



RESEARCH PAPER

Alienation and Self-Alienation

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: June 16, 2021</p> <p>Accepted: September 20, 2021</p> <p>Online: September 23, 2021</p> <p>Keywords: Alienation, Freedom, Othering, Retreatism, Self-Alienation</p> <p>*Corresponding Author:</p> <p>sultanulaarifeen@gmail.com</p>	<p>Modernity has though opened new vistas of existence, yet it has brought in its wake trails of woes and worries, pains and pangs, which have got worldwide attention with emergence of particular terminologies like alienation and self-alienation. Both these terms might have existed in the annals of history, named and unnamed, but a particular signification has made them a topic of debate. Two world wars, the rise of globalization and one's settlement in a war torn and economically growing world has introduced human beings to external as well as internal incompatibility amidst growing challenges of life. Human beings it appears are standing on a crossroad and are confronted with Shakespearean idea of "to be or not to be." This research therefore tries to investigate as to what is alienation and what is self-alienation. Alienation and self-alienation appear to be products of modernity as modern human being, an alien, personally or impersonally, at home or on foreign lands, in loneliness or gatherings, seems in a state of great perplexity, confusion, chaos, uncertainty, helplessness and hopelessness. The discussion shows that alienation is objective whereas self-alienation is a subjective phenomenon.</p>

Introduction

The When confronted with problems of immense nature, almost as a routine matter on daily basis, a modern man finds himself in a state of perplexity, confusion, chaos, hopelessness, helplessness and uncertainty. Under such circumstances, seeking refuge into safe places, whether external or internal in nature or whatever they might be, has not been fruitful and alienation both from the self and society has been on the rise. Jarrett (1972: 179) in his quest to know "Adam, where art thou?" finds his society and himself nowhere "We are nowhere. Our society, our culture, our time - all is out of joint" Jarrett (1972:179) further finds his contemporary time synonymous with the 19th century which, to him, George Meredith spoke of as "all coherence gone." Similarly, Urick (1977: 10) is of the view "the theme of alienation, moreover, runs through a large body of religious, mythological, and literary expressions stretching back almost to the beginnings of the written world." The concept, though contemporary and universal in nature, seems to have been tragically present in abundance in America, one of the most privileged nations on earth. Urick (1977: 11) also observes "alienated feelings and perceptions are spread widely through our population" and this to him is generated by a "variety of ways of behaving that can be triggered by feelings of isolation, meaninglessness, powerlessness, normlessness, and estrangement." It points to the fact that alienation is a feeling that by being dynamic in nature creeps within and between societies and microcosmically speaking, humans are its victims, and speaking macrocosmically, it is societies that suffer at its hands with consequences of varying levels and degrees having positive and negative effects depending upon the force of the source of the alienating factor (s).

Likewise, unfathomable subtleties of life that the modern man comes across including complex social demands in global spectrum and the existential paradoxes also result in alienation. Sinari (1970: 124) is, therefore, of the view "It results from varied existential paradoxes: a strange combination of falling-apart-from-the-totality and hope of a union; an awareness of social injustice, apathy of man towards man . . ." Sinari (1970: 125) further states "The suffering and anguish of an alien springs from the fact of his incongruous relationship with his situation." There is no denying the fact that an alien being tries his level best to de-alienate himself by achieving a concord between him and the society. This discussion gives rise to a question who an alien is. Sinari (1970:125) presents seven types for identifying an alien:

- (1) Alienation of an individual from an object or objects to which he is attached;
- (2) Alienation of one from society in the event of one's belonging to a minority – religious, ethnic, linguistic, occupational, etc. – in a place where affairs are determined by the majority;
- (3) Alienation of one who shows dissension with regard to the values and ideals society stands for; from such a dissension might emerge ethical rebels and social reformers;
- (4) Alienation of a person who disapproves of his self and thus experiences a peculiar sort of self-estrangement; this self-estrangement might occasionally give rise to neurosis, but if properly manipulated by the rational sensor may produce creative genius;
- (5) Alienation of one who in a highly industrialized and technologically oriented society as in the U.S. gradually ceases to use one's body; more and more use of buttons and switches deprives one from the natural physical operations; this eventually causes a rupture between man and Nature;
- (6) Alienation of those who are uprooted from their cultural habitat; this peculiar form of estrangement can be witnessed in all those countries where, as a result of prolonged Western influence, people experience isolation from their original ethos;
- (7) Alienation of a person of a class that is exploited, or whose interests are downtrodden, by another person or class; it is this form of alienation that figures as the central issue of Marx's, Engels's, and all socialists' thinking.

But these seven types of an alien can not necessarily be found in everybody. It shows that alienation is both a sociological and psychological phenomenon. Finkelstein (1965: 136) says "The individual becomes "alienated"; that is, estranged not only from "others" but from himself . . ." And pointing to the psychological aspect of alienation Finkelstein (1965:137) observes "It is a psychological phenomenon, an internal conflict, a hostility felt toward something seemingly outside oneself which is linked to oneself . . ." This psychological aspect of alienation thus shows that alienated are exploited souls and those exploited can either accept this state as something natural or they may react to their being exploited. Seeman (1975: 93) has also pointed toward the social – psychological framework of alienation and has discovered six varieties of alienation:

- (a) Powerlessness – the sense of low control vs mastery over events;
- (b) meaninglessness – the sense of incomprehensibility vs understanding of personal and social affairs;

- (c) normlessness – high expectancies for (or commitment to) socially approved means vs conventional means for the achievements of given goals;
- (d) cultural estrangement (called “value isolation” in an earlier version, Seeman 1959 – the individual’s rejection of commonly held values in the society (or subsector) vs commitment to the going group standards;
- (e) self-estrangement – the individual’s engagement in activities that are not intrinsically rewarding vs involvement in a task or activity for its own sake; and
- (f) social isolation – the sense of exclusion or rejection vs social acceptance.

Discussing these variants of alienation Sarfraz (1997: 51) says that Seeman “asserted that powerlessness is a socio-psychological phenomenon rather than an objective condition in society.” Furthermore, quoting Seeman, Sarfraz (1997: 53) says “Meaninglessness is independent of the first category” but if it were so then “In the state of meaninglessness, individual’s ability to predict about social situations and the outcomes of their own and others’ behavior is diminished” would not have been the case. Thus, diminishing of the “individual’s ability to predict about social situations and the outcomes of their own and others’ behavior” proves that meaninglessness is dependent upon powerlessness. But given the feelings of an individual that previously approved norms are no longer effective is highly suggestive of the fact that normlessness is dependent upon powerlessness and meaninglessness. These three variants of alienation are the product of societal uncertainty and insignificance which is extrinsic in nature and when this chaos continues only then does it become a psychological factor. These factors then lead to the fourth variant of alienation, i.e., “cultural estrangement. Sarfraz (1997: 55-56) explains this state as following “The culturally estranged individual feels that his ideas and opinions about the important as well as everyday affairs are different from those of people in his primary and secondary groups. . .” Recording fifth variant of alienation Sarfraz (1997: 54) writes “According to Seeman, a person is self-estranged when engaged in an activity that is not rewarding in itself but is instrumental in satisfying extrinsic needs, such as the need for money and security.” But Seeman’s this statement does not hold true in the background of post colonialism where an individual’s sense of security goes to a level very low because his identity being at stake creates problems for him and money alone cannot provide security. As regards the sixth and final variant of alienation, i.e., ‘social Isolation’ Sarfraz (1997: 55) says “When an individual finds that he can no longer share the normative system for the attainment of his goals due to its ineffectiveness, he may develop norms of his own to guide his behavior . . .”

But it is not just the ineffectiveness of an individual’s normative system that dissociates him from others and overall social system which result in his social isolation. There are various other factors as well that contribute toward social isolation of an individual from the society. They may include most of all, identity and its discursive structures like, ethnicity, race, linguistic, religious, national, political, educational, and so on and so forth. Identity, therefore, can give birth to ‘Self ’ and ‘Other’ attitudes which may maximize the social isolation.

Mejos (2007: 75) highlights these concepts of ‘Self ’ and ‘Other’ while describing alienation “The other is not recognized as a neighbor but is recognized as a stranger or even an enemy. Alienation devastates the *I – Other* relationship . . .” One, thus, notices that alienation is the negation of the self of a person, or it is an act of the deprivation of the rightful and true enjoyment of one’s self which may result in deep mental trauma or conflicts and one’s excommunication from the society (both indigenous and foreign) or social bonds. Alienation is, therefore, dehumanizing in nature but Mejos (2007: 76) believes “The real threat of alienation is not so much that it “dehumanizes” the human being as an individual member of the species but because it threatens the person as a subject.”

Furthermore, if an individual and society are in accord with each other one may not feel alienation; even if it is there it may be passive, and when there is some discrepancy between the individual and the society then this incongruous relationship would said to have been built on alienation. Waisanen (1963: 24-26) observes this situation as:

Festinger has suggested that “if a person knows two things – for example, something about himself and something about the world in which he lives – which somehow do not fit together, we will speak of this as cognitive dissonance.” If these two things do fit together, the condition is consonance.

One can, therefore, safely assume that alienation is the absence of consonance between the individual and the society. There is yet another factor that causes alienation in and amongst individuals within and outside a society depending upon one’s nature of relationship at such levels. And that is the level of expectancy which besides being somewhat natural is dependent upon the normative system of a society one is living in. A decline, therefore, in the level of expectations which one has either attached with individuals or societies, can result in yearning for the fulfillment of those expectations. In this regard, Stokols (1975: 27) is of the view “The experience of alienation is brought about through a decline in the quality of one’s relationship with a particular context . . .” Level of expectancy is closely related with a sense of security and freedom and the absence of a secure and free existence involves the dangers of alienation. Alienation can, however, be either negative or positive. Dalirian (2010: 11) writes “Generally alienation is known as a negative trait . . . Compared to “anomie” – by Durkheim and his followers . . . and “disease” or “syndrome”, like a mental disorder, and “sickness” . . .” Dalirian (2010: 11) further observes “since alienation illustrates the situation of an individual, it means that this “situation ought not to be as it is;” thus it represents a negative situation.” However, it is not just ‘sickness’ or the situation ‘what is ought not to be’ that refers to the negative trait of alienation. Social isolation, rebellious attitude or behavior of an individual or a group, ethnocentrism and so on and so forth can also be the negative traits of alienation.

On the other hand, it may have its positive aspects as well. Dalirian (2010: 11) is of the view “in some cases it is a very thoughtful decision . . . alienation is a conscious positive decision.” The problem of alienation is also viewed as subjective and objective and there are supporters of both these claims. Dalirian (2010: 16) is of the view “Whether one takes a subjective or objective approach toward the concept of alienation is a fundamental debate in the history of alienation studies.”

Alienation discussed so far thus appears to be an objective and realistic situation which everyman confronts almost each day and somehow manages to cope with it. But it is not necessary that everybody would consider his sufferings and problems as the product of alienation, either from himself or from the society. The condition remains objective as much as an individual does not himself experience it. So, as long as it is external it is objective and an individual may be aware of its presence but may not have personally experienced it. It is a common observation that people generally view each other in terms of either rich or poor and accordingly they attribute their blessings and deprivations to wealth. But many a problems that men experience have their roots in some other sources, as important as wealth or more important than the wealth. Dalirian (2010: 17) writes about the subjectivity of alienation as following:

On the contrary, the subjective approach to alienation is concerned with actual human characteristics rather than ideal attributes or states. According to the subjective definition, alienation is an “existential reality” in an individual’s life, far from the judgmental observation of outsiders . . .

Hence, alienation can be both subjective and objective.

Self-Alienation

Alienation of this kind is deeply personal (subjective) and has its roots in one's culture, race, ethnicity, religion and so on. And it is this 'self' which besides being one's strength also becomes a weakness and this usually happens in this 'self's' relationship with another 'self' that is famously known as 'Other.' Although the 'Self' and the 'Other' are usually at variance with each other yet there are certain situations which sharpen this variance to the extent that the co-existence of both almost becomes impossible and it results in acute alienation. There is yet another side of the picture and that is in the case of one's migration to another locality, quite contrary to one's own where the chances of the collision of the 'Self' and the 'Other' increase manifold.

However, in order to understand self-alienation, one needs to know first what self is. Bay (1970: 170) defines self as "the individual's awareness of acceptable aspects of his personality; it is part of the individual's consciousness" and "*The self is the image of one's own qualities, or evaluated characteristics.*" This definition, however, seems incomplete in that it does not cover the composite or complete self. This 'self' is, therefore, half-self or partial-self and it needs, for its completion, also the awareness of acceptable or unacceptable aspects of others' personality along with the social norms, whether established or situational or transitory. 'Self' is, therefore, not just the image of one's own qualities, or evaluated characteristics. But one thing is for sure that when the 'self' gets aware of himself or others' self both these selves constitute a 'self' that becomes conscious of what is happening around and within a person. And what happens around and within a person is hardly in accord with each other which creates a conflict in the mind of that person. It is, therefore, consciousness of such a conflict that results in alienation and the more this conflict widens the more high is the alienation. Bay (1970: 173) implicitly points to this fact when talking about the self he records "Lasswell and McDougal equate the self with "the conscious pattern of significant demands, expectations and identifications" and that "identifications are the boundaries of the self-system, comprehending the components in terms of which values and expectations are assessed." The 'significant demands, expectations and identifications' which Lasswell and McDougal talk about are dependent upon the 'Self' and 'Other' concepts which result in self-alienation. As regards "identification" Bay (1970: 174) is of the view "*A person identifies with someone or something to the extent that he incorporates this object into his own self or incorporates his self into this object.*" At this point, one notices that incorporating an object (Other) into oneself may successfully be done but that object (Other) may not mingle or get mingled into the aspirant's self and vice versa. The problem is thus that of identification and identifying oneself in relation to another is not devoid of risking self-alienation. There is still another definition of the self that is extremely appropriate to be quoted here. Bay (1970: 173-174) quotes William James for understanding the self as:

In its widest possible sense, however, a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank account.

So, self-alienation dispossesses a man of his valuable possessions in the sense that he is slowly and, at times, rapidly deprived of all the amenities attached with these possessions like peace, rest, happiness, satisfaction, contentment and so on. It shows that the self we are talking about here is a wider self. But we may also say that self-alienation is an action that destabilizes one's material self, the social self, the spiritual self, the pure ego and the social selves and puts man into dangers of unspecified nature. Or one can say that self-alienation is a sort of violence committed upon man by others or himself. But the same action with its destabilizing and dangerous forces can help one circumvent, after a time, all the problems. Self-alienation has thus its negative and positive aspects as well.

Self-alienation may also be caused by lack of security, both subjective and objective, which produces anxiety and fear in an alien person. Bay (1970: 67) defines *Subjective Security* as “‘Security’ means (a) the relative absence of anxiety. ‘Security’ means (b) the relative absence of fear.” Bay (1970: 68) further says that “‘Anxiety’ and ‘fear,’ . . . bear intimately on ‘psychological freedom’ as well as on ‘security’.” To clarify his stance, Bay, on the same page, defines both anxiety and fear as: “‘Anxiety’ is a state of apprehension or uneasiness expressing a sensation of danger that is not perceived, diffusely perceived, or imaginary. ‘Fear’ is a state of apprehension or uneasiness in response to a realistically perceived, specific danger.” For a more clear understanding of the concepts of anxiety and fear Bay (1970: 69 – 70) quotes Karen Horney remarks as “Anxiety is an emotional response to danger, as is fear. What characterizes anxiety in contradistinction to fear is, first, a quality of diffuseness and uncertainty . . .” It is thus evident that the lack of security by instilling a sense of anxiety and fear in an individual causes self-estrangement. But at the same time it may encourage an individual to tackle the dangers involved therein. As opposed to subjective security there is objective one which Bay (1970: 74) defines as “‘Security means (c) the relative absence of danger. In other words, an individual (or a society) is more secure the lower the probability that he (or the society) will suffer damages or harm to vital interests.’”

Lack of freedom is yet another factor that causes self-alienation to be produced amongst individuals. Bay (1970: 83) defines freedom as “Freedom means to me self-expression, or the individual’s capacity, opportunity, and incentive to express whatever he is or can be motivated to express,” and freedom to him is three-fold, it is psychological, social and potential in nature. Similarly, according to Pierrakos (1996: 1-2) self-alienation is a fragmentation of being and “if you want to become happy, to lead a fruitful, rich life, you have to be a whole, undivided.” But neither the events of life nor one’s own self is always in one’s own hands and it is because of the fact that an individual cannot stand or live in isolation. Multiple forces of life keep on working on man and he confronts helplessness and unresolved conflicts, therefore, Pierrakos (1996: 2) sees self-alienation “as the result of unresolved problems.” Furthermore, Pierrakos (1996: 4) stating the conditions of alienation throws light on it as “You are inhibited. You cannot express yourself. You cannot communicate and relate either to others or to yourself. You are confused and anxious. Your faculties are paralyzed.”

It, thus, shows that there are certain situations that result in one’s self-alienation and these can either diminish one’s powers to cope with such an awkward situation or can enhance one’s powers to fight with the alienating circumstances and find one’s way out of such a troublesome state of affairs. It is perhaps because of this fact that Sayers (2003: 5) writes “He (Marx) regards self-alienation as a social and historical phenomenon which is destined to be overcome with historical development and progress.” On the other hand, Seeman (1959: 90) defines self-alienation as “To be self-alienated . . . means to be something less than one might ideally be if the circumstances in society were otherwise – to be insecure, given to appearances, conformist.”

Lystad (1972: 90), however, defines alienation as following:

Alienation is seen as a sign of personal dissatisfaction with certain structural elements of society; it has been related particularly to economic and political elements. This dissatisfaction has been defined in the more recent studies in terms of expressions by individuals of feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation and self-estrangement.

There is no denying the fact that economics and politics are the structural elements of a society that define and determine the social role of an individual in society yet they are not the exclusive factors that may make or mar one’s future in terms of economic gains, security, and freedom and so on. One’s identity – personal, political, religious or national

can also cause an individual to be dissatisfied from his own self or the society. This is why that an alien individual, in the words of Pierrakos (1996: 1) may ask himself "Who am I? Where is my real self?"

There are however other consequences of alienation too. Lystad (1972: 92), therefore, notes:

The consequences of alienation for the individual have been described by Hobart (1965) as a feeling that others do not understand and a resulting impaired ability to communicate with others. Manheim (1965) contends that the reaction of individuals can take four directions: (1) fatalism, (2) withdrawal in protest, (3) the revolutionary impulse to conquer and reshape the social order, and (4) involvement in change.

Thus, the feeling that others do not understand me intensifies the feelings of alienation in an individual who has already been estranged from life or himself and in this case alienation doubles. One's identity and social status is yet another factor that makes people feel alienated from the society and their own selves. Lystad (1972: 99) observes "The alienation of those at the bottom of the prestige and social rewards ladder comes as no surprise. Alienation of blacks is not related to alienation of the poor, since many blacks are poor." So, the recognition of one's prestige either becomes a source of high self-esteem or low self-esteem. Ziller (1969: 287) thus defines alienation as "The alienation syndrome is defined as low self-esteem, low social interest, and high self-centrality." Ziller (1969: 287) makes us view alienation from a different perspective when he says:

Alienation is defined as an attitude of hopelessness resulting from an inability to structure the environment in terms of either a stable self-orientation or a stable Other orientation, and a cessation in the individual's attempts to confront the social environment.

Self-alienation thus caused or experienced crosses all its limits and becomes unbearable, its victim; having no other option left with him to assuage his injured self and soul, eventually finds solace into retreatism. So, in the words of Waisanen (1963: 23) an individual feeling estranged "must *retreat*," because:

Retreatism is, of course, a case of dissociation of the self from the social system, the appropriate mode of adoption would be *adjustment*. If he is dissatisfied with the social system, he can attempt *innovation* or (if the dissatisfaction is sever) *rebellion*.

But the dissociation of the self from social system cannot alone said to be a source of retreatism which may result in 'adjustment,' 'innovation,' or 'rebellion.' A person may be in full or partial accord with the social system of any given society yet a sudden twist of turn in the national or international scenario involving intrinsic or extrinsic factors may pave the ground for retreatism, adjustment, innovation or rebellion. Here again one can say that retreatism may represent the social psychological withdrawal but not from the system or the whole system. It, therefore, may result from one dominant current that throw away the entire system in the background. But an individual who still chooses to remain in the social system both physically and mentally may not necessarily live there as a nonconformist. He may still be a conformist against all odds and try to adjust himself in the changed atmosphere.

Regarding *adjustment* Waisanen (1963: 27) observes:

In "full" adjustment, the individual, perceiving discrepancy between his self-system and the social system, rejects his own norms and goals and internalize the norms and goals of the system. But modified, or perhaps spurious, adjustment can be made.

Similarly, elucidating his stance about innovation and rebellion, Waisanen (1963: 26-27) is of the view:

In innovation, the individual perceives his goals to be consistent with the system's goals, but the attitude-norm system has a measure of discrepancy. He would make changes in the norms or innovate. In rebellion, both norms and goals of the social system are rejected, and the individual would change them.

In the light of the discussion made above one can say that self-alienation is different from alienation. The former is a deeply subjective phenomenon while the latter involves objectivity. The impact in terms of harm, spiritual, physical and mental, to an individual is higher in self-alienation and on the contrary, it may not be the same in the experience of alienation. Self-alienation is, therefore, more dangerous for an individual when it comes to the question of survival, at home or abroad, in isolation or in gatherings.

Conclusion

The concept of alienation and self-alienation is contemporary and universal in nature that is why poets, dramatists, novelists, essayists, short story writers and scholars of other social sciences have taken up these issues in their writings and discussions. Both these feelings may originate from incongruous relationship with oneself, human beings, families, situations, and localities. As diversity is increasing in modernity so are aliens, and feelings of alienation and self-alienation diverse. These may be sociological, psychological, geographical, spiritual, and so on. They may also be rooted in one's culture, race, ethnicity, religion, and in some other shapes and forms. In all its forms and shapes both alienation and self-alienation appear to be fragmentation of being.

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