance by securing the spontaneous consent of subordinate groups, including the working class, through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and intellectual groups. (170)

In the perception of intellectuals’ strategy, in his treatise *Hegemony: Studies in Consensus and Coercion* Boothman has been very rightly remarked: “The exercise of hegemony … is characterized by the combination of force and consent which balance each other reciprocally” (348).

**Ideology**: Ideology is the superstructure of the ruling class because through it, the intellectuals express their thoughts, interests, philosophy, personality etc. Thus ideological hegemony is as the recourse of maintaining and legitimizing the intellectuals’ ideology. Gramsci’s notion of ideology suggests:

“Men acquire consciousness of structural conflicts on the level of ideologies.” Those revolutions are facilitated by shifts in the economic structure and their outcomes are decided on the level of ideologies. Ideology is thus the site of class conflict for Gramsci. He redefines ideology by emphasizing the institutional and cultural bases of ideology. Ideology may be of any form: Political propaganda, sermons, folklore, and popular songs. Ideology is not false conscious, simply because for Gramsci popular songs and superstitions are themselves materials forces. Ideology is an object of interpretations. The purpose of a ‘Philosophy of praxis” is to uncover the roots of the development of the current ideologies. (215)
Intellectuals maintained control not only with state power, violence, political and economic coercion but also through ideology. They develop a hegemonic culture which propagates its own conventions, customs, ethics, faiths etc. so that these can be the common values for all. Simon rightly remarks: “… the practices of the intellectual class or its representatives to gain state power and maintain it later” (25).

Gramsci’s hegemony refers to a process of moral and intellectual leadership through which, dominated and subordinate classes are settled in society. Gramsci has been very rightly remarked:

State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules. (244)

**Religion:** It is the powerful apparatus of the intellectuals which is implemented in a society through the priests and Bishops. Customs, rituals, priests, religious norms move through the ideology because all are the parts of the ideology. As the apparatus of the intellectuals; religious and spiritual norms control minds and conscience of the people in many spheres of the life. Sometimes one’s religion norms seem opposite to other but ultimately their disputes terminate because these disputes create deliberately so that people may engage in such activities and rule of the intellectuals’ moves continuously.

**Education system:** Established educational institutions are very important parts of the strategy of the intellectuals, and which kind of education would be given to society is determined already and this is provided through educational institutions i.e. schools,
colleges, universities etc. because intellectuals prepare the norms about the literature, movie, syllabus, history etc.

**Political Parties:** All political parties seem opposite to each other but all these move according to established norms of the ideology of the intellectuals. Political Party formulates the structure of consciousness which expresses the views of a particular class. Intellectuals determine legal and political forms, and they present a process in which men become conscious of a fundamental economic variances and fight for it. In outer perspective, court and law seem work for the common man and its justice, but in reality they give assistance to the ideology of the intellectuals. Through ideology rules and regulations of the army and police are settled by the intellectuals, but in publically these rules seem that they are for the protection of the public but in reality these are tools of the strategy of the intellectuals.

**Media:** Media is the colossal apparatus of the ideology because which kind of information, news, shows etc. would be presented to a society are determined already but publically, media persons show that they are giving service to the public, and media is taking the voice of suppressed people but indeed, media follows the established rules of the intellectuals. Intellectuals prove themselves as the best personalities because whatever they do is for the welfare of the people. Intellectuals describe social life, feelings and experiences through the language of culture, about which the subject is unaware. Hegemony is the way of the intellectuals that controls and influence of the thoughts and life, of the people.

**Historical Prospect:** What Gramsci was trying to achieve through developing his concept of hegemony, it is useful to look at the historical Context that he was responding to as well as the debates. The term hegemony had been in general use in socialist circles since the
early 20th century. Its use suggests that if a group was described as hegemonic then it occupied a leadership position within a particular political sphere. In his essay “Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method” Cox has been very rightly observed:

Hegemonic class is essential for an historic bloc to exist because it maintains cohesion and identify within the bloc through the diffusion of a common culture. ... intellectuals perform the function of developing and sustaining the mental images, technologies and organizations which bind together the members of the class and of an historic block into a common identity. (168)

Intellectuals: The domination of the ideology of the intellectuals and hegemony are inter-related. The attainment of domination requires a certain form of hegemony, and political power and ideological domination entails the realization of hegemony because hegemony is the synthesis of domination and leadership. Through ideology intellectuals display their intrinsic nature. In the case of the ideology, Nayar has been very rightly argued:

Intellectuals are people in whom the philosophical instinct is better developed than others. There are two kinds of intellectuals (a) the organic type are those who are needed by the new class to develop a new social order (b) traditional intellectuals are those who remain tied to an earlier historical period. Both types help construct a cultural-social unity that forms the basis of a “historical bloc”. A historical bloc represents a unification of various groups with differing interests ...under the leadership of the party. (116) It seems that through ideology the intellectuals become as the supreme power of a country. They provide
assistance to the proletariat, in making its cultural values, society structure, economic, political leadership etc. Gramsci rightly notes:

The proletariat, as a class, is short of organizing elements; it does not have its own layer of intellectuals and it will only be able to form such a stratum, very slowly and laboriously, after the conquest of state power. But it is also important and useful that a break should take place within the mass of intellectuals: a break of an organic nature, historically characterized. (336)

The State is the very important apparatus of the ideology of the intellectuals. To enforce rules and regulations in society, state uses force and assurance, and it compels the subject to accept the determined norms of it. Gramsci has been very rightly remarked:

One of the most important functions of a state is to raise the great mass of the population to a particular cultural and moral level, a level which corresponds to the needs of the productive forces for development and hence to the interests of the ruling class. (258)

Lives of Intellectuals are full of struggle; they believe in hard work; and they put themselves forward as autonomous, intelligent, creative, discrete, sensible personality of society. They also make balance among many sections of the society. Gramsci notes:

The Supremacy of social group manifests itself in two ways, as domination and as intellectual and moral leadership. A social group dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to liquidate or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can ... exercise leadership before winning
government power; it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power.…

(57-58)

Gramsci’s central insight is that the power of the intellectuals is maintained not only by direct acts of forced compliance but also by taking control of the private sector. The civil society is the vast network of contacts, associations, families, churches and informal gatherings in which people move from day to day without direct involvement with the state. Gramsci provides a useful description of the intellectuals’ dominancy. He says:

The spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life. By the dominant fundamental groups (intellectuals); this consent is historically caused by the prestige which the dominant group enjoys …. (61-62)

Thus everything moves through the ideology and it is made by intellectuals. Eventually, Antonio Gramsci’s Concept of Hegemony provides the best knowledge about the concealing power of the intellectuals, and how they implement hegemony as a tool to rule over a country.

Works Cited


