

A Critical Approach to Alienation in Marxian Theory

Dr. Geeta
R.G.I. College, Meerut (U.P.)

Abstract

Marx took the idea of alienation from Hegel. But Hegel presented the concept of alienation in idealistic terms while Marx gave to it a materialistic interpretation and used it in analysing and criticising the social circumstances in which man becomes a passive creature & gets dehumanized. Marx criticises Hegel as he takes the two terms 'objectification' and alienation as synonymous and thus creates confusion. Marx says these two terms are not to be used interchangeably. Objectification is the process through which one externalises himself in nature and society and becomes necessarily an object for others within the social structure. But alienation occurs only when man having externalized himself in nature and society finds his activity his essence operating on him as an external, alien and oppressive power.

Introduction

The idea of Alienation finds expression in Max's Economic and Philosophical Manuscript 1844 and in the Grundrisse. It is a situation in a highly organised capitalistic society in which the individual finds himself crushing under the dead weight of productive efficiency. Man is essentially looked upon as a producer because social organisation in which he works is so large and complicated that personal relations have lost all meaning- Even if the individual, by strenuous efforts, succeeds in reaching fairly high in career scale, he is still nothing more than a mere cog in the machinery and can hardly hope to influence its working. Most individuals however continue to languish in the lower scales of hierarchy. The capitalist to maximize his profit continues to exploit the situation and therefore common man is engaged all the time in nothing but producing things in order to improve his economic status. He has to remain so much busy in the pursuit of his vocation that he hardly gets time to look within himself. He experiences alienation from himself, his work and society. Thus, alienation of individual from his surrounding has made him restless and we read in Newspapers a sense of personal fright among men. To Marx Alienation has four Dimensions.

Alienation from Nature

Marx says that essence of man is not to run after property. Property is for men and not man is for property. The essence of man is the self-realization and the development of his personality. Private property is enemy and destroyer of humanity. It paralyses the personal life of man and turns him into a slave, a non-entity. Thus, it imprisons the essence of man in its nasty citadel. In this way both rich and poor get alienated from their essence and nature as both run after property. They are converted into living corpses. The worker is reduced to the animal condition and the capitalist is reduced to an abstract money power.

Alienation from Himself

In Capitalistic system man is treated not as a man but as an employer and employee, master and subordinate, producer of wealth and source of production. In the system he becomes a part of machine. The social division of labour creates a vast accumulation of capital and wealth of one pole of society, Value of things get increased, But it is achieved only at the cost of progressive devaluation of man. "Man's labour is transformed into a saleable commodity. The workers put their skill and experience into

raw material and turn it into a finished object. But this finished object goes into the hands of capitalist and thus the worker stands alienated from that. The object produced by labourer stands opposed to him, as an alien being, as a power independent of the producer. This is an objectification of labour. The more he works, the more he finds himself dominated by the world of objects which his own labour has created. He has to put his life into it and his life then no longer belongs to himself but to the object. The greater is his product, the more he is diminished. With the passage of time he gets exhausted and mentally depressed. The profit brought about by his labour does not belong to him but belongs to the employer who has no sympathies with him.

Alienation from his Fellow Beings

The worker becomes highly impersonal. Each man is alienated from every other man. He has no close relations, sympathies or association with whom he works. Even in the crowd of men, he finds himself powerless, isolated and lonely due to selfish and self-centered tendencies of capitalistic society. The employer treats worker as a commodity and the worker treats his employer as an instrument of exploitation. Enmity, bickering and ill-will dominate their relations.

Alienation from Society

With the growing concentration of wealth, the capital becomes an independent social power which is opposed to society. Man's affair with Maya (Wealth) badly tells upon his social life too. Marx says, 'the less you eat, drink, buy books, to go theatre, to the public houses, the less you think, theorise, sing' etc., the more you will be able to save money and the greater will be your treasure which neither moth nor rust will corrupt. The less you are, the less you express your life, the more will be your saving and greater will be your alienated life" Everything which economist takes from you i.e. the life and humanity, he restores to you in the form of money and wealth.

Another aspect of social alienation is that in a society based on private property, all human values are superseded by wealth. Property becomes the basis of honesty, gentleness, virtue, power, right and justice. Money acts as a distorting power. It transforms fidelity into infidelity, infidelity into fidelity virtue into vice, vice into virtue, servant into master, master into servant, idiocy into intelligence and intelligence into idiocy. A gentle, intelligent, cultured poor is regarded inferior in comparison to a crooked, foolish and uncultured rich man. Money becomes the criterion for everything, Human values become meaningless and are lost in the race for property, Immoral capitalistic system becomes moral.

In a capitalistic system, the work process leads to alienation. In this regard, two main conditions may be referred to

1. The worker has sold his labour power to the capitalist. The product of his labour exists outside him, independently as something alien and hostile to him.
2. Alienation is found in the process of production. The worker is unable to work creatively. The ownership and the control of work process is vested in the capitalist who decides what is to be produced, how much is to be produced and how the product is to be disposed. The workers are subordinated to the machine. Marx beautifully analysed the process of alienation. In the first stage, the relation of man ceases with his labour power. When it is alienated from man, it becomes a commodity to be purchased by the capitalist and sold by the labourer. Workers sink to the level of commodity in fact the most wretched of commodities. In the second stage, after a man has sold his labour, work becomes joyless, forced labour. Whatever is produced by him, does not belong to or controlled by him. Work becomes a burden. The worker feels comfortable and free outside his work.

In the third stage, the worker feels freely active only in his animal functions eating, drinking/procreating. He no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. Though eating and drinking are human functions but these as only aims of man, becomes animal functions. These when turn into sole and ultimate end become animal functions. Man eats and drinks to live and not vice versa. A man who lives

only for eating/drinking is an excreting machine rather than a man. What is human becomes animal, what is animal becomes human in man.

Thus the more the worker produces the less he has to consume. The more value he creates the more valueless he becomes. The better formed his product, the more deformed the worker becomes.

Marx finds private property is the only cause for alienation which leads to animalisation of man. It is harmful for both the Haves and Have Nots. It paralyzes the personal life as it negates the personality. It enslaves both rich and poor. Property owner becomes a slave to his wealth and propertyless becomes a slave to his needs which impel him to work. Thus, both lose their personality and humanity.

Relevance of the Study

Marx finds only one solution to the problem that is the overthrow of private property which is the basis of the exploitation of workers. In a capitalistic society things are produced not to meet the needs but for profit. First the things are produced and then the demand for them is created through advertisement. Thereafter, they are sold with the profit motive. Private property also creates wall between man and man, and causes discord and disharmony. Marx says that the democratic ideals like rights, liberty, justice, equality etc. are unrealisable unless private property is abolished through revolution. Only then man will be reunited with his essence and resorts to himself and his nature. To conclude, despite alienation being a vague concept, Marx exposed through it the weaknesses of a capitalistic system

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