

ALIENATION : A CONNOTATION

By Dr. Shabana Singh

Abstract:

The concept of alienation is a complex outcome of a chain of developments. It means turning away or keeping away from one's own immediate surroundings. "The word **Alienation** is derived from the Latin word '**Alienatio**'. It is a noun which receives its meaning from the verb '**alienare**' which means-----to make a thing of other, to snatch, to avoid, to remove etc. In French **Alienare** and **Alienation** are used in the same sense as the English words **Alienate** and **Alienation**. **Anomie** and **Anomia** are used as synonyms of Alienation. These words are Greek in origin. The meaning of **Anomia** is self-alienation and **Anomie** is alienation from society. Generally, **Anomie**, **Anomia** and **Alienation** are interchangeable. In English there are words other than **Alienation** ; they are estrangement, isolation, insulation and separation.

Keywords : Alienation, Alienare, Alienatio, Anomie, Anomia

Introduction:

Alienation is a state of human feeling of isolation, loneliness and physical and mental aloofness from others. It is a type of mental change, preventing the person affected, from leading a normal life. It implies a vastly comprehensive meaning that various people from various fields have interpreted its infinite aspects in their own manners and according to the nature of their respective disciplines. When life becomes complicated, the definitions of alienation also become more complicated. Alienation can be from other things ; it can be from man himself, it can be intense and minute, it can be external or internal also. The fact is that alienation is man's indispensable fact.

Variants:

Powerlessness : This is the feeling in which one feels that his destiny is not under his control but it is determined by external agents. A powerless man thinks that he cannot play an important part in any socio-political decisions. He thinks that he cannot avoid the modern problems. He accepts that this world is run by few powerful people and any powerless man can do nothing in this matter. This sense of powerlessness gives birth to alienation on the political level.

Meaninglessness : It refers to the lack of comprehensibility or consistent meaning in the domain of action such as world affairs or interpersonal relations. When a man thinks that his ambitions and desires will not be fulfilled in future, it shows that meaninglessness is gripping him. A meaningless man does not understand the incidents related to him, or he can commit the mistake of understanding them wrongly.

Normlessness : It is the lack of commitment and shared prescriptions for behaviours which culminates into distrust, unrestrained individual competition etc. e.g. the alienation of youths from social values is not natural for the discovery of new values, but it has existed by intentionally violating the social values without giving any reason. The youths are said to be in a condition of normlessness.

Cultural Estrangement : It is the deviation from the established values in the society. In cultural estrangement man deviates from the norms of the established institutions and suffers from the feeling of rootlessness, non-belongingness; he moves like a person having no idea of his line to follow, or he goes astray.

Social Isolation : The feeling of loneliness is the loss of significant relation with others. The awareness of this loneliness in sociological review, is called social-isolation. The meaning of social-isolation is the decay of creative meaningful relations between man and man and it is the separation of a man, from the culture of his society.

Self-Estrangement : It is perhaps the most difficult term to define. It is an understanding in

which one way or another, the individual is out of touch with himself. Thus he is alienated from his own self.

Approaches of various authors regarding alienation:

A considerable number of philosophers, psychiatrists, psychologists and sociologists have employed the concept of **Alienation** in their works. It has come to be one of the major themes in contemporary literature. Various artists have used their own approaches in regard to the portraiture of the mood of alienation.

Hegel's mature philosophic views in respect of alienation are expounded in his book entitled **Phenomenology**, which is a collection of some of his essays. In one of its essays **The Fragment of Love**, Hegel says that between man and man, or between man and the world, there is one basic problem and that is the problem of consistency. He does not think of the word **Alienation** separately rather only used the term **alien characters**. In its another essay, **Fragment of a System**, Hegel states that man cannot become the part of the remaining life until he merges his soul with the finite. He has elaborated the concept of **alienation** philosophically by quoting Eric Kahler :

"It is an essential characteristic of finite mind (man) to produce things, to express itself in objects, to objectify itself in physical things, social institutions and cultural products and every objectification is, of necessity, and instance of alienation."

Marx was the first thinker who discussed the concept of **alienation** in his early writings and explained its detail in the Socio-Economic context. He has imparted secular and materialistic dimensions to the interpretations of alienation. He has condemned those social features which do not allow man to achieve a society of free, creative individuals, in which each individual is free to realize his or her own nature through spontaneous and untrammelled activity in the spheres of productive life.

Erich Fromm popularized the concept of **alienation**. In his book "**Marx's concept of Man**"; he writes, "the concept of alienation is non-theistic language, the equivalent of what is theistic language would be called 'sin'." Fromm makes the world aware of the meaning and form of alienation. Later on, in the same book, he wrote :

*"I have chosen the concept of **alienation** as the central point from which I am going to develop the analysis of the contemporary social character."*

In "**New Ways in Psychoanalysis**", Karen Horney expresses her views in this regard. According to her, that man is self-alienated whose "spontaneous individual self (has been) stunted, warped or choked , he is said to be in a condition of alienation in her "**Our Inner Conflicts**", has discussed the concept of self-alienation that it is such as the "person simply becomes oblivious to what he really feels, likes, rejects, believes in short to what he really is."

According to Freudian ethics, an individual is placed in a position of antagonism to his society, and consequently he is alienated and is incomplete. The Freudian think that man's drives which are subverted by his society give birth to the diseases. Hence, he suggests that there is no sense in extending one's being into society. Without this extension, man remains incomplete without any identification. This makes him feel alienated. Thus Freud attributes man's alienation from society to the basic and unalterable contradiction between human and society.

Mac Iver has given another important psychoanalytic perspective of **alienation**. He considers it as one of the maladies of democratic man that becomes most virulent in times of crisis and turbulent change. He refers to three types of anomic persons. Firstly, those who have lost altogether, abandoned themselves to the present, but a present devoid of any significance; secondly, those who, having lost their ethical moorings, strive to the pursuit of means instead of the pursuit of ends beyond them; lastly, those who are overpowered by fundamental and tragic insecurity.

Besides Freud, Fromm and others, Marcuse has been influenced by psychoanalytical thought. He opines that alienation in the modern context has become 'entirely objective'. It means that "the subject which is alienated is swallowed up by its alienated existence." Man is alienated to the extent that he is able to identify with this alienated being. This man is incapable to revolt, because he believes that he is satisfied and free.

Some sociological scholars have accepted alienation from others in the sense of 'loneliness'. When a man says that he often feels lonely, it is clear that he is detached from others, or his relations with others are not such as he can overcome his loneliness by meeting them. Mc. Closky is of the view that "the feeling of loneliness and yearning for supportive primary relationship," are the two sides of a coin. According to him, the meaning of the feeling of loneliness, is the basis of significant relation with others and therefore to this loss, loneliness is the outcome. The awareness of this loneliness is called **Social Isolation**.

Parsons, on the other hand, states alienation as a possible product of something going wrong in the process of value acquisition through identification. Thus, for parsons, **alienation** is more concerned with dissociation from societal values rather than from other people. It may be regarded as 'social-deviance' rather than 'anomie'.

Among Existentialist thinkers the name of Martin Heidegger, Paul Tillich and Jean Paul are remarkable. We know that man lives in this world in unauthentic existence, the existence which is determined in the present only in resemblance of impersonal social requirements. Existence is authentic because man is not free to lead a life full of self-directed existence. Heidegger used the word **alienation** in this context of falling in life and unauthenticity of life from a certain viewpoint.

Paul Tillich has used the word 'estrangement' for alienation. According to him, "existence is estranged from essence..... man's estrangement from his essential being is universal character of existence." On the one hand, Tillich speaks about estrangement from 'Essence' of existence, and on the other, he refers to the estrangement of man from his basic nature condition. But his intention in both the forms is same. On this basis, we can say that Tillich's view about estrangement pertains to man's estrangement or alienation from himself. Further Tillich is of the opinion that lack of consistency with God leads man to alienated state. According to him 'Sin' creates disintegration in man's basic nature, that carries him away from God, and alienation from God, is the alienation from 'self'.

Sartre has a different approach to alienation. His approach is existentialistic alienation. In his book "**Being and Nothingness**", he feels that he is contrary to the other objects of this world, and a form of his body is that which he feels in the form of body known to others. As this sense arises in his mind, he feels alienated. According to him alienation occurs in the feeling of man. He says :-

"Point as I choose myself as a tearing away from the other. I assume and recognise as mine, this alienated me."

Impact:

Alienation proves fatal for those who are under its negative aspect. They find their life meaningless that renders them powerless, desperate, lonely, insecure and deserted. It proves harmful for their mental and physical health. On the contrary alienation could work as a boon when it is exploited for the constructive and creative activities. It enables man to withdraw himself from various mundane temptations, so that he might devote himself completely towards his work that will naturally bring to him success in every field of his life. For the acquisition of knowledge, alienation, when exploited for it, would lead to the attainment of wisdom and skill. This will prove helpful in proper comprehension of reality that lurks behind the surface of the objects. In some cases alienation becomes the cause of mal-adjustment in the society, so much so that aloofness, isolation and loneliness become man's constant companions. The result is continual chain of failures. This disturbs the balance of mind, making man gloomy and downcast all the time. As an impact of negative alienation, "spontaneity and choice are lost, direction in life, in the sense of moving towards self-realisation is missing."

Alienation that has been availed by saints and devotees, helps them in transcending not only the material world, but also their own self, as Melvin Seeman says, "Most of the alienated take a pessimistic view of the world, strong in opposition but weak in affirmation or commitment. They respond to what they see in life with scorn, bitterness and anger, often directed at themselves, and reject those values upon which an interdependent society relies. They often have intellectual passion and concentrate well, but avoid positions of

responsibility. They become involved in intense experience, ruminate obsessively about all close personal relationships, and have an agonising desire for closeness, although they often have difficulty in their sexual orientation and relationships. They readily admit their confusion and anger and their apparent contempt and often gives way to admission of unhappiness and apprehension.”

Conclusion:

It is an established fact that alienation has been a constant feature of human life since times immemorial; it has been experienced as something detrimental to the cause of man, rendering him a helpless victim of inferiority complex and bad physical, intellectual and emotional health. Generally speaking there are two different aspects of alienation --- negative and positive. The former is taken into consideration by the materialists. The glamour of material objects makes man unable to understand the inner reality of things. This makes him alienated from his own world. Such alienation renders man shrinking within his own self. But when this state of mind turns towards non-materialism, and individuals try to peep below the surface of things to know the inner reality of objects as well as of other individuals, and completely forget the outward glow of material objects, such type of alienation renders soothing and comforting effect on their whole personality. Such alienation may be termed as contemplation e.g. a research scholar, an artist, a scientist, a saint etc. This is called ‘positive alienation’.

Works Cited:

Sharma Rajiv, *“Feminine Sensibility : Alienation in Charlotte Bronte and Anita Desai”*, (Shalabh Prakashan, Meerut, 1994)

Kahler Eric, *“The Tower and Abyss”*, (New York, Braziller, 1957)

K. Shrawan, *“Alienation in the poetry of Matthew Arnold”*, (K.K. Publications, Delhi, 1996)

Fromm Erich, *“Marx’s Concept of Man”*, (New York, Ungar, 1961)

Horney Karen, *“New Ways in Psychoanalysis”*, (New York, W.W. Norton, 1939)

Paul Tillich, *“Systematic Theology”*

Sartre Jean Paul, *“Being and Nothingness”*, (London, Methuen, 1956)

Seeman Melvin, *“International Encyclopedia of Psychiatry, Psychology, Psychoanalysis and Neurology”*

Bio:

Dr. Shabana Singh is working as Assistant Professor , Department of English ML&JNKG

Episteme: an online interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary & multi-cultural journal

Bharat College of Arts and Commerce, Badlapur, MMR, India

Volume 10, Issue 4

March 2022

College, Saharanpur. She can be contacted at email ajeet8794@gmail.com

EPISSTEME