

Chapter 1

Introduction to Alienation

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Alienation has been viewed from different angles since the birth of this term through centuries. Sociologists such as Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and George Simmel have discussed this term elaborately and alienation has become the central idea in modern literature. There are many interpretations of this term. Ignace Feuerlicht gives three main meanings of this word; First it meant the transfer of rights or property; second, the act or result of turning away from friends (estrangement); and third, insanity. (Feuerlicht, 1978: 3) It has also been viewed as the estrangement of individuals from the norms and social controls of society. It is the inability of individuals to influence their situation in society; the person tends to have the feeling of meaninglessness about life. Social conditions affect the individual's life that may lead him or her to alienation. These conditions vary in different societies and therefore sociologists do not agree that alienation is the result of one particular condition or a feature of one particular society, class or culture. According to some sociologists it is a psychological state of mind where man becomes egoistical due to some infatuation. He tries to project himself better than what he is and if he fails to do so, he feels alienated. Social circumstances do affect man's psychological development, but finally it is man's self- infatuation which is central to all alienation. In modern world advancement in science, technology, industry and other public fields has completely changed man's life. Many sociologists thought 'alienation' as the effect of world wars and they considered it as inevitable impact of world wars and workers, students, intellectuals, peasants resent their lack of control over government and

economy. People in modern world or say in so called democratic countries realised that despite the right to express their views, freedom of organisation, they are denied to decide their own destinies. On the contrary they are governed by other people.

Alienation- Meaning and Origin:

‘To alienate’ means to estrange, to detach and its noun form is ‘alienation’ which means estrangement, detachment and also insanity. The word ‘Alienation’ is derived from the Latin word ‘Alienatio’ (n.) which is a noun form of the verb ‘alienare’. Alienare means- to make a thing of other, to snatch, to avoid etc. the word ‘alienare’ again has its roots in the word ‘Alienus’ which means to relate a thing of anyone with any other. The adjective ‘Alienus’ means ‘other’. The German words ‘Entfremdung’ and ‘Entausserung (EentauBerung) which incidentally do not carry the third meaning of alienation i.e. insanity are interchangeable to the word ‘alienation’.

‘Entefremdung’ is a German word. As described in Marxist literature, it was used for alienation from property. It generally meant to rob, to snatch from property. In sixteenth century the word ‘Entefremdung’ was used for the alienation of man from man. The word ‘Entasserung’ was used in the sense of natural and economic relations. It is used in the sense of man’s detachment from his natural form or self. In a way it means a thing which was man’s natural part is snatched or separated. ‘Entausserung’ means ‘Man’s alienation from himself’. Other words which are synonymous to Alienation are ‘Anomie’ and ‘Anomia’. Anomie means alienation from society and Anomia means ‘Self-alienation’. According to some

sociologists, man's alienation from society, results in his self-alienation. Other words used for alienation are Estrangement, Isolation and Separation.

Alienation – Definitions:

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, Alienation means, "the action of estranging or state of estrangement in feeling or affection." (Oxford, 1973:219) According to Encyclopaedia Britannica, "A term used with various meanings in philosophy, theology, psychology and social sciences, usually with emphasis on personal powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement, social isolation, or self-estrangement." (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1979:243) These definitions mention man's estrangement from nature, society, God and himself as well. As its interpretations vary, the definitions of alienation express different thoughts. As noted, there is no universally accepted definition of the concept.

Approaches to Alienation:

Though the term alienation has acquired popularity and significance, Alienation is a timeless state of the human condition. Sociologists have denied alienation to be a part of modern society only. According to them it is as old as man and no society or historical period is free of alienation. Certainly it is dominant in modern age but it is not a phenomenon of modern society only. It is as old as man's thinking and knowledge. It is a general feature of human history. Ignace Feuerlicht discusses how the alienation finds its expressions in biblical stories as well. The story of Adam and Eve is a story of alienation from God. Similarly Cain's story and the story of the

Tower of Babel seem to show alienation from God, home and nature and from others on a universal scale. Ignace Feuerlicht rightly puts it as,

“... alienation seems to be as old as man or at least as old as primitive Fall, whether this Fall is seen from a religious point of view, as a fall from a innocence and divine grace or from a psychological and sociological point of view as a leap (or crawl) into life as a thinking and social being”

(Feuerlicht, 1978: 21)

Alienation can be traced back in the development of human civilization. With the development of agriculture man became less dependent on Nature for his food and that was the first step towards the alienation of man from nature. But unlike capitalist society, the primitive society had control over his economic activities, the process of production and distribution of it. In capitalist society goods became commodities and producers lost control over their products. In a way men became commodities and they had to sell their labour. Marx in this sense used the term ‘Alienated Labour’ to describe the alienation of men from their self.

Modern alienation began in the middle of the eighteenth century. Until Hegel, alienation had some pessimistic connotations. In second half of the eighteenth century, it was believed that civilization, society, the state, the private property prevent the natural development of individual thus causing ‘alienation’. An individual was believed to be estranged from his true being. In the early 19th century, this pessimistic view was growing due to increasing industrialisation and civilisation. In the communist society, man was considered as a commodity or a mere tool. But after it philosophers reversed this pessimistic view. In ‘Phenomenology’ Hegel used the word ‘Entfremdung’, and he puts the idea that alienation is necessary for the totality, because totality is possible through restoration out of highest

separation. Hegel accepts that to advance forward in the direction of development the soul will have to be alienated. (Sharma, 1955:11) The German romantics, Goethe and Schiller also have references to alienation in their works. Friedrich Schiller argues that the division of labour and the increasing specialisation destroy the inner unity of human nature. Both Olympian Goethe and Friedrich Schiller refer to self alienation, social alienation, political alienation and work alienation. Schiller never used the term *Entfremdung* but in this connection Hegel is influenced by Schiller. Schiller used the words 'fremd' and 'fremdling' which may have inspired Hegel to use the term 'Entfremdung' and thus the view of alienation. He used two German words 'Entfremdung' and 'Entausserung' to describe the experience of alienation. He applied these two terms to the evolution of spirit (mind, conscience), who first creates the world (the objects, the substance) through externalization, objectification, and alienation. The spirit then experiences his own creations and manifestations as alien, and finally conquers his self-alienation through knowledge (education, culture), thus achieving his true reality and unity. (Feuerlicht, 1978: 26) Alienation and estrangement are key categories in Hegel's philosophy. He used these expressions in relation to the word 'Otherness'.

Marx took the concept of alienation from Hegel. In fact Hegelianism was the source of Marxian thought. Marx accepted the philosophy of Hegel but interpreted it in a different manner. He applied the terms *Entfremdung* and *Entausserung* to economics and social life. Though Marx was inspired by Hegel, his theory of alienation was based on the idea of man's universality. In his book *Communist Manifesto* (1848) he refers to alienation. In the views of Marx, alienation refers to the separation of things that naturally belong together. He believed that alienation is a systematic result of capitalism.

Marx's theory of alienation relies on Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) where he argues that God has not created man, instead man has created God. In a way he laid the foundation of materialistic philosophy. Marx felt the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the working masses, including women and children, he argued that because of private property and the division of labour, and man does not see and enjoy his own product as the result of his potential. In this way he becomes mere object, a part of machine or a commodity. As Marx pointed out in his earlier works alienation refers to individual expectations or attitudes. Alienation has been a general feature of human history, but alienation of labour is an unusual feature of civilisation and is related closely to the institution of private property.

Marx attributes four types of alienation in labour under capitalism:

1. Alienation of the worker from his or her 'species essence' as a human being rather than a machine,
2. Alienation between workers, since capitalism reduces labour to a commodity to be traded on the market, rather than a social relationship;
3. Alienation of the worker from the product, since this is appropriated by the capitalist class, and so escapes the worker's control;
4. Alienation from the act of production itself, such that work comes to be a meaningless activity, offering little or no intrinsic satisfactions.

(wikipedia.org)

According to Marx economic alienation is the basis of all alienation. He felt the terrifying impact of the Industrial Revolution on the working class, and every social need to create such social institutions in order to keep people out of alienation. When these institutions fail, man's state will be termed as the state of being alienated. Marx thinks that self-actualisation is the need of human activity. But Marx also stresses that every class feels alienation from

different perspectives. Capitalists and proletarians both are alienated in capitalist society. On the contrary capitalists and proletarians are equally alienated but they experience their alienation in different ways. Capitalists relate estrangement or alienation to the power whereas proletarians relate it to the powerlessness. To quote him, “The propertied class and the class of the proletariat represent the same human self-alienation. But the former feels comfortable and confirmed in this self-alienation, knowing that this alienation is its own power and possessing in it the semblance of a human existence. The latter feels itself ruined in this alienation and sees in it its impotence and the actuality of an inhuman existence.” (Singer, 1980: 39)

In his later works, (the Critique of Political Economy, Capital) Marx has discussed ‘Alienated Labour’ to present the labour system. In the view of Marx alienation of labour derives from private property. A worker produces things and this production is owned by another person who is not involved in the labour process, but controls the procedure of production. In this process the worker is alienated in many ways; he is alienated from his natural essence, estranged from nature as well as his body as his actions are determined by the owner of his labour. Similarly he is separated from his fellow human beings. Certainly a worker loses control over the process of production that can cause psychological alienation. Each individual functions as an instrument to contribute to the common wealth. A worker benefits neither from his labour nor from its product. Marx opines that man is not free to choose his field of production in the capitalist society. Thus social relations within the production process take the form of relations between material things. Social relations take the form of money relations. Therefore private property is one of the main causes of alienation. Marx criticised Hegel for

neglecting the alienation of actual man as labour and considering only the alienation of consciousness.

Marx also discussed Religion as an agent in the process of alienation. He argues that religion reverses the real relations between mankind and the world. According to him man created the gods in his own image and that man is not created by gods. But people think that Gods have created men. Alienation therefore is a social expression. Men lack control over nature and sense a distance between gods and worshippers.

Jean Paul Sartre's concept of alienation is totally different from Marx's view of alienation. Sartre's approach to alienation is existentialistic. He revived Marx's theory which assumes man as a thing. Marx says that when the production and labour of a man is controlled by the man, alienation takes place. Marx saw alienation in the context of labour class only but Sartre has tried to analyse the alienation in the life and world of writers. His approach is existentialist approach and he suggests accepting alienation in the form of the fact. According to him the rise of otherness in the personality of a man is the main reason of alienation.

Other existentialist thinkers Martin Heidegger, Paul Tillich also have contributed to it. Tillich used the word 'estrangement' rather than alienation. According to him, man's existence has the character of estrangement. He has pointed out the difference between man's existence and his essential being, from other beings and from himself and the result is loneliness, anxiety, dehumanisation and the experience of meaninglessness. He has also expressed his views about consistency with God. When there is lack of consistency with God, man becomes alienated. Tillich says that alienation from God is the alienation from 'self'.

Heidegger was of the view that existence is of two types authentic and unauthentic. Man lives in unauthentic existence. Existence is unauthentic because man is not free to lead a life full of self-directed existence and man's freedom of his decisions and choice is interrupted. Therefore alienation occurs from this unauthentic existence. He says that Marxian alienation is rooted in modern man's homelessness. In the novels of Sartre and Camus, the existentialists' ideas on alienation are well expressed in terms of terror of man's being a stranger to himself, to others and to the world.

In twentieth century, many sociologists like Max Weber, Werner Sombart agreed that alienation was the central social problem of modern society. Many writers and expressionists showed alienation in their works. George Lukacs considered 'reification' to be synonymous with alienation. In his views reification dehumanises the worker. He considered alienation as central to the capitalism.

Freud, in 1930 explained the general discontent in his *Civilization and Its Discontents*. He gave the social alienation and world alienation a psychological explanation. He explained that repression of instinctual drives results in general discontent. Erich Fromm popularized 'Alienation' in America. Fromm does not talk about alienation from society; instead he discusses alienation in society. In his views man detaches himself from nature and this detachment of man from nature is his alienation. He also considers man's alienation from other man similar to the natural alienation. He feels that the sociological alienation is due to the modern faulty socio-economic structure. (Sharma, 1955: 18) Man's alienation from other man is the fundamental fact of Fromm's concept of alienation. Today man is forced to live in his own private world without even sharing

his miseries or happiness. This condition results in the exploitation of people. Thus, according to Fromm alienation is the result of capitalist society where exploitation of exploiter is the indicator of his alienation from others. This alienation disturbs the feelings of man and encourages unsocial and egoistic nature. In 'The Sane Society' (1955) he also discusses self-alienation as the most important of all types of alienation. According to him self-alienation or the absence of self-awareness results finally in social alienation. He opines that it would be confusing to say that there is no alienation in society. Men feel alienated but every man can not express his alienation.

Some sociologists refer alienation to man's profession and relations. One approach views alienation as the result of general cultural conditions of contemporary industrial society. Weber discussed about bureaucratization as responsible for alienation whereas Durkheim held the erosion of societal consensus and social integration responsible for alienation. In spite of multiplicity of concepts of alienation, sociologists would agree that alienation reflects something about the individual in relation to society. Sociologists differ from Marx in their views on alienation. 'Loneliness' is an indicator of man's disorganised relations with others. Man sometimes is forced to make such choices which he doesn't like and he feels helpless. Moreover in his social relations he may be either happy or discontent with others. If he is not happy with the circumstances or people around him or in his field of action he feels alienated. Such an alienated individual feels powerless and thinks that he can not take his own decisions or play an important part in any social circumstances. Further he thinks that his desires will not be fulfilled in future.

3. Anomia: - This term was coined by Leo Srole and this term is closely related to Durkheim's original conception of anomie. Anomia is related to individual's socio-economic status. 'Anomia' is self alienation and 'Anomie' is alienation from society. 'Anomia' is an indicator of 'Anomie'.

In short, William A. Rushing discusses that powerlessness refers to the individual's perceived inability to influence his fate in society; normlessness to the tendency to accord legitimacy to individual self-interest rather than to honesty and norms, rules, and laws of society; whereas anomia refers to the individual's general sense of hopelessness, despair, and malaise about his situation in society. (Rushing, 1972: 9)

Alienation in today's world:-

The present study is focused on the alienation in Carson McCullers' *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* (1940) and Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*. McCullers focuses her work on the theme of man's vital craving for love, a sympathetic confidant and his urge to express himself, and his revolt against his own inner isolation. *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* is a story of isolated people who seek release through love and end up in frustration. Each of the five characters John Singer, Biff Brannon, Jake Blount, Dr. Benedict Mady Copeland and Mick Kelly unsuccessfully attempt to communicate with other human beings. John Singer, a deaf-mute is a pivotal character around whom the whole story revolves. Other characters, because of their loneliness see in Singer a confidant and ascribe him all the qualities they wish him to possess. Each one creates his own understanding of Singer from his own desires. Singer has a God-like function in the novel. Other four characters struggling with life from different angles like journey from adolescence to womanhood,

the racial discrimination, socialism and coping up with outer world with common sense. Copeland, Jake, Mick and Biff live in their illusory worlds that initially underscore their isolation. They find their refuge in Mr. Singer who has the considerate 'heart' that listens to the every word of these 'lonely hunters'. At the same time no one understands Singer's attachment to his moronic friend Antonapoulos. When Singer commits suicide their dreams are shattered and they are left alone in their alienated worlds.

The title of the novel 'That long Silence' suggests silence which women live with. There is Jaya's rebellion against enforced silence, her quest for identity and more strikingly a postponement of aggressive behaviour till it can't be postponed any more. Jaya, a failed writer, is haunted by memories of the past; differences with her husband, frustration in their seventeen year old marriage, disappointment in her two teenage children lead her to utter alienation.

Jaya experiences a great emotional turmoil between her past role as a traditional woman with all her suffering and tolerance and her adoption of the new role of modern egotistical self-assertive woman. She is torn between love and hate, liking and disliking for her own husband and life situations. Shashi Deshpande has created a tension between these two torn images of Jaya.

Mrs. McCullers and Shashi Deshpande both are mainly concerned with the spiritual isolation of the individual in the modern age. Ordinary verbal communication ends in failure and it is only through ideal communication or love which can provide temporary relief from alienation. Love is the only force that can unite people, but the intensity of love is never equal between the two persons.

Today the alienation of youths from social values has become the main topic of discussion. Their condition of normlessness is not for the discovery of new values, but it is the impact of super industrial society. The kind of alienation that occurs frequently in *That Long Silence* by Shashi Deshpande and *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* by Carson McCullers is not a kind of philosophical or religious alienation but it is a common alienation, the dreaded boredom, powerlessness, isolation and meaninglessness from which the youth in 20th century is suffering. Fromm says that alienation starts with thinking and speaking. It is a psychological phenomenon. Most of the characters in these two novels suffer agony partly because of their own egoistical natures and partly from the relational burdens which they have to carry along with them unwillingly. And in their efforts to eradicate their alienation they react to the situation differently.

In spite of many interpretations of this term not only philosophers but scientists, psychologists, sociologists have accepted 'alienation' as a social phenomenon. It is a popular notion today to describe the feeling of helplessness, misery, and sometimes a feeling of emptiness. Many thinkers have tried to predict the future of alienation. It is not an easy task to decide the future of alienation as it is not time specific phenomenon. Not a single society is free from alienation and the causes of it vary in each society. Therefore it would be difficult to say that in future there would be no alienation. Some sociologists think that among the various types of alienation some will be cured but some forms of alienation continue to exist in society and some forms will emerge in the course of time. Therefore future of alienation is unpredictable.

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