

Ideology, Interpellation and False Consciousness: A Marxist Reading of *American Fever* (2022)

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Abstract

American dream has always been a ubiquitous concept for ages. It is the nature of human beings to crave for more, people always try to seek better opportunities in order to have a better status and class. For this purpose most of them prefer to migrate to the first world countries as these countries run the ideologies of equal status for all. This study aims to analyze this concept of American dream as a false consciousness in the novel *American Fever* (2022) by Dur e Aziz Amna. The researcher applied the theoretical framework of Marxism while specifically focusing on Louis Althusser's concept of ideology (Althusser, 1971). The novel follows the journey of the protagonist Hira from an urban area of Pakistan towards the rural areas of America for a one year student scholarship exchange program. Hira was fascinated by the economic and social equities that these first world countries promise but after living in the place she faced alienation. The researcher used descriptive qualitative research to deeply study the novel using Marxist reading and looked for the underlying ideologies by using Althusser's (1971) concept of ideological state apparatus and interpellation to explore how American dream becomes an ideological state apparatus that leads to false consciousness. The findings of the research reveal how Hira became an ideological subject due to the environment she was surrounded with, her surrounding acted as an ideological state apparatus. Initially, Hira was blind towards the manipulation and exploitation of the capitalist ideology of Americans but later on her illness and emotional turmoil made her realize that the dream she had was nothing more than false consciousness.

Keywords: Marxism, American Dream, Ideological State Apparatus, False Consciousness & Interpellation

Introduction

The concept of American dream has created a ground of hope and opportunity for the people all across the world for a very long time. The term *American Dream* was first coined in James Turslow Adam's novel *The Epic of America* (1931). This term is defined as land that provides better, richer and fuller opportunities moreover, it allows every individual to attain the facilities and luxuries of life equally depending on their capability and hard work regardless of their race and the place of birth. It creates the idea of social mobility to achieve betterment, however, this has now shifted more towards grasping only the materialistic goals especially after World War II. The American Dream is now seen more skeptically in the younger generation as compared to the older generations due to their experiences that reveal the reality as something totally different from the literal definition of American Dream, it does not refer to the economic or class equality rather it means that everyone deserves an equal opportunity to strive for better. This concept of American Dream is showcased in the novel *American fever* (2022) by Dur e Aziz Amna.

American fever portrays the journey of a 16 year old female, Hira, who was bluffed due to the American dream and was selected for a one year student exchange scholarship program in the rural area of America, Oregon. Hira was a Pakistani Muslim who belonged to an upper middle class family where her only task was to study and have better grades she had never taken part in any of the house chores as it is very common in Pakistani society to hire domestic workers, Hira's home also had these facilities. Her family was a lot in to acquiring education and speaking English fluently. Hira became an ideological subject due to the surroundings. Her experiences made her both suffer physically and mentally in America which later unmasked her disillusioned perception about America and before even completing the year long journey she had to return to Pakistan.

This research analyzes the journey and the experiences of the protagonist by using Althusser's ideological state apparatuses and

interpellation to identify the ideologies and ideological state apparatuses in order to study Marxist American dream as false consciousness. Through close reading the textual analysis helps to reveal how Hira's experiences in America made her realize the false consciousness she had. While the past researches have worked on the novel through diaspora and post colonialism, this study is significant in a way that it dissects the novel more ideologically and economically to unveil how different institutions fabricate ideas.

Research Objectives

The following research objectives are:

- To identify and analyze the underlying ideologies represented in *American Fever* (2022) through Althusser's concept of ideology.
- To examine the representation of Ideological State Apparatuses and their role in shaping the protagonist as an ideological subject.

Research Questions

The following research questions are:

- What underlying ideologies are represented in *American Fever* (2022)?
- How are Ideological State Apparatuses represented in the novel, and how do they shape the protagonist as an ideological subject?

Literature Review

Many researchers have analyzed the novel through diaspora and post-colonial theories. Palli et al. (2023) analyzed the novel from post-colonial perspective and utilized the framework of Orientalism (1978) given by Edward Said to connect the experiences of the protagonist with stereotypical views about Muslims and Pakistanis along with the concept of othering. The close textual analysis was utilized to discuss the recurring themes of racial and religious discrimination and Islamophobia along with

the diaspora concepts of mimicry and hybrid identity. The findings of the research showed the colonial influence where the Westerns are considered superior and the Eastern community is always marginalized by them and this continues to influence the perspectives all across the globe.

Similarly Qasim et al. (2024) utilized the diaspora concepts while keeping the qualitative research approach. The research analysis centered around the main character Hira. The analysis explained how the immigrant experiences of Hira made her being stuck in between the lifestyles of the two states. The environment caused physical, psychological and emotional stress which resulted in her fragmented identity. The post-colonial discourse of the narrative provided the themes of fragmentation, alienation, the identity crisis and belonging. This helped to understand the how the emotional and cultural consequences occur in immigrants life that shape their entire personality.

A similar kind of post-colonial reading was done by Abu Bakkar et al. (2024), they analyzed the journey of the main character using Para colonial identity, the term is used to refer to the lasting impacts of colonialism that continue to shape the hybrid identities of the colonized. The protagonist's experiences were analyzed by specifically focusing on the identity crisis that she faced. The theoretical model of Homi K Bhabha and Stuart Hall was kept in view to analyze the experiences in context of third space and cultural identity. The findings of the study explain that the post-colonial influence changes the personalities of the colonized and the effect lasts for decades.

Another similar kind of study was done by Aziz et al. (2025) by merging the diaspora and post-colonial elements to reflect the experiences of the protagonist with a specific focus on how immigrant students face difficulty to fit in a different culture and always seem to be stuck in between the two identities. The study also reflects the story as an autobiographical work of the author as she herself went to America for studies and faced physical and psychological restrictions. In another research study, Abdullah Yousaf & Umara Shaheen (2024) focused on the linguistic aspects of the novel and their analytical framework contained the Fairclough's three dimensional model (1962) to deeply analyze the code switching, inter-textual references and the cultural identity reflected in the novel.

The aforementioned studies focused on analyzing the novel from post-colonial and diaspora perspectives and the theoretical frameworks were mostly Homi K Bhabhas and Stuart Halls Concepts. The authors discussed the experiences of the author and there was no previous work on discussing the novel through the lens of structural Marxism so this study utilizes the Marxism concepts specifically utilizing Althusser's concepts of ideological state apparatus to analyze how her environment shaped her mind towards American Dream and how this false consciousness was broken to brought her back to reality.

Methodology

The analysis is based on the ideological concepts of Marxism which were first termed by Karl Marx and then later modified by Louis Althusser. Although Marx did not himself use the term ideology but many Marxists explained ideology as an idea of struggle between the two classes. Ideology according to Althusser is the ideas that helps people to understand the relationships in the world. Ideology collectively becomes the set of rules that are actually established by the ruling class that are for the weaker ones to serve them. These ideologies set by the capitalists mask the

economic inequalities this is referred as false consciousness. False consciousness is the idea that people blindly follow the rules and ideologies set by the ruling or authoritative class. False consciousness is central to the concept of American Dream.

The term American Dream was first coined in James Turslow's novel the Epic of America (1931). This term is defined as the dream that allows every individual to attain the facilities and luxuries of life equally depending on their capability and hard work regardless of their race and the place of birth. Marxism calls American dream as an ideology that shapes individual perceptions of equality for all.

The false consciousness in American dream creates the mindset of the people that they are themselves responsible for their economic class and instead of questioning the ideologies, people consider themselves as failures. The ideology of American dream portrays everyone having equal rights and opportunities. This shows how ideologies manipulate people into thinking that the exploitation they face is normal.

Karl Marx mentioned about the class differences based on the economic structure of the society and Louis Althusser (1971) related it to ideologies in his essay "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" he stated that ideologies works through the ideological State apparatus. These ISAs are the institutes like education systems, religion, family and society. Unlike the repressive state apparatuses that impose their rules through force, the ISAs embed their ideologies through shaping individual perceptions as following the normal beliefs and customs of the society. Another concept given by Althusser is the concept of interpellation. This refers to the individuals being hailed as subjects of the ideologies. The individuals accept these ideologies that are given by the ISAs and these are not given by force but passively shape the individuals minds into performing and acting according to them.

The researcher utilized the qualitative approach to analyze the novel through Marxism while specifically using the modified version of Marxism that Althusser called the structural Marxism. The techniques of close reading and textual analysis was utilized to deeply explore the novel by linking the cultural and economic context as Marxism studies the material conditions. The research steps included identifying the selective narrative instances where the ISAs were obvious along with looking for the ideologies and the ideological subjects. The researcher identified the instances where American dream was embedded as false consciousness and the moments where this ideology was challenged. The concepts of ISAs were used to identify the institutions that hail the individuals to obey the ideologies of the capitalists. The concept of hailing helped the researcher to understand how the ideologies transform the individuals to subjects (Althusser, 1971). The data selection was purposive as the selective instances from the novel was analyzed to have a better grip on the ideological concepts.

Discussion

The novel American fever represents the journey of the protagonist Hira from the urban area of Pakistan to the rural area of America, Oregon. For this journey she had very high hopes to achieve material success and the freedom that she desired her entire life which she somehow achieves in America but later realizes the negativity it carries. The novel represents the ideological constructs in terms of family, religion and culture. She was the ideological subject who suffered due to the blindness towards the ideological manipulation of the capitalist system of America.

From the place she was born and during her entire lifetime, her family as well as the school played a great part in inculcating the misogynistic ideology in her mind by objectifying the behavior, bodies and the dressing of the girls. The girls had to act a certain way in order to avoid the male gaze towards them.

In her school, the females were treated like puppets, they had to act a certain way, speak in a way to be acceptable by the society and they also had to dress according to the societal and cultural norms. Amna mentions an incident where Mrs. Saleem, her teacher instructed the students to make a line and took a ruler to measure the length of the shirts that should be knee length. When the teacher turned towards her, Hira was wearing loose baggy clothes and she asked a question sarcastically, "Allah approves of this length, ma'am?" (Amna, 2022, p. 24). This reflected the unnecessary checklists the girls had to fulfill in order to be called a student of that specific school. The societal ideology is that the females are to follow certain rules which are fabricated under the Islam teachings in order to survive smoothly in the Pakistani culture, this is just another way of making women obey the patriarchal norms. Mrs. Saleem responded with a harsh utterance, "Arrogance is a terrible look, And trust me, our society does not forgive it in young ladies like yourself" (Amna, 2022, p. 24). Women have been forever the ideological subjects of the society, the one who disobeys is called as arrogant in the same manner like Mrs.

Saleem called Hira as the girls who talk back are considered bad mannered. These types of instances create a distasteful hatred in people's minds towards the society and culture they live in. The anxious environment of the schools also creates a lot of hatred among the students and all they want is the freedom from these things and to have better opportunities somewhere else. In the same way, Hira wanted to have freedom after completing school and wanted to move to America. "Instead, I nodded and walked out, towards freedom into a summer, leading to America" (Amna, 2022, p. 27). This reflects the Marxist concept of American dream that the land of USA provides a better opportunity equally to the ones who try and put efforts. Hira also desired a life free of the restrictions that her school had implied on her. This reflects the fabricated beliefs among the people that America provides freedom to the women and they are treated better as Hamid said, "Americans think our women are so oppressed, they can't do any wrong" (Amna, 2022, p. 91). Hamid's stance was contradictory to Kelly's life, the women over there were treated no less than labors, they worked, earned and fulfilled motherly duties as well the way Kelly did. Hira's concept of freedom involved walking around the road alone and no dress code restrictions in the school, she desperately wanted to have it in America but when she got that then she realized that American concept of freedom had its own rules and regulations. The women had the freedom to live alone and be independent but it did involve being restricted to do all the house chores independently as well. "There were freedoms I had wanted to jealously claw at my entire life— walking alone on empty streets, whistling in public, holding the ember tip of a cigarette between my fingers— but I had never considered stripping to my bra as freedom before" (Amna, 2022, p. 78). The way Kelly got abandoned by her boyfriend also revealed her view about America as a myth of the freedom. Kelly had to raise her daughter independently which psychologically affected her daughter as well. Hira had never taken part in any of the house chores while living in Pakistan but when she moved in with her host family she had to learn to do all the chores by herself as Kelly clearly mentioned it to do everything independently. "American moms, she said, are not like Pakistani women. They have jobs, and they've volunteered to host you. For free—remember that none of these families are being compensated. You should be ready to look after yourselves

and do chores" (Amna, 2022, p. 35). Kelly flaunted her favors here and became an ideological state apparatus teaching Hira that she should be grateful for living with them as she was not compensated by the government to be the host family. This also refereed to accept America the way it is and learn to live according to it. This also showcased that Hira's desire to move up a class actually decreased her class level and the American dream she was intoxicated with was not real at all. This was due to her parents as they wanted their child to study abroad for a better future and prosper economically. "it was that desire to move further up the rungs of class, the forever promise of progress, and the conviction that this progress equated to westward movement, that made my parents decide that sending their young daughter across two oceans was a good idea" (Amna, 2022, p. 31). "We want you to take advantage of every opportunity America gives you" (Amna, 2022, p. 41). This reflects the false consciousness of the American dream that Hira's family had, once she moves to America she will make her family move up a class to have better life opportunities. This is also the Althusser's ideological concept that the ideology's physical existence is in the form of material. This physical existence is in the form of people, the movement of people from one place to another to achieve the better materialistic life.

This false consciousness was broken when Hira struggled to earn for herself independently. "where the state of opportunity is such that I haven't been able to find an afterschool job in five months" (Amna, 2022, p. 17). One day her friends visited her and Hira mentioned, "I am in America to learn about new things. I am so tired of new things" (Amna, 2022, p. 217). Hira was fed up with the lifestyle over there and was just going on with everything that was happening around her.

Hira's mother also wanted her to avail the benefits of scholarship but she also had suspicions about the place as most of the people who go abroad rarely return, some settle there for the better lifestyle and some suffer like proletariat. "She said the road to America is one-way. Whoever goes there gets consumed by it" (Amna, 2022, p. 31).

This utterance by Hira's mother portrays America as an ideological state apparatus that Americans try to impose their ideologies to the ones who try to survive there. This was vividly observed when Hira was interviewed for the scholarship program about jihad and she smartly answered the words that favored Americans ideologies. "What if someone invites you to jihad during your year abroad in America?" (Amna, 2022, p. 29).

This shows the emphasis the capitalists create in order to be obeyed and pressurize the others to act in way that only benefits the ones in power, it also reflects the traces of Islamophobia but is inclined more towards capitalist's obsession to force others to surrender. They only favor the ones in their country who are ready to surrender themselves completely including their self-respect, ego and beliefs. The ideological subjects blindly follow their culture and the rules despite considering their own norms this was also vividly mentioned when Hira's father had no issue with coeducation in America but was against it when she was in Pakistan. Hira also became the ideological subject in America where the state, the family she lived with, her peers and the school became the ideological state apparatuses and played a key role to reveal the false consciousness of American Dream. In Lake View High, during the lunch time in cafeteria, Hira only ate bread and few of the fruits and vegetables due to the reason that the school had no separate lunch plan for the Muslims, On Eid, there was no holiday for the Muslims like the Muslim countries so Hamid and Hira had to go to attend the classes and on that day pork was being served "They're serving pork today" (Amna, 2022, p. 114). This does reveal the false consciousness of American dream, the concept of

equality is vividly negated here ,administrative block had no separate rules to aid the scholarship students or specifically the Muslims. The administration of the school interpellated the exchange students to act like the whites and their beliefs were given no importance.

Hira signed up for the volleyball practices when Kelly asked her to, she went there daily and often faced strange looks from her peers due to the fact that she wore leggings under her skirt and she was pushing herself to play it daily, it made her legs hurt, her mother told her to quit, Hira talked to Kelly about it and told her mother that, "She said Americans don't quit" (Amna, 2022, p. 81). This indicated how her host family became an ideological state apparatus and she became an ideological subject. Where she had to obey and behave according to the host family and she unconsciously accepted the lifestyles of the Americans. "I hope you like dogs. I nodded with force. Rabia had told me that Americans treated their pets like children and got offended if you didn't like them" (Amna, 2022, p. 65).

When Hira reached Kelly's home she saw Kelly's dog, she was scared of it but had to mask it. This also reflects the fact that American dream restricted her psychologically as well, she knew if she did not act according to them she would not be treated like the normal citizens.

Hira made some new friends in Lake View High, her closest friend was Hamid who was also an exchange student from Oman .Hira and Hamid shared the same trait of being an outsider at the Lake View High. Both of them faced the same kind of racist looks and discrimination. Hamid had an instructor who told him about avoiding using the Arabic language as the post 9/11 media influence created hatred and fear among the Americans towards Muslims and Islam. "My coordinator said not to speak in Arabic too much. It scares them" (Amna, 2022, p. 91). Hamid faced more bullying than Hira ,he was called as "Ahmed the terrorist" (Amna, 2022, p. 95). Hira tried to speak up for him but Hamid stopped her and claimed that friends joke that way this reflects that ideological subjects do turn blind towards the harshness of the ideologies, Hira and Hamid did the same . "A couple of boys had taken to calling him Ahmed the Terrorist, and he either didn't mind or did a great job Pretending" (Amna, 2022, p. 95). Hira admired the fact that Hamid dealt with the situation in a quiet calm manner. This shows how Hira was trying to be positive while ignoring the fire burning inside her heart. It also reveals that the ones who are in power try to manipulate the ones who don't share the same status as them.

Hira started to fit in according to each and everything but at the same time she desperately missed Pakistan, her family and all the things that she used to do over there. The effects of the American environment started appearing on her body as well, she started to get weaker and weaker day by day. This broke the false consciousness of her mother's American dream as she said "America fattens everyone up" (Amna, 2022, p. 76). She said it jokingly but it was true for many people as fried items do cause weight gain .Hira's friend Zahra who also moved to America under the scholarship program, gained a good amount of weight due to the fact that the place she was in was economically better than Oregon and when she met Hira she felt a visible difference. "You're so skinny! she exclaimed, holding my wrists in her hands. How did you manage to lose weight in this country?" (Amna, 2022, p. 157). Hira did get consumed by the American environment which her mother feared. This was due to insufficient meals as Kelly did not cook for her three times a day like it's a common practice in

Pakistan, despite she was asked to expect only dinner, "She also told me that dinner was the only meal I could expect from her" (Amna, 2022, p. 96). The meals Kelly cooked were also pastas which caused weakness. Hira started to feel fever, weakness and coughing. She was considering it something as normal and heard a conversation between Amy and Kelly where Amy said, "Mom, you have to take her to the doctor when she comes back, Her cough isn't getting better. Crista was asking me if she has Pneumonia. Why did you sign up if you can't take care of her?" (Amna, 2022, p. 156). This conversation hit her hard "Heat pricked at my jaw and crept up my cheeks. In Pindi coughing and Sneezing in the classroom were commonplace, as much a part of the winter Landscape as early sunsets and foggy mornings. How odd I must have Looked in the hallways of Lakeview High, sick for days among strong, Healthy bodies" (Amna, 2022, p. 156).

She still tried to ignore it until one day she coughed up blood on her pillow then she decided to visit the doctor with Kelly. She was diagnosed with Tuberculosis. This diagnosis became an eye opener for to wake her up from the false consciousness towards reality. She was quarantined for a long time where she reflected on her past and present. Hamid gave her Urdu books to read she started to enjoy reading Urdu .The loneliness made her to connect with her culture through books. During her quarantine she received a news that her grandfather passed away, she wanted to immediately leave for Pakistan but she was not allowed to go. The treatment she got from the Americans during her illness and especially after her grandfather's death she wanted to go back to the Pakistan in her winter break she visited Zara in New Jersey where she met Habib, he asked her the reason of her desperate decision to return to Pakistan to which she replied "I want to be around people who look like me" (Amna, 2022, p. 166). This made her realize the importance of belonging and living in one's own land which American dream can never create for the immigrants. This broke her false consciousness about America that she was not welcomed by the Americans.

When she told Kelly that wanted to go back to Pakistan she tried to stopped her and told her that she should complete her studies then she should move back to Pakistan but Hira justify her self and said that she is tired of this alienated county and people "Returning to that life comfortable and familiar, among people who have been shaped by the same biases" (Amna, 2022, p. 222). This revealed that Hira had stopped becoming an ideological subject and realized that she wanted to be among the people who know her and own her .When Hira got better, she had no worry about completing the studies in America, she wanted to go back to Pakistan immediately. On the flight back to Pakistan, Hira was jubilant realizing the fact that she would be known by her own name and Pakistani identity .She recognized her people, felt an unusual relief to have a sense of belonging. "These are my people. Not Kelly or Amy. Not the Indians at JFK. Not the New Jersey Pakistanis. It's these men and women, with tongues tangled in Shahpuri and Mirpuri and Pashto, who are plucking out sim trays and inserting Ufone and Telenor sims, who are counting out the flimsy, dirty notes of the State Bank, whose hair is the kind of black on which you can still see an ant move— these people are mine" (Amna, 2022, p. 231). Her ideological narrative changed here, Her American dream brutally revealed the reality but created a soft corner in Hira's heart for Pakistan and Pakistanis.

Findings

The findings of the analysis show Hira as an ideological subject interpellated by her surroundings. Her family, the school, Kelly and other American natives, and the lake view high acted as an ideological state apparatus. Her family acted as a first ideological state apparatus. The way Hira's family focused on the English language skills of their kids, the jubilant reactions of Hira and the people around her unveiled the embedded ideologies of American superiority. This also reflected the class system of Pakistan. The one who speaks English and has his life aligned according to the American culture is considered as a well-mannered and an educated person. Her family was influenced by these kind of societal ideologies so they were themselves the ideological subjects, this gave rise to Hira's concept of American dream due to which she badly wanted to go abroad in order to have a better class.

America also acted as an ideological state apparatus, the institute and the people around interpellated her as a cultural representative from where she belonged to and her desire of belonging to one of them was always shattered by the Americans. She was always reminded that she was a Pakistani by asking questions about her culture and religion which made her feel like someone being pitied upon as along with the care the Americans were trying to show she could also feel that she was looked down upon. Kelly and Amy also played a great part in breaking her false consciousness as she wanted to move to a higher class and in America the way she lived reflected the lives of the lower class of the Pakistanis this made. These instances made her realize that all ideologies related to American dream were just false consciousness.

In LakeView High she and her friend Hamid were always treated differently the fabricated idea of being among one of them was completely destroyed when she encountered instances like being served pork on Eid and no facilitation during the month of Ramadan. She was interpellated by the administration to act like the native American students and her religious beliefs were not at all given the importance to facilitate her but at the same time the students around her made her feel different. The white friends they had mocked them multiple times which she just had to accept quietly. "Cruelty and intimacy often sit together" (Amna, 2022, p. 135).

Her acceptance of the bitterness broke when she was diagnosed with tuberculosis and she was treated as a threat towards the Americans. For this reason she was quarantined for a long time and the nurse herself monitored her to take the pills. She missed each and everything about Pakistan during her quarantine, the hospitality, the care, the connections and even the messy crowded streets. Her class in America changed but a level lower, her health declined both physically and psychologically. This gave an insight of enlightenment to Hira. She decided not to fall victim to all of the people's ideologies and she moved back to Pakistan and experienced internal peace. Her movement from an ideological subject to an individualist revealed that being interpellated by the ISAs is not always beneficial, one has to be realistic and try to look for the false consciousness in order not to fall victim to these and suffer.

Conclusion

Hira's journey as an ideological subject revealed a lot of reality checks for her which caused her to break the false consciousness of American dream. She had a desperate desire to go to America and achieve material success along with education. According to

Althusser's ideology, this concept of American dream is in the form of material/having a physical existence. This physical form includes all the matter including human beings. Hira's school, her own parents, the host family, Lake View High and her host family became the ideological state apparatuses for her who implemented their ideologies on her which did not actually benefit her rather she suffered physically and mentally. She became an ideological subject who was blind towards the capitalist manipulation until her body completely gave up on her and the people strictly quarantined her after her diagnosis of tuberculosis. The quarantine period served as a reflective enlightenment for her. There she realized that individual comfort mattered more than following the path of societal ideologies.

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Credit authorship contribution statement

Amna Arshad, Fatima Noor, Amna: Writing – Review & Editing, Writing – Original Draft, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Conceptualization.

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