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The Theme of Alienation in Indian Writing in English

Abstract

Alienation is the fundamental embodiment of loneliness and isolation which forms the theme of many sociological, psychological, philosophical and literary studies. Alienation is the major subject matter of human situation in the present era. It is legitimate that a universal phenomenon like alienation leaves an indelible percussion upon the literature of the present epoch. Actually, alienation comes up as a natural aftermath of existential dilemma both in inherent and extrinsic terms. The subject of alienation has been dealt with many angles in Indian writing in English. The isolated protagonist is a recurrent figure in much of the American and European fiction in the twentieth century. It has influenced the Indo-English literature to a large extent on the basis of socio-cultural and historical reasons. Alienation is the consequence of the loss of identity. It is the separation or displacement of human beings from their society which strengthens the feeling of powerlessness. The subject matter of alienation has become a section of ordinary language in the contemporary epoch. The theme alienation recognises a distinct type of social or sociological ill, which is one involving a problematic isolation between self and other that appropriately belong together. It is the condition of feeling estranged from one's milieu, work or self and it remains as an ambiguous concept with elusive meanings. This paper depicts the theme of alienation in Indo-English

literature from different point of views along with basic concept of the said term. It will be portrayed by analysing the works of few renewed writers.

Key Words: Isolation, Rootlessness, Identity, Alienation, Predicament, Existentialism.

Introduction

This paper is an attempt to bring out the subtlety and modulation of the term alienation from different perspectives. It also seeks to scrutinize the theme of alienation particularly in Indian writing in English. The main purpose is to make the readers familiar with the theme of alienation in modern literature, increasing their interest and enhancing their courage in their research. Alienation appears as a natural outcome of existential predicament. It is essential to understand the meaning of existentialism prior to analyze alienation. Existentialism is neither a well standardized and systematic philosophy of life nor its beginning can be determined. Jean Wahl contemplates existentialism as “Philosophies of existence”. Another significant point to be highlighted is the proclamation that the existentialists recommend that the existence precedes essence. It is also regarded as a strong reaction of all forms of rationalism. Actually, existence is the first principle from which everything else flows. According to Sartre, “We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up and defines himself afterwards” (Sartre 290). Soon after the two world wars the term existentialism gained popularity all over the world on the basis of disorder, chaos, annihilation, fears and frustration on the one hand and disintegration of moral values such as loss of faith and trust in man along with anguish and anxiety rendered the life exactly absurd, futile and meaningless on the other hand. Consequently existentialism enhanced rapidly and entered the sphere of literature also. The emptiness that man observes within the profundity of his soul is existentialistic by nature and this has to be counteracted to

bring the individual to the mainstream of life and to escape him from longstanding isolation. Many existentialists explored that life as a whole is hollow and one's comprehension of life can never be precisely alleviating. Therefore, alienation is persuasive to existence as an intrinsic egoism conceals the sub consciousness.

Existentialism has been applied in some of the Indian English novels such as Mulk Raj Anand's *Across the Black Water* reflects a very closeness to existential art. It puts light on existential terms like meaninglessness and subjectivity through the sound characterisation of its protagonists enlisting the hero Lalu Singh. Anita Desai's *Fire on the Mountain* is also included in the existential novel in which she analyses the emotional life of her characters, particularly female characters. She selected merely those characters that emotionally fail to come to the reality. The characters such as Raka, Nanda Kaul, Ila Das are victims of isolation, agony craves for privacy. The novel is saturated with a powerful sense of loneliness and isolation in the relinquished life of the protagonist, Nanda Kaul. Alienation is the situation of being estranged or alienated from something or someone else. The English term 'Alienation' is derived from the Latin word 'Alienato' which is a noun and it receives its meaning from the 'alienare' which implies to remove or to snatch. "Anomia is personal disorganisation, alienation is psychological state of an individual andalienated is the person who has been estranged from, made unfriendly toward his society and the culture it carries". As a matter of fact the words Anomie, Anomia or Alienation are interchangeable. In English there are some other words other than alienation such as isolation, separation and estrangement etc. According to Arnold Kaufman, "To claim that a person is alienated is to claim that his link to someone has certain characteristics which results in avoidable disconnect or loss of satisfaction" (Kaufman 37). Moreover, Karl Marx puts forth a very extensive and complex thought of alienation that includes many extrinsic dimensions of human existence in socio-economic context. His idea of alienation can be categorised in

political alienation and economic alienation. In order to explore political alienation he says, “The state does not care about individual’s existence, in a society without communion between people and that individual in his relation to such a state does not experience a feeling of solidarity, he is only able to it as an isolated monad, an individual. Man’s inner life is divided in world split up in such a way”. Secondly, the main agenda of all societies is the production to meet out the basic needs and to establish social institutions. The situation of being out of this procedure is known as the state of being alienated. Because of the environment of being alienated the existence of human being becomes only the existence of material human being. He says, “Just as alienated labour transforms free and self directed activity into a mean, so it transforms the species-life of a man into a mean of physical existence”.

Sociologists consider the loneliness as a type of alienation which is noticed in the absence of intimacy with others. When an individual says that he/she often feels lonely, it is understandable that he/she is dissociated or disconnected from others in the society. Actually, the loneliness and yearning for supportive primary relationships runs parallel to one another. The basic meaning of the concept of loneliness is the loss of essential relations with others and the weakness or loss of this relation with others in the society generates alienation.

The theme of alienation is apparent in Indo-English literature and serves as a basic subject and recurrent motif in many novels. For instance, R. K. Narayans’s novels are noteworthy in spotlighting the loneliness of human beings. His attempt to deal with alienation in the novel *The Vendor of Sweets* is more methodical. Sweet business holder, Jagan, has a son Mali and Jagan’s wife expired due to a brain tumour at the time when Mali was a child. Jagan tried his best to provide him every facility to give him proper education but Mali planned to proceed to America. Mali went there and returned back after three years with an American wife. Jagan is excluded and blacklisted by his community and he left Malgudi. His

estrangement and depression rose up because of his shock of his wife's death and Mali's aggrieved treatment. Jagan's displeased experience indicates Narayan's alienated characters. The earlier Indo-English novelists were familiar with the predicament emerging from alienation. Their writings bear evidence to a certain involvement with the changing national scene and an authentic concern for the intention of the country. Their feelings of isolation were never as keen as that of later novelists. The major reasons behind these feelings and thoughts were socio-political. During the course of delineating these alienated persons, their main purpose appears to demonstrate the potential dangers of two cultures commonly.

Manohar Malgaonkar's novel *Combat of Shadows* depicts the theme of alienation. The narrative is a foremost study of a Eurasian woman who desired to climb up and become a member of white English community. Moreover, she drifts between the two worlds; Indian and Western without associating to the either and feels herself an alienated to the both. The characters in the novel, Ruby and Winton reflect the two different perspectives of alienation. Winton's marriage with an English woman does not recover the alienated scene for a long time. The theme of alienation of various sections of Indian society is Kamla Markandaya's enduring subject. From the thorough study of her novels we can assume her message that is as long as one has roots one can survive easily and if one's roots are injured and lost then one dies socially and spiritually. Besides, Balachandra Rajan is another Indo-English literary personality who is associated with the theme of alienation. His novel *Too Long in the West* portrays the story of a young lady named Nalini, who lodged at Columbia University for three years. Her awkward situations increased by her stay there in America. Her mother says that, "she'll never fit in, in India because she's been too long in the west" (Rajan 24). Moreover one of Nalini's lovers also tells her that, "You won't fit in. You've joined the lost generation, out of place everywhere and acceptable nowhere. You will always be in exile and

an alien, a self-created foreigner, a refugee from yourself. You can't belong. You will leave in two worlds and fall between two stools" (Rajan 55).

The theme of alienation has also been dealt more constantly by Nayantra Sahgal and Anita Desai. In her novel *This Time of Morning*, Sahgal approaches the obstacles caused by changing order. In this narrative, Rashmi, the daughter of Kailash Vrind, vibrates with the freedom of sex. She desires separation from her husband an officer in Indian Forest Services. After ignoring him, she returned back to parents, isolated and alienated. She herself is unaware about her uncertainty. Rashmi's depressions, despite all her proclamations remained the same. Her complete existence seems to be paradoxical. Similarly Anita Desai is another novelist who is concerned with the theme of alienation in an organised way. "No other writer", it is said "is so much concerned with the life of young men and women in Indian cities as Anita Desai" (Kohli 4). In her novel *Cry, the Peacock*, there is a transparent depiction of the alienated human psyche in Maya's self-examination. Here is the tale of a young sensitive girl troubled by a childhood prophecy of disaster whose acute sensitivity is influenced in terms of unlimited human loneliness. From the very beginning, the novel reflects the theme of husband-wife alienation by depicting the relationship of Maya and Gautam. Maya, an upset favourite daughter of prosperous artistic father is married to an elder detached man. They are entirely opposite in their ways of living and their life after marriage is punctuated all along by matrimonial silences. Her loneliness in the house pains her a lot. She is victimised by restlessness, depression, and alienation. Her feeling of rootless keeps on increasing day by day. The alienation between Maya and her husband is rooted particularly in his philosophical detachment which Maya brushes aside. The embodiment of alienation is the main thematic preoccupation with Indo-English novelists. Their protagonists are unable to adjust themselves in their society largely because of some of their defects or evils in the society. Although, the Indo-English novelists are not attentive in preparing philosophical statements

in presenting the predicament of an alienated individual and disapproval for society but actually, to some extent alienation has influenced directly or indirectly the entire generation of Indian writers of the present era.

Conclusion

The theme of alienation is apparent and the alienated protagonist is the recurrent figure in the Indo-English fiction. The novelists have seriously attempted to depict the confusion, isolation, frustration, estrangement and disintegration of the human beings in the present era. The protagonists are not in a position to adopt the environment because of some defects in them or in the society. The novelists portrayed this problem by sketching the changing human relations in their fictions. They picked up the existing issues as the subject matter of their writings. They explored the anguish of the human beings living particularly in the modern society. They deal with complexity human relationships which are a global issue and therefore attract universal readers.

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