

# Notion of Alienation, An Existentialist Approach

Dr. Naushaba Anjum

**Abstract**— The problem of alienation has been a persistent issue of man since the beginning of civilization and it has been discussed in the history of philosophy since beginning. But as a serious issue the problem of alienation come in to existence after the development of industrialization and technology in a mass scale. Some twentieth century thinkers, philosophers, psychologist, sociologist, and religious scholars prescribed the way to come out from alienation. But in contemporary philosophy the existentialists took the issue of alienation most seriously. They gave their own approach on this issue and propagate a humanistic point of view as a way to come out from alienation. They try to make the philosophy free from the clutches of objectivity and bring the man in center again. Other contemporary western philosophers also influenced by existential movement. For them also the problem of alienation is a serious issue especially the famous philosopher and psychologist Erich Fromm. Fromm observes that in twentieth century man finds himself in a highly mechanical culture dominated by technology. Because of over use and emphasis on technology man becomes alienated from his own personal being. Both existentialists and Erick Fromm believes that man's subjectivity is lost in the highly technical and mechanical contemporary world. The main issue for these thinkers is not only to understand the concept of alienation but to find out the ways to eliminate the alienation. Through which a human can understand his true being and meaning of life. This is a descriptive paper. The objective of the paper is to explore the issue of alienation in contemporary world and to suggest the ways to come out from the alienation with special reference to Existentialism and Erick Fromm.

**Index Terms**— Alienation, Existentialism, Estrangement, Industrialization, God, Nature

## I. INTRODUCTION

The term alienation usually refers to as a state of isolation or aloneness. The Theory of alienation was originated on the basis of different social, economical and religious accompaniment. In other way, we can say, that a person feels himself to disassociate from one self or a group. The term has been used by various classical, modern and contemporary theories with the passage of time and changing of societies, many controversies emerged related to nature of alienation and its real impact on individual and society of human being. Existentialist approach has been a reaction in support of individualism, subjectivity introspection and feeling. It is not a philosophy of a thing but a philosophy of human conditions. Existentialist's main thesis is that "Existence precedes essence, it is beyond physical pronouncement. While the traditional concept is essence precedes existence means essence first comes than existence".

According to existentialist that human nature is determined by the course of life not by the human nature. Partially human nature is alienation, what man does either individually or

universally, bear imprint of alienation. As existentialist say that alienation is understood chiefly in inward term. It is the human existent's alienation from his own self. He is not in himself but simply a thing. He is only in the mass existence of a crowd some existential philosopher, psychologist, sociologist discuss the notion of alienation according to this own point of view.

They refer to their own extreme ordinary type of psycho-socio disorder, including the lose of self status or self despair meaninglessness, powerlessness, automalization and pessimism and the lose of morality, belief, and values. Psycho-analysts try to help persons/patient return from the world of illusion of reality.

The central definition of alienation is that man loses his self identity and selfhood. Many thinkers who explain the problem of self alienation assume that in each of us there is a real self which we are prevented from achieving. But, here the problem is how we find the self identity? The most satisfactory answer of this question has been given by a social psychologist named Carless H. Coolev and George H. Mead says that one find the self identity by the interaction of others. But if one acquires the self identity by committing the other through a particular language then anxiety about of loss of self loved is individual as well as a universal problem. It means that a person is not only feels, self estrangement but also fails to achieve good and wrathful relation with others.

## II. EXISTENTIALIST VIEWS ON ALIENATION

Erich Fromm, who has considerably influenced, the contemporary philosophy, sociology and humanists, both in western and eastern countries, he expressed in his major work "Man for himself" and "Fear of freedom" in present century reiterated by humanist existentialist that man can not be himself. He is distinct to remain a alienated in the world in which he lives.

In philosophy, the term alienation is used as a concept denoting the element of separated ness of two things with finding tentative and frustration. In other word we can say, it is implied as a specific scientific term relating some special aspect of separation. In his writings, Hegel uses the word 'alienation' I connection with his notion of becoming Alien. In more clearly speaking about alienation that man who is species being born in this created world is alien, alone, hostile, impoverished physically and mentally. According to Fromm "By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which a person experience himself as an alien or more fully."

"By alienation is meant a mode of experience in which the person experiences himself as alien. He has become, one might say, estranged from himself as the creator of the world, as the creator of his own act but his acts and their consequences have become his masters, whom he obeys, or whom he may even worship. The alienated person is out of touch with any other person. He, like the other is experienced

as things are experienced; with the sense and being related to oneself and to the world outside productively.”<sup>1</sup>

Fromm says, man has become alien; separated from own self. He realizes himself as things. He is not aware of his originality and separated from his own personality, from his own feeling, willing, loving and caring etc. He thinks that he is like a machine. He never feel that he is a creator of his own created act. Since his essence is alienated, his production must be stranged. Ultimately his activity has become a power, a God whom he obeys, whom he worships whom he find even always superior to whole universe.

Most of the time an alienated person finds himself out of touch with the external world. He does not realize that he is a part of this world. In many of his writings he taken to man's separation not only from himself but from his body, from his fellowman and temporal institution. Separation is the cruise of alienation. Man is seen not only stranged from God but from nature, from his neighbor, from all other being both as social and individual. Human essence can be explained as the aggregate of social relation. His relationship shows us that he individual is completely alienated from the society.

In order to know the theory of Alienation, first of all we should analyze the Marxian treatment of subject. Marx wrote in the context of what he perceived to be an extremely exploitation of socio-economic system that prevailed in the early 19th century Europe. After that his socialist formulisations were proceeded by an examine of labors, condition of an individual worker, in relation to the work done by the labor and the thing what workers produced. In his writing “Economic and Philosophical manuscript 1844” was basically more emphasized on alienation than exploitation. According to Marx, the prevailing economic system, leads to workers' estrangement from his own self. Alienation was the outcome of the processes involved in the production and consumption of the things in a capitalists society. Marx said that through a four point of alienation related to man and his work.

- (1) Alienation of the worker from his work.
- (2) Alienation of the worker from the process of the work
- (3) Alienation of man from his species
- (4) Alienation of man from himself.

The Marxian concept of alienation has been interpreted by Fromm in his book Marx's 'concept of man'. As he summarizes the Marxian concept with reference to two points:

- (1) In the process of work, a worker (man) is estranged from his own work i.e. his creative power specially of industrial work under the condition of capitalist society.
- (2) The object his own work becomes alien and they rule over him. Marx said that the labor exists for the process of production, and not the process of production for the labor with reference to these two above points. Marx is talking here of he economic exploitation of the work. But the fact that his share of the product was not as large as it should be. The product should belong to him instead of capitalist.

The relationship between producers and his co-producer is species alienation. The producer employs fellow human beings for his private earning. The relation between man and man is hence not the two independent and equal individuals sharing an activity but one man being under the subjugation of the other. In a particular system each one feels estranged from the other one. “The labor and its products assume an existence separate from man's will and his planning.” The object

produced by labor, its products, now stands opposed to it as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer. The product of the labor is labor which has been embodied in an object and turned into physical thing; this product is an objectification of labor.”<sup>2</sup>

Apart from such type of relationship between owner and the worker also discuss in his many writings. He has no control over the arrangement of the things which he produces. So, under the situation of capitalism work has become separate to the worker that is not the part of his nature.

Ultimately the worker experiences work as impoverishment. In this system of work one cannot find the feeling of healthy/well being. He finds a feeling of physically, mentally, morally and spiritually debasement. As Marx says, “The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labor becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists, outside of him, independently as something alien to him. .... It means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien.”<sup>3</sup>

During the time of his duty, he feels homeless; work is not his voluntary act but a forced labor. So Marx says that “His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labor.

It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it.”<sup>4</sup> For the worker the world is alienated to him. So, he creates the another world i.e. the world of object. So, created by human act, this realm of object acquires an independent power hostile to him.

According to Fromm, “What constitutes the alienation of the labors? First, the work is external to the workers; it is not the part of his nature, and consequently, he does not fulfill himself in his work but denies himself. He has feeling of misery rather than well being; he does not freely develop his mental and physical energies but is physically exhausted and mentally debased. This is self alienation; as opposed to the above mentioned alienation of the things.”<sup>5</sup>

As we know in the writing of Marx, in the modern society and presently industrial societies gradually dehumanizes man and reduces him as a machine. Marx was inherently removed by this dehumanize process, by the misery, suffering and by the exploited labors.

The concept of alienation has also been described by Hegel in his many writings in different ways. It is the basic idea of Hegel philosophy. In the last analysis, absolute idea in neither a set of fix thing tting nor a sum of static properties but a dynamic self engaged in a circular process of alienation and de-alienation.

As Hegel said, “nature is only a self alienated form of absolute mind, and rational mind is the absolute in the steps of dealienations. The whole human history is the constant growth of man knowledge of Abolute and at the same time, the development of self knowledge of the absolute who through finite mind becomes self-aware and return to himself in nature”<sup>6</sup>

Hegel's main problem is closely related with this metaphysics and ontology. The Absolute spirit of Hegel is mainly the central issue of his metaphysics. It is dynamic and projects itself through a dialectical process i.e. marked by alienation and de-alienation. The basic rhythms are, self projecting, self uniting and self negation etc. The spirit i.e. self consciousness is realized dialectically. To begin with, it is immediate but its inner dynamic introduces elements of differentiation in it. The necessities, the objectification of the spirit is alienated from his immediate character. In this sense a creative activity is

bound to prove alienative. The another form is self alienation is in seeing bifurcation of the spirit in two, realms i.e. natural and human. Undoubtedly, man is clear cut expression of consciousness, and consciousness of spirit exist in nature as well. Both may be interpreted in two different ways.

One is alienated from their sustaining ground 'Geist' or and other one is alienated from each other. "If man is considered essential in his finitude, he seems to be alienated from, if not authentic to, nature. But, viewed from another stand point, a more comprehensive one, he is a part of nature, the latter's self consciousness." 7

According to Materialist's nature has nothing to do with consciousness. It is not the unity between them, but "Hegel concedes that at the negation of his life makes him conscious of how much he owes and belongs to nature. This consciousness negates his essentially alienative consciousness.

As an analysis of human existence given by Soren Kierkegaard, relates it to the notion of anxiety, what explain in Kierkegaardian sense is not fully alienation but in some sense what makes alienation is possible Kierkegaard explain the presence of anxiety in three different ways. First, it is already existed in the state of innocence. In the dreaming state of an innocence, there is something (uneasiness, instability) which disturbs the tranquility of bliss. This is the profound secret of innocence that at the same time it is anxiety, Secondly that anxiety if related to freedom. It is also a type of instability prior to action. He explains that the anxiety is a type of dizziness of freedom. For freedom means possibility and to stand is like standing on the edge of a scrap/height. One is standing on a given, to leave the given and cast oneself into the possibility is to let the life become a fluid. "This spring of possibility in primordial freedom is experienced as an anxiety, the awareness of complexity, differentiation and possible alienation with in every depth of ones being." 8 Third one, is very much related to philosophical doctrine i.e. man is made of mind and body.

Hence, man is subject to the tension of anxiety. The human being is synthesis of mind and body and this task is from the starting laden with anxiety. Anxiety is a unique phenomenon of humans. According to Kierkegaard, man in his "middle state" conjoining sense and intellect, body and mind. the given and the possible. "It can therefore only be stopped by the individual attain his loneliness, his courage and doubtlessness of a religious man answerable to God." 9. He again admit that man's intellectual culture represent a sphere of estranged, that is why, man has lost his identity, has ceased to be a man, has suffered as alien and fails to recognize himself as a subject, lost his specific life. He has ceased to live and is in fact non-existent.

Kierkegaard also analyze the alienation as anxiety. Anxiety changed into despair and this despair is the sickness unto death. This implies that the spiritual history of modern man, whereas the modern skepticism lead on one's own self and therefore leads to despair. According to him, this despair is the disproportionate in relation to self to self, whoever has not the self, has no God, has no self is in despair. Despair forces a man to realize that he confronts a void, and he is fully responsible for his void and sinful condition. A person despair of himself and other one self is confronting implies void ness that cannot be fitted by de-aesthetic or ethical rules. In this point of view to become a conscious one has brought one self, "IN analyzing despair, we recognize guilt; so too with dread. Kierkegaard contrasts this fear that has a specific and

identifiable object with the dread that is objectless. In the experience of dread I become conscious of my bad will as something for which I am responsible, and yet which I did not originate. Original sin is seen as a doctrine deduced from the analysis of experience. 10 .

According to existentialists, specially with reference to Sartre, human existence is prior to every thing, this is the first principle, man is first of all posses his subjectivity. As he already said that 'existence precedes essence'. It means that man is not defined by the universal quality of human nature but he is what 'he wills to be'. "Since there is no God, a fundamental postulate of Sartre's ontology, there is no concept of man in the mind of God which constitutes man's existence. Man does not come into the world readymade, he is simply what he makes himself, and never made but always in making." 11.

Sartre has discussed the concept of alienation in his writing i.e. of types of being. One is being in itself and the other is being for-itself. Being in itself means a self contain of a thing, a wood is a wood, it no more or no less. It means that being a thing always coincide with itself only. In contrast of this 'being for itself' is co-extensive, with the realm of consciousness, and the nature of consciousness is that it is a perpetually beyond itself.

According to Sartre, man in his existence always outside of this present world, some time towards future and sometimes outside of this world. Man never poses his being as a possesses a thing. This is only possible when a person is not estranged/alienated from himself. As he said, the human reality is made by the being in itself and being for itself. Being in itself defined human reality as pure being. Sartre also defined in term of nothingness. If the human existence has no objection ground nor has any reference of a system of value then the conscious human existence is pure nothingness. It is also the same fact that man always constantly creates himself as well as objective condition his empirical being as taken a nothing. It is inferred that 'to exist' man must be transcend himself, or be alienated from himself.

According to Paul Tillich holds,

"The state of existence is the state of estrangement. Man is estranged from the ground of his being, from the other being and from himself."

Hence, we can say that the totality i.e. (Being in itself and being for itself) of Man. Here the being i.e. two dimension are radically difficult. For Sartre the basic feature of human existence is self transcendence. All the tragedy of human existence can be traced to this source. It is also the feature of human which constitutes its finitudes. In contrast to this Heidegger accepts that "death is the greatest source of anguish and the symbol of finitude. He does not deny the Sartrean concept of self transcendent. In short as Sartre describe the alienation through existentialism. He has written "is nothing else than an attempt to draw all the consequences of a coherent atheistic position." 12

Thus we can say that there is no God, man alone form beginning is genuine humanism that explain man is free originator of all values and of what ever meaning is in human existence.

### III. CONCLUDING REMARK

Alienation is the main feature of the contemporary world. It is the hallmark of man's individual and universal pathology. So ,

the modern western society is strange. The main symptom of this estrangement is manifested through the phenomenon of alienation.

An existentialist is accordingly a humanist or a de-alienated person. But the de-alienation can be ensured only by knowing himself as a true being. We must know the nature of man in order to understand the human potentiality and activity in man.

In concluding, the concept of alienation has been used by the sociologist, psychologist, existentialist and philosopher etc to explain the wide range. There are many ways of alienation, issues may be physical, mental, spiritual religious, economical and ethical and so on. There are also the numerable ways of alienation and recommended to eliminate this alienation. It has been also conceptualized in different ways. But in contemporary period spirituality and humanity is the penance to remove of all kinds of alienation.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] Fromm Erich; *Escape from freedom*, Holt Rinehart & Winston Inc. London 1947
- [2] Fromm Erich; *The sane society*; Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. London 1955
- [3] Fromm Erich; *Mara's Concept of Man*; Frederick Ungar Publishing Co; New York 1963
- [4] From Erich; *To have or To Be*; Jonadhon Cape, London 1978
- [5] From Erich; *Socialist Humanism*; Double day and Co. Inc. Great Britain, 1965
- [6] From Erich; *Man for Himself*; Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. London 1947
- [7] From Erich; *Sigmund Freud Mission*; George Allen & Unwin Ltd., New York, London 1966
- [8] in Karl Marx Early Writings; by T. Bottomore McGraw Hill, New York 1964
- [9] Hume David; *A Treatise of Human Nature* ed By T H Green and T H Green Logman's Green & Co., New York 1934, Vol. 1
- [10] Kurtz Paul, *The Humanist Alternative*; George Allen Unwin Ltd, London 1973
- [11] Karl Marx; *Existentialism and Humanism*; trans with an introduction by Philip Mainet, Methuen and Co. Ltd. London 1963
- [12] *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Macropedia, Vol 7
- [13] *Existentialism and Predicament* by Heineemann; F.H. London Adam and Charles Black, 1958
- [14] T. Lich Paul; *Systematic Theology* ( Chicago 1957)
- [15] Sartre, J.P. ; *Being and Nothingness*; Op Cit
- [16] Fritz Pappentein; *The Alienation of Modern Man*; Published by Monthly Review Press, New York, 1959

### REFERENCE

- [1] Erich Fromm; *The sane society*; p.120-121
- [2] Erich Fromm; *Marx Concept of Man*; p.47
- [3] Karl Marx; *The Economic and philosophical Manuscript 1844*; p.63-64.
- [4] *ibid.* 66
- [5] Erich fromm; *Man for Himself*; p.66
- [6] Poul Edward; *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ;vol 1, p.76
- [7] Krishna Roy Chhand; *Essay in Social and Political Philosophy*; p.615
- [8] Johnson; *Alienation, Concept ;terms and meaning*; p.313
- [9] Heineemann, F.H.; *Existentialism and Modern Predicament*; p.35
- [10] Paul Edwards; *the encyclopedia of Philosophy*; p.338
- [11] Fuller Mcmurrium; *A History of Philosophy*, vol2, p.611
- [12] *Ibid.*; p.612