



## EXISTENTIALISM AND STARK NOTE OF ALIENATION IN THE MODERN LITERATURE- A DETAIL ANALYSIS IN TERMS OF POST MODERN LITERATURE

SHANTANU SIULI

Assistant Professor, Department of English, ICFAI University  
Kamalghat, Agartala, West Tripura, India  
Email- [shantanusiuli@gmail.com](mailto:shantanusiuli@gmail.com)



SHANTANU SIULI

### ABSTRACT

The term “existentialism” was explicitly adopted as a self-description by Jean-Paul Sartre. Among the major philosophers identified as existentialists were Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger, and Martin Buber in Germany, Jean Wahl and Gabriel Marcel in France, the Spaniards José Ortega y Gasset and Miguel de Unamuno, and the Russians Nikolai Berdyaev and Lev Shestov. The nineteenth century philosophers, Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche, came to be seen as precursors of the movement. The aim of this paper is to expose the importance of both existentialism and alienation of human life and how do these work and grasp the loneliness and pensive moods of human beings unknowingly. The idea that freedom being the origin of valuable idea is closely associated with existentialism which is strongly imposed in this paper.

Key words: Alienation, existentialism, cognitive meaninglessness, emotive response, absurdity of human condition.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

The existential philosophy is connected with the view of the absurdity of human condition. The aesthetic existentialism shows an individual in a strange world. Man has no reality if he unthinkingly follows social law or convention suffering anguish and despair in his loneliness, he may nevertheless become what he wishes by the exercise of free will. The existentialist though they define in doctrine attitude agree on certain points, they are also connected with man’s being. They too feel that reason is insufficient to understand the mysteries of the universe, they are cautious that anguish is a universal phenomenon and also believe that morality has validity only when there is positive participation. Existentialism just is this bygone

cultural movement rather than an identifiable philosophical position.

Existentialism is not a school of philosophy rather a revolt of traditional philosophy. The three notable existentialists- Heidegger, Sartre and Jaspers are not in agreement on essentials. Kierkegaard who is a precursor of existentialists was a dedicated Christian and stressed the idea that In God man may find freedom from tension. Pascal was another precursor of Catholic sorts, Nietzsche was anti Christian and Dostoevsky was anti- semitic and anti- Catholic. And when we consider Kafka and Camus as existentialists we are safe to consider that one essential feature shared by these men is their fervid individualism. The basis of existential thought is marked by dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy. Existentialism is a timeless sensibility

that can be discerned in the past, but only in recent times it has hardened into a sustained protest and pre-occupation.

Sartre and Heidegger deny god's existence and provide the inner odyssey of the self as the primary concern. Sartre and Heidegger incorporate the idea that man is alone in this godless universe. According to Sartre, God is impossible. To be a God is to exist from his own nature alone: 'heaven is empty and yet we are left alone to create ourselves by own acts.' Mathieu in Sartre's *Age of Reason* is dominated by a sharp nostalgia and bitter feeling of loneliness in his search for freedom. Sartre speaks of "aesthetic existentialism" which is an attempt to reinterpret human class of nature in terms of human subjectivity itself. Sartre's *Being and Nothing* lays the foundation for particular moral or psychological analysis of special human problem. Both Sartre and Heidegger show the problems of the individuals in the community, i.e the problems of togetherness, a sense of belonging with nothing genuine to belong to, that constitutes the "one" in and by which on the unauthentic level, each of us lives. An existentialist seeks to examine an individual's problem in the community. For the existentialist, every man is born to set right a time out of joint and everyman's tragedy like Hamlet's line in the disproportion of the circumstances to be rectified and the action that he takes to rectify them. It is not a simple romantic disparity of thought and action, but a more delicate and desperate record. It is not just the disparity between his dreams and actuality. But it is his dreams enacted, his values self- created and self-realized hopelessly disproportionate to the circumstances he is trying to control. Kierkegaard in the "Philosophical Fragments" directs his thought on the problem of the individual and the personal of subjective appearance, existence as inwardness. However his notion of subjectivity is not fluctuated from the problem of Christian faith. Kierkegaard's thought is determined by his conception of Hegelian speculation and of Christianity. It is significant too that Kierkegaard has turned from abstract philosophic tradition to something closer to the inner feeling of our experience. In this context, his thinking has significant akin to Conrad's novels, particularly *Lord Jim* who examined his entire life on

the refutation of a single past action. The tragic conflict that lies at the core of personal existence is something completely private something hidden from public affairs and revealed only in glimpses as the storyteller developed his tales. Sartre's *Huis-clos* is an existential novel too. The character Garcin himself has not just life but all eternity to puzzle out the question of his cowardice. The existential philosophy directs the attention to the meaninglessness.

The existential philosophy is connected with the view of the absurdity of human condition. Though Camus is not called an existentialist, he has the affinity with the thought of existentialists in his insistence on man as an isolated being cast into an alien universe. In his *Myth of Sisyphus* he writes: "You have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero. He is as much through his passions as through his torture. His skillful scorn of the gods, his strong hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exalted toward accomplishing nothing." "Existentialism", therefore, may be defined as the philosophical theory which holds that a further set of categories, governed by the norm of *authenticity*, is necessary to grasp human existence. Existentialism does not deny the validity of the basic categories of physics, biology, psychology, and the other sciences. Existentialism just is this bygone cultural movement rather than an identifiable philosophical position; or, alternatively, that the term should be restricted to Sartre's philosophy alone. Camus' existentialism represents man's life as an existence which is both absurd and anguished. In a universe that is suddenly deprived of light man feels a stranger. He is terrifically exile." Camus "The Outsider" has no nothing special to illuminate. He has hardly any feeling at all: "Mother died today or may be yesterday, I can't be sure." The hero is tormented by the sense of unreality the sense of "absurdity of existence." *Hamlet* is a drama of existentialism. The check that repeatedly keeps him from swift and effective execution of his purpose is as much his doing as are the bold and impulsive deeds that he does do in the heat of a moment-killing the pirates, Polonius, fighting with Laertes. The elements of chance are dramatic instances of

the absurdity irrationality that defines our freedom. Our highest purposes fall miserably little in terms of its fulfillment. Hamlet's freedom and humanity are crossed and checked by the milieu which is governed by diabolic mother, corrupt uncle, stupid Polonius and hypocritical friends. Hamlet's apparent madness is only and the tragic reality. He is a prototype of existential alienation. Pip in Dickens' *Great Expectations* is an alien in the seamy surroundings but rises above it and tries to become a gentleman. He takes seriously the values given him by his age. He is a horrible example of "Mauvaise foi." In Kafka the sense of unreality is coined by deliberately using a dream technique. In *The Metamorphosis* the hero awakes one morning finding himself into a gigantic beetle. In *The Trial* the hero is arrested and finally executed without knowing why. In *The Castle* Kafka is a seeker who tries to find the grace of God so that he can fulfill his life but he finds himself beset with confusion of modern world. He tries to clear away the confusion that roams the castle, but unable to do so.

The sense of loneliness in this universe is found in many poems, novels and the dramas of the modern period. The growing introspectiveness of the modern poets and their self- withdrawal and various techniques of exploration of the consciousness point to the influence of existential thinking. New Lines poets echo the existential thinking in their pre occupation with ironic self scrutiny and complacent acceptance of life as a mad, mad thing. These poets spin poetry out of the very inadequacy and pointlessness of modern existence. T. S. Eliot's *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* is the expression of a sense of loneliness and boredom which constitutes the modern dilemma. *The Waste Land* depicts a picture of the desolation of man. Man's individuality is lost in the godless universe but Eliot is however searching for truth and freedom. In *Ash Wednesday* the soul:

Wavering between the profit and  
the loss.

In this brief transit where the  
dreams cross

The dreamt crossed twilight  
between birth

and dying.....

The novels of the Stream of Consciousness technique aims at preoccupation with one's own consciousness. Joyce's *Ulysses* published in the year 1922 the year in which Eliot's *The Waste Land* was published explores the aimlessness and loneliness of a man of a single day to day life. Conrad's *Lord Jim*, *The Heart of Darkness* seek to focus the minds of characters lost in the darkness of their confused purposes and thwarted ambitions. In the play *Look Back in Anger* by John Osborne is a frightening study of alienation of Jimmy. His cynicism bitterness and anger are Hamletian and betray his pain and anguish for the purposelessness of his life. He symbolizes the existential rejection of life. The Theatre of the Absurd which became prominent after the Second World War in the plays of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter reflects on the absurdity of the existential thinkers that man is out of harmony, man is an exile in a meaningless universe. In his *Waiting for Godot* Beckett shows that Godot is nobody, no goal, no meaning and of nothing itself. Sociologist Harry Dahms has pointed out *The Matrix Trilogy* of films in the context of the theories of alienation in modern society. He suggests that the central theme of *The Matrix* is the "all-pervasive and invisible prevalence of alienation in the world today, and difficulties that discourse the attempts to overcome it". In addition, *Bartleby, the Scrivener* is introduced as a perfect example because so many senses of alienation are present.

Discussion:

Sartre's existentialism drew its immediate inspiration from the work of the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger. Heidegger's 1927 *Being and Time* introduced most of the motifs that would characterize later existentialist thinking: the tension between the individual and the "public". Heidegger pursued these issues with the somewhat unlikely resources of Edmund Husserl's phenomenological method. Husserl's efforts in the first decades of the twentieth century had been directed toward establishing a descriptive science of consciousness. The existentialists welcomed Husserl's doctrine of intentionality as a refutation of the Cartesian view. According to Husserl consciousness is our direct openness to the world. A phenomenology of consciousness depicts neither

the metaphysical composition nor the causal genesis of things, but the "constitution" of their meaning. Existential themes take on salience when one sees that the general question of the meaning of being involves first becoming clear about one's own being as an inquirer. According to Heidegger, the categories bequeathed by the philosophical tradition for understanding a being who can *question* his or her being are insufficient: traditional concepts of a substance decked out with reason, or of a subject blessed with self-consciousness, misconstrue our fundamental character as "being-in-the-world." In his phenomenological pursuit of the categories that govern being-in-the-world, Heidegger became the reluctant father of existentialism.

In Kierkegaard, the singularity of existence comes to light at the moment of conflict between ethics and religious faith. Kierkegaard, in his book *Fear and Trembling*, argues that for philosophy my life becomes meaningful when I "raise myself to the universal". He believes *both* that Abraham's life is supremely meaningful. Human existence cannot be thought through categories appropriate to things: substance, event, process. Existentialists tend to describe the perspective of engaged agency in terms of "choice," and they are sometimes criticized for this. Because existence is co-constituted by facility and transcendence, the self cannot be conceived as a Cartesian ego but is embodied being-in-the-world, a self-making in situation.

### Conclusion

Alienation is most often discussed in literature as a psychological barrenness of men belonging to this society. In a volume of *Bloom's Literary Themes, Shakespeare's Hamlet* is discussed as the 'supreme literary portrait' of alienation. In *The History of Literature*, German Romantics groups is to be treated the first writers and poets whose works are associated with the notion of alienation regularly. At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Hegel popularized the Christian and idealized philosophy of alienation. He used German terms to assimilate the idea that "self" was a historical and social creation. In human alienation human beings try to be estranged to become apart from others. In a

broader philosophical context alienation incorporates the inadequacy of the human beings with the relation to the world. The human mind sees the world as an object of perception and is distanced from the world. And all relation is going to be fused with the demand of nothingness. The human frailty is the result of the alienation and alienation is akin to excessive demands gyrated by the human beings of the materialistic world. In the theory of psychoanalysis developed around the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sigmund Freud did not express the concept of alienation. Alienation is the sense of lack of power of human beings that is addressed by Seeman as the probability of an individual who has no sense or rather no control over his exaggerated mind. Kalekin-Fishman says that a man suffers from alienation in the form of powerlessness when a clash is held in between of his capacity to do a work and of what he would desire to do. Seeman also discussed the insights of the psychologist Julian Rotter who distinguishes the internal control and the external control kept within one's ability. Powerlessness is the means of active perception that the individual does not have the power to achieve.

Both Heidegger and Sartre believe that phenomenological analysis of the kind of intentionality that belongs to moods does not merely register a passing modification of the psyche but reveals fundamental aspects of the self. The experience of anxiety also yields the existential theme of the *absurd*, a version of what was previously introduced as alienation from the world. Sartre said that anxiety provides a lucid experience of that freedom which, though often concealed, characterizes human existence as such. For him, freedom is the dislocation of consciousness from its object.

### Reference

- Grossman, Lt. Col. Dave, Psychologist, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, Time Warner Book Group, New York, NY (1996): 290.
- Purdue, William D., *Sociological Theory: Explanation, Paradigm, and Ideology*, Mayfield Publishing Co., Palo Alto, CA, 1986:325

- Ankony, Robert C., "The Impact of Perceived Alienation on Police Officers' Sense of Mastery and Subsequent Motivation for Proactive Enforcement", *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*, vol. 22, no. 2 (1999): 120–32.
- Rokach, Ami (2004). "Loneliness then and now: Reflections on social and emotional alienation in everyday life". *Current Psychology*. **23** (1): 24–40. doi:10.1007/s12144-004-1006-1.
- Ankony, Robert C., "Perspectives," *Vietnam magazine*, August 2002: 58–61.
- Junger, Sebastian, "Warfighter's paradox" ,*Army Times*, Washington, D.C., June 10, 2014, p. 27.
- Grossman, Lt. Col. Dave, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, Time Warner Book Group, New York, NY (1996): 275-76.
- Purdue, William D., *Sociological Theory: Explanation, Paradigm, and Ideology*, Mayfield Publishing Co., Palo Alto, CA, 1986:325
- Johnson, Frank (1975) *Psychological Alienation: Isolation and Self-Estrangement* *Psychoanalytic Review* 62:3 Pg 369. Reprinted from *Alienation: Concept, Term, and Meanings*, 1973.
- Ankony, Robert C., "The Impact of Perceived Alienation on Police Officer's Sense of Mastery and Subsequent Motivation for Proactive Enforcement," *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies and Management*, vol. 22, no.2 (1999): 120-32.
- McKnight, A. S. (2003). The impact of cutoff in families raising adolescents. In P. Titelman (Ed.), *Emotional cutoff: Bowen family systems theory perspectives* (pp. 273–284). New York, NY: Haworth Clinical Practice Press.
- Blake Hobby, Harold Bloom (Ed) *Bloom's Literary Themes: Alienation* Infobase Publishing, 1 Feb 2009
- Agllias, Kylie. (Sep 2013). *Family Estrangement*. *Encyclopedia of Social Work*. Subject: Couples and Families, Aging and Older Adults, Children and Adolescents. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199975839.013.919
- Apel, K.-O., 1973. "The Apriori of the Communication Community and the Foundation of Ethics," in *Towards a Transformation of Philosophy*. Tr. Glyn Adey and David Frisby. London: Routledge.
- Bernasconi, R. (ed.), 2003. *Race and Racism in Continental Philosophy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Crowell, S., 2004. "Authentic Historicity," in *Space, Time, and Culture*. Ed. David Carr and Cheung Chan-Fai. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Fell, J., 1979. *Heidegger and Sartre: An Essay on Being and Place*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Heidegger, M., 1985. *History of the Concept of Time: Prolegomena*. Tr. Theodore Kisiel. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- MacIntyre, A., 1967. "Existentialism," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. III. Ed. Paul Edwards. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Reynolds, J., 2004. *Merleau-Ponty and Derrida: Intertwining, Embodiment, and Alterity*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Taylor, C., 1985. "Self-Interpreting Animals," in *Philosophical Papers I: Human Agency and Language*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Gordon, L., 2000. *Existencia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought*, London: Routledge.
- Kierkegaard, S., 1971. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. Tr. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kierkegaard, S., 1983. *Fear and Trembling*. Tr. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ortega y Gasset, J., 1985. *Revolt of the Masses*. Tr. Anthony Kerrigan. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Wahl, J., 1949. *A Short History of Existentialism*. Tr. Forrest Williams and Stanley Maron. New York: Philosophical Library.

Wild, J., 1963. The Challenge of  
Existentialism (1955), Bloomington: Indiana  
University Press.

---