

Quest of Self in Literature

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Abstract – This paper is an attempt to discuss the nature of “self”, its different connotations as propounded by sociologists, philosophers and the psychologists. It is the self and its perception which gives rise to a definitive identity. Emergence of an identity can be defined as accretion of umpteen social, cultural and psychological ingredients. Any negative deviation from these factors leads to the crisis of identity and alienation. Growing complexities of life and in the materialistic modern world, ruined by war and devastation, has accentuated the modern man’s dilemma and created uncertainty about the purpose of existence. This lack of certitude has given rise to plethora of interrogatives. It has forced individual to dwell deeper in the inner recesses of psyche and dredge out the real self. This exploration of the real nature of self and antagonistic conclusions has made the life more difficult to comprehend. This very dilemma has been dealt with by contemporary literature in great details and with dexterity.

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INTRODUCTION

The twentieth century, especially the post war world has been an age of great stress and strain. Man suffers not only from war and ruin but from inner problem of isolation, meaninglessness in his mode of existence. Never before were so many people plunged in so much uncertainty and unsettlement. As Rilke asserts in first *Dunio Elegy* “we are not very reliably at home in the interpreted world”. The concept of reality has been dramatically changed by Burgeson’s theory of duree, Freud concept of subconscious, Einstein’s theory of relativity and Heinsberg’s Uncertainty principle. It is the all pervasive sense of alienation that has corroded human life from various directions. Alienation from oneself forms the subject of many psychological, sociological and philosophical studies. It is but natural that all encompassing phenomena like alienation and identity crisis should form the subject matter of contemporary literature.

The English articulation 'Self' is a modest one; in its typical sense it isn't exactly even a word. It something that makes any object pronoun into reflexive one: "her" into "herself", "him" into "himself", and "it" into "itself". In psychology it is frequently utilized for that arrangements of traits that a man appends to himself or herself most firmly, the properties that a man thinks that it's difficult to envision himself or herself without. In philosophy, the self is the operator, the knower and a definitive locus of individual personality.

A non-descript term; identity suggests our contemplations and emotions, our psychic nearness, our place of living, and even our longings, dreams and wants. The individual identity is shaped through

a progression of irregular and every now and again unusual gradual additions. A developmental and not an inborn item, one's identity is controlled by three elements. Firstly childhood impressions and yearnings assume an indispensable part in choosing it. How solid the rebelliousness in every individual is, and what frame it takes, is the second component. The third component is the zeitgeist. This approach youth to create diverse characteristics in various verifiable periods. As Eric Erikson clarifies in "Youngman Luther", the corruption of the church infused Martin Luther's with the requirement for change, ingrained in youthful Luther valor, lucidity and persistence of chivalrous extents. Erikson contends that personality is expressed in the core of the person and also that of the communal culture. An outsider will undoubtedly experience culturally diverse contacts which may place him in a stupefying and disappointing circumstance. It is the aftereffect of what Toffler calls "cultural shock". For example, Sarah in "Bye-bye Blackbird" is perplexed by the change realized by her cross-cultural marriage.

Identity is simply the projection of the self. Self-image view shape and changes self-identity. One's identity is established in the culture in which one lives and subsequently estrangement from the culture prompts the loss of one's socio-cultural identity. The person's alienation from the society is the sign of his quest for the statement of his identity.

The identity of a person might be set up on evidences. John Locke portrays individual way of life as the "sameness of a rational being". A man knows his identity by methods for what Locke calls "consciousness" and it is this cognizance that constitutes individual identity. Hume, then again, in the wake of having contemplated that everything that

endures past a moment is just a "bundle of recollection" of quickly evolving observations, presumed that the identity we attribute to people (and things) is just an imaginary one. Butler, similar to Locke, gave consciousness the prime significance in his record of individual identity.

Soren Kierkegaard finds that genuine identity of man is his "internal self" which is simply the "true self". To him subjectivity is truth and reality. Identity is simply the projection of the subjective self of a man; it relies upon how he envisions himself, and his undertakings for the obtaining and development of this self-view through a quest for identity. Mikhail Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher and literary theorist underlined the dialogic idea of self which as indicated by him is a "multiple phenomenon of essentially three elements.... A centre, a non-centre and the relation between them". His idea of dialogism features not just the numerous nature of language and self yet in addition human recognition, and declares the impossibility of a particular, determinate meaning.

The significance of the individual connectedness with society keeping in mind the end goal to gain in confidence and self-esteem cannot be belittled. In the modern world, where a relativistic philosophy has shaken the establishments of determinate truth and objective reality, the individual is to a great extent impacted by his own particular construction of reality. This construction must be a dynamic one, obliging and mirroring the changing unending structure. Having an individual identity is essential when a man identifies with a group. Lost identity or personality emergency emerges when a man as a result of his/her communications with a group, is left without a constructive picture of him/her. All through history, people have endeavored to get an unique identity for themselves, which has driven them to be roused to play out various expected and surprising practices. In his book "Identity in Modern Society" Bernd Simon states: "Identity is fashionable. Everybody wants to have one, many promise to provide one".

The modern man has demonstrated a genuine concern for the spiritual malaise of present day life, and the search for the identity has been one of his central distractions. Dennis Wrong has properly recommended that the expression "identity" and "identity crisis" have turned into the semantic signals of time. Notwithstanding all its imprecision, identity and its quest has become odyssey of the modern man, who has lost his social and otherworldly moorings and who is restless to look for his underlying foundations. Identity has been differently portrayed as malaise, ennui, mal du siècle, the stifling of life, automatization of man and his estrangement from himself, his kindred men and from nature. The issue of alienation is closely related with the loss and journey for one's identity. Alienation is one of the greatest issues facing modern man. The disquietude has been extensively aggravated by

what Spengler calls "the crises of the present". The existential experience with nothingness and tenuousness of human presence are prototypical of present day life. The situation of present day man has been examined by Melvin Seeman under an arrangement of five inter-related operational conditions – Powerlessness, Meaninglessness, Normalness, Isolation and Self-estrangement, which he considers to be diverse indications of alienation.

Alienated people have been differently depicted in modern literature. The pariah as hero is an intermittent figure in a significant part of the twentieth century European and American writing. The artist as an alienation is depicted in James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young man*, the negro or Jew as an outcast in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible man* and Saul Bellow's *Herzog* and the delicate adolescent as a pariah in Salinger's *Catcher of the Rye*. Camus' Mersault and Kafka's Joseph K are serious attempts to outline the perplexity, disappointment, breaking down and antagonism of modern man.

James Joyce's Dubliners broke from conventional methods for recounting a story. In the same way as other expressionistic masterpieces and music, Dubliners takes its subject the modern, baffled man as depicted by Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud: separated, loaded with inward clash and tension, rebelling against established norms and acknowledged standards. The fragmentary discussions and fractured confessions of *The Waste Land* of T.S.Eliot, may be perused as a progression of endeavors to turn the key that will permit the modern, distanced individual to be discharged from his fiendish jail to discover fellowship with God, nature and others. Huxley's dystopic vision depends on the mutilation of the ideas of Marx and Freud. The mantra of his novel isn't "everything belongs to everyone else" but "everyone belongs everyone else". *Brave New World* exhibits that the theory of the greatest happiness for the greatest number may not lead to happiness at all.

As Jean Paul Satre contends, *The Myth of Sisyphus* is a philosophical companion to *The Stranger*. As indicated by him in it we discover the hypothesis of absurdity. Showing Camus' philosophical thoughts and applying them to the novel, Satre centers around alienation – the way the novel's hero, Mersault exists outside social standards. For Camus and Satre, life is alienating, ludicrous; we occupy an unreasonable world as outcasts, isolated from significance, denied truth and deserted by God. What makes Samuel Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* so pitiful, so tragic is that the greater part of the characters are repelled and made abnormal isolated, for sure estranged – from each other, God and nature as well as from time itself, a day of the week, and all that they touch, think, feel, see, and

significantly recall. What appears pure gibberish is really a contemplated or excessively contemplated endeavor to build up past all uncertainty the idea of human existence.

Attributable to historical and socio-cultural reasons, Indian English composition, as well, couldn't stay unaffected by the topics of alienation and identity crisis. As Meenakshi Mukhreejee brings up, alienation or rootlessness is "a very common theme in it". It is without a doubt the most overwhelming quality of a few characters outlined in Indian books. It has taken two principle bearings – philosophical and sociological. The philosophical quest includes a web of dualisms from which the hero must unravel his intricate identity. One of the central exponent of this approach is Raja Rao, whose own spiritual search echoes in the pursuit of the hero of *The Serpent and the Rope*. The search for identity through a knowledge of the self is the premise of R.K. Narayan's fiction. All his books resound with the rhythm of departure and return, ebb and flow. The youthful squabble with the old, leave Malgudi for England and America, eat beef and marry foreigners. An attention to the determinants of , and threats to identity, can likewise be seen in Ruth Pravar Jhabvala. Her characters are in never-ending journey for identity and need to confront a progression of crises simultaneously. In spite of the fact that her books are constrained with external manifestations of identity crisis, she is at her best while she depicts conflict of individuals and domestic friction, which are social or familial acknowledge of this ailment.

The journey for identity in the books of Kamala Markandaya is more cognizant and deliberate. She has a great sense of dilemmas of identity with which modern man might be confronted. Her books contain a boundless attention to assorted elements in charge of the loss of identity, which in them, is prevalent in the sociological sense then in the philosophical. Her books goes for working out precisely those issues which begins from the hero's search for identity.

The topic of alienation has been managed all the more relentlessly and unflinchingly by Nayantara Sehgal, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi. Many characters musings and deeds are spurred by their rootlessness.

The treatment of alienation is a noteworthy topical preoccupation with Indian English authors. Their protagonists are, as Existential heroes, nomads distanced from nature and society. They are oddball in their society to a great extent due to either a few defects in themselves or a few shades of malice of society. The Indian English writer isn't tremendously inspired by putting forth philosophical, target explanation as in introducing the predicament of a distanced individual and communicating empathy for him and objection for society. The issue of alienation is associated with the loss of and quest for one's

identity. The dispossessed personality's quest for identity is common theme but it has peculiar Indian coloring.

CONCLUSION

A simplistic view of self is that it is a person hence a physical system. But the nature of consciousness has convinced many a philosophers that there is basically a non-physical aspect of a person. Understanding the nature of immaterial self creates one's identity. The identity of a person is rooted in the culture in which he lives and any estrangement from one's culture results in what can be referred as socio-psychosis. Thus identity is a dynamic construct which is susceptible to alteration and quite competent to balance multiple facets in a healthy co-existence. Crises of identity arises when one cannot form positive self-image of oneself either individually or in relation to the society. And this dilemma of search for self and identity has been dealt with assiduously by the contemporary modern writers in their writings.

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