

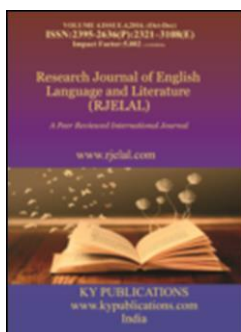


THE AGE OF ALIENATION: MAN'S ESTRANGEMENT FROM GOD AND SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT



The term "alienation" has different meanings in everyday life in science and philosophy. Originally alienation refers to some sort of mental illness but later on to man's estrangement from God and society. This paper is an attempt to analyze the various forms of alienation (layer by layer) and discuss how the modern man is doomed to suffer from the corrosive impact of alienation which manifests itself at various levels in the form of generation gaps, the credibility loss, the compartmentalization of life, the stunning of personal development and the conspicuous absence of a sense of meaning and so on. It unfolds the theme of alienation with in various layers, which is in communication in human life leading to loneliness, despair and frustration. It is an authentic study of the pervasive sense of alienation which has corroded human life from various quarters.

Key Words: Existentialism, estrangement, intrinsic isolation, indestructible loneliness, psychiatry alienation, disillusionment.

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Modern age is not only "an age of anxiety" as Auden calls it but an age of alienation as well where man suffers not only from war, famine, persecution and rain but also from inner problem a conviction of isolation, randomness and meaninglessness in his very existence".¹ The contemporary man is certainly in search of a way in which he can confront a universe which has become disjointed, purposeless and absurd. Most of the Indo - Anglian novelists, after the 50's show great concern about the inner problem of their protagonists resulted due to cultural alienation, social alienation or self-alienation. The problem of alienation and quest for identity permeates rather undoubtedly the post- modern Indo - Anglian fiction.

It would be worthwhile to learn the causes for the birth and prevalence of alienation right from the beginning before going for a deep analysis. The impact of the IInd world war and the disillusionment

of the welfare state left the curious new generation empty and puzzled. They partly envied those who had fought in the war and those labour pioneers who had helped to set up a welfare state. They partly resented the old generation, the establishment, an old aristocratic dream of high culture. "The democratic and the technological - have between them destroyed the old hard human stability and man's sense of the old hard human sense of striking individuality."² While excessive mechanization and industrialization was altering the people's mode of living, the society was fast disintegrating, sapping the bonds of fellowship among men. This disintegration was so deep that it altered the family, relationships and shook the foundations of private and public morality. They had no sense of communal belongingness. The individual, with his fractured self and with the restlessness generated by the circumstances, had

disgusting experience and dismaying sense of isolation and alienation.

The so called modern age with its prevailing climate of opportunism and cynicism has tended to alienate the sensitive mind from the social set-up. First, there is the mood of depression, pessimism, moral and spiritual vacuum created by the 11th world war. Secondly, due to the domination of the industrialization in the post - colonial society of the bourgeois world, man becomes a totally insignificant cog as a result of his robot - like role in highly automated industry. Thirdly under the impact of science, old religious faith had been shaken. In the world of one critic-cum-writer V.R. Kanadey, "The physical loneliness of the modern man as a result of the industrial society is matched by his intellectual and spiritual loneliness as a result of the pursuit of the spirit of science. Man finds himself today as a lonely being shivering in the cold night of positivism or pure existentialism, mainly because of this spirit".³

It would, no doubt, be apt and rewarding to go back to the meaning of alienation before delving deep into the problem of alienation as recorded in the works of the foreign writers, and later finds its expression in the works of the post-modern post-independence Indo-Anglian writers in general and Anita Desai in particular. The term "alienation" (estrangement) has different meanings in everyday life, in science and philosophy. The morphology and the etymology of the word suggest one broad meaning - the meaning in which alienation is "the act or the result of the act, through which something or somebody becomes alien or strange to something or somebody else".⁴ Alienation is a term which has been in use in theological, philosophical, sociological and psychological writings for a longtime. The Oxford dictionary defines 'alienation' in three ways: "estranged, with drawn or turned away in feeling or affection; to estrange or turn away the feeling or affection of anyone; mental alienation, withdrawal loss or derangement of mental faculties".⁵ Originally alienation refers to some sort of mental illness but later on to man's estrangement from god and society. Sidney Tinkelstein refers alienation as "a psychological phenomenon, an internal conflict and with hostility

felt towards something seemingly outside oneself which is linked, to oneself; and barrier erected which is actually no defense but an impoverishment of oneself"⁶.

Alienation, in theology, refers to the idea that the relation of the worshippers to god may be analogous to the alienation or estrangement between human beings. The word implies that a close relationship of affection with family and friendship has been broken, often with detrimental effects on the psyche. Man, by his sin and indifference, alienates himself from religious traditions. In the Romantic age, man was viewed as 'alienated' from nature. The concept of alienation first gained prominence in the philosophy of Hegel. To him, the external world was part of man's nature and the point was to establish the right relationship between man and his environment. The supposed objectivity of the world of nature was in fact an alienation, for man's task was to discover behind these appearances, his own essential life and finally to view everything as a facet of his own self-consciousness. It was the failure to realize, that constituted alienation.

It was Marx who amended the idealist conception of alienation exemplified in the writings of Hegel. Marx uses two words to express the concept of alienation: 'Entfremdung' and 'Entausserung'. 'Entfremdung' conveys the sense of alienation in which two people are said to be alienated from each other, while 'Entausserung' has more the sense of making external to oneself with legal and commercial overtones. David McLellan has said rather aptly as:

"It is man's nature to be his own creator: he forms and develops himself by working on and transforming the world outside him in co-operation with his fellowman. In this progressive interchange between man and the world, it is man's nature to be in control of this process, to be the initiator, the subject in which the process originates. However, this nature has become alien to man, it is no longer his, and belongs to another person or thing. In religion, it is God who is the subject of the historical process and man is in a state of dependence of His Grace. In economics, according to Marx, it is money and the processes of the market

that maneuver men around instead of being controlled by them. The central point is that man has control of this own evolution and has seen this control invested in other entities. What is proper to men has become the attribute of something else and thus alien to him"⁷

The development of the means production and especially of machines has led to an intensified alienation, the worker being reduced to an extension of a machine and usually regarded as less important than the machines, for he can easily be replaced whereas the machine cannot. Estranged from nature, estranged from himself, man is also alienated from his fellow -men. Though Marx's analysis was made in 1840's, it was only in the 1930's that Sarte, Camus, and Nathaniel, best introduced this theme of alienation in creative writing. Requentin, the hero of Sartre's *Nausea* is a representative of the modern man who has become alienated and a helpless victim caught up in the vortex of illusion and reality. Camus in his *Caligula* and *The Outsider* deals with man's powerlessness, intrinsic isolation and the meaninglessness of existence in a normless universe. Joseph Conrad in *The Outcast of the Islands* writes of the loneliness impenetrable and transparent, elusive and everlasting, of the indestructible loneliness that surrounds, envelops, clothes every human soul from the cradle to the grave and perhaps beyond.

Many contemporary novelists - Joyce, Musil, Hesse, Gide, Graham Greene, Samuel Beckett, Anthony Powell, Muriel Spart, Dorris Lessing - to name only a few, depict the world as inhuman and hostile. The unseen laws turn man into a helpless isolated victim of a monstrous system. The young, struggle to adjust themselves to an expanding economy and an outdated socio - moral convention. Alan Sillitoe in *Saturday Night* and *Sunday Morning* and David Storey in *This Sporting Life* portray the lack of communal belongingness of the people and their isolation in the mass society. The peculiar rootlessness and alienated self of man is writ large on every page of modern literature, especially in post - Independent Anglo - Indian fiction. One modern critic has aptly stated as.

"Human life is struggle, unsuccessful struggle, for most of the human beings

have something within them that prevents them from accomplishing what they dream and desire. They are maladjusted, frustrated, spiritually starved. They live and end their lives in despair. Alienation is the characteristic of modern civilization and it leads the human being to disillusionment and despair"⁸

No doubt, the modern man is in the phase of disintegration and destruction. He feels alienated at various levels from other individuals and society, from traditional religion and value systems, from the human predicament and finally from himself. In every day usage, "alienation" means turning away, keeping away, from friends or associates. In psychiatry 'alienation' means 'deviation from normality' - that is insanity. In psychology and sociology it means individual's feeling of alienness towards society, nature, other people or himself. For philosophers, 'alienation' means "self-alienation". G.W.F.Hegel Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx were the three thinkers who gave first an explicit elaboration of alienation and whose interpretations alone are the starting point for all discussions related to alienation in the present day philosophy, sociology, psychology and finally creative writings like novels and other genres of literature.

The twentieth - century differ greatly in their enumeration of the basic forms of alienation. Frederic A Weiss has distinguished three basic forms: self - anesthesia, self - elimination and self - idealization while Ernest Schachtel has distinguished four: alienation of man from nature, from their fellowmen, from the work of their hands and minds and also from themselves; Melvin Seeman has distinguished five: powerlessness, meaninglessness, social isolation, normlessness and self - estrangement; and Lewis Feuer has distinguished six forms : alienation of class society, alienation of competitive society, alienation of industrial society, alienation of mass society, alienation of race and alienation of generations.

According to the nature of that which is alienation, one may distinguish between 'alienation of things' and alienation of selves. In his famous book *The Confessions* Rousseau proclaimed his complex uniqueness:

"I am not made like any of those I have seen; I venture to believe that I am not made like any of those who are in existence. If I am not better, at least I am different"⁹

One can classify as types of social alienation the alienation of societies as a whole (such as feudal societies and capitalist societies), the alienation of social groups (Capitalists, Consumers, workers, intellectuals bureaucrats, producers etc.) and alienation of social institutions (such as the state, the church and cultural institutions). According to Roy Pascal "it could be grasped only in historical perspective. A thing cannot be alienated from itself. A self can be alienated either from something or somebody or from itself"¹⁰

Alienation can be distinguished on the basis of self and on its own activity or through the activity of another. There are different kinds of alienation of things. Alienation of self can be either alienation through others or alienation through one self. The concept of self - alienation found in Hegel and Marx can be of great interest for philosophical and creative writers. What Hegel and Marx called self - alienation is alienation of self from itself through itself. It seems plausible to say that to be self - alienated means to be internally divided, split into at least two parts that become alien to each other. The point is that a self-alienated man is one who is not, in fact, what he is in essence, for his actual existence does not correspond to his human essence. Similarly a self - alienated society is a society whose factual existence does not correspond to the real essence of human society.

The most poetic and evocative Indian novelists in English are Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Arun Joshi, Anita Desai etc., have shown a stern consistency of purpose, in their modern literary imagination which lies in its evocation of the individual's predicament in terms of alienation or quest for identity. BalachandraRajan (1920) IN Indian English fiction of the fifties and sixties illustrates realism and fantasy. His characters make self- discovery and very often find themselves alienated. Many a time they travel through a world of fantasy in order to, come in terms with the reality of the situation. Kamala Markandaya (1924) presence the mental agony of

an Indian in the alien land in her novel *The Nowhere Man* (1972), which examines psychological process of acculturation to an alien soil, and portrays an evolutionary progression from rootlessness to belongingness. Immigration breeds estrangement. In the fictional world of Mrs. Ruth Praver Jhabuala (1927), a profound study of human relationship bedeviled by cultural encounters, captures the confusions and conflicts of another set of alienated persons. Narayan Sahgat (1927), a prominent Indo- Anglian women novelist known for the portrayal of variegated female characters. Emotional alienation is beautifully visualized, the temperamental incompatibility is the cause for the husband-wife alienation which is the outcome of the hypersensitive nature of women and their inability to establish a close emotional rapport with their partner, is portrayed in her novel. Shashi Deshpande move further and catches on the subtle psychological complexities of the individual mind. Like other women novelist, she portrays the distortion of human values and the consequent de-humanization of man in a mechanical society, where an individual remains alienated from human aspect of his identity.

Anita Desai (1937) has the credit of being the first to explore the modern Indian sensibility. Her preoccupation is "more with the inner world of sensibility than with the outer world of action". She has added a new dimension to the achievement of Indian women writers in English fiction. Since her preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility and action, she is found trying to forge a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal characters. She delineates in her novels the problems and plights of alienated individuals caught in the crisis of a changing society. She excels in highlighting the miserable position of highly sensitive and emotional women, tortured by a humiliating sense of neglect, of loneliness and of desperation. The existential problem of the alienated self finally emerges to be the central theme of her novels. In her creative works, she is mainly concerned with the feeling of isolation and alienation search for existential communication and self-realization and self-fulfillment through love,

friendship and family ties. But she is a great artist who has successfully universalized the experiences of the personal life of all her characters coupled with her own personal aims and objectives in life and has really become a leading spokesman in the form of a writer for the isolated, lonely and the alienated souls of the world.

Unlike other novelists like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth PraverJhabvala and Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai is not at all satisfied with merely uncritical, prosaic documentation of social reality, for her chief concern is nothing but "the exploration of human psyche".¹² She has added a new dimension to the Indian English fiction by exploring the sensibility of the inner workings of the minds of all her protagonists delineated through her novels. "She is more interested in the psychic life of her characters and her novels do reveal that her real concern is with the exploration of human psyche".¹³ Almost all her novels are just an attempt to tackle the main problem of the modern writer - the problem of rendering "complete human personality in an age of lost values, lost men and lost men and lost men and lost gods".¹⁴ The modern man is doomed to suffer the corrosive impact of alienation which manifests itself variously in the form of generation gap, the credibility loss or personal development and the conspicuous absence of a sense of meaningfulness of life and so on. The present age has been rightly called "The age of alienation".¹⁵ The malaise of the contemporary man has been considerably aggravated by what Spengler calls "the crisis of the present". The present century has been the dissolution of certainties and as Paul Brunton points out, "never before were so many people plunged in so much uncertainty, so much perplexity and unsettlement."¹⁶ Anita Desai excels in all her novels in chartering this crisis, tormenting a sensitive souls.

Among several layers and kinds of alienation like emotional alienation, cultural alienation, psychological alienation and self - alienation, what gains prominence in her novels is 'self - alienation' which means the loss of contact of the individual selves with any inclinations or desires that are not in agreement with the prevailing social patterns as a result of which individuals are forced

to manipulate in accordance with the social demands or feel incapable of controlling their actions. Self - alienation is the more basic form of rootlessness and can thwart an individual's mental and psychic development in an alarming manner. As it forms the subject of many psychological and philosophical studies, it is this human problem that has occupied the primary interest of Anita Desai in her novels, most of which are full of autobiographical elements. She has presented the dilemma of the modern man most effectively. "No other writer as Suresh Kohli rightly observes, is so much concerned with the life of young men and women in Indian cities as Anita Desai is"¹⁷ An attempt is made in this chapter to focus on the discussion of the psychological delineation of her protagonists projected novel wise facing the dilemma of self - alienation - emotional alienation and its aftermath.

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