



Technological Enhancements Attributing Psychological Estrangement

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Imagine yourself on an island in the middle of a large body of water and out of sight of any other land mass. If the day is bright and sunny, the horizon stands out sharply and it is very easy to distinguish the sea from the sky. If the day, however, is gray and overcast, the line of demarcation becomes as vague and ambiguous as to virtually disappear. As the bench marks, or points of contrast, that were available become no longer visible, your view tends, in a very real sense, to lose its meaning, and it becomes pointless to continue staring out to sea. Similarly, many people whom we could describe as alienated may feel that some aspects of their lives- or of the style of life around them – have no meaning; it's a sort of going through the motions without any real point to it. This sense of meaninglessness about one's existence is another characteristic of estrangement.

The disappearance of the bench marks that we referred to above suggests two more characteristics of alienation that will be helpful to keep in mind. Generally speaking, among groups of people, living in association with one another there will be certain ways of behaving, of doing things that are accepted by the members of the group. For these people, the patterns or standards (or bench marks) for living that they share are part of what holds them together. Social scientists generally refer to these standards or patterns as norms. In the alienated person, however, there may be a loosening of the attachment to those norms, a feeling of separation from them, or an outright rejection of them, feelings of normlessness the absence of attachment to any definite set of standards, may characterize one who is alienated. So also may feelings of estrangement from the accepted norms indicate a sense of alienation.

Karl Marx gives the term many applications, and the things he terms alienated differ so considerably, the exact way in which the term is to be understood depends very much upon the context in which it occurs. Its basic sense is the same; but the point it conveys differs according to the nature of that to which it is applied. A man is self –estranged for Marx if his true human



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nature is something alien to him-if his life fails to manifest the characteristics of a truly human life. There are three such characteristics for Marx; individuality, sociality and cultivated sensibility. Self-alienation thus takes the form of dehumanization in the spheres of life which correspond to them: production, social life, and sensuous life. It may best be understood in terms of dehumanization in each of these areas. Obviously, Marx's conceptualization of alienation is the result of historical process in which man paradoxically gains mastery over his physical environment only by becoming a slave to himself and to other men. Marx shows that the very social relationship (class relationship and the whole 'super structure' of political institutions and ideologies) created by man in his attempts to exploit nature become autonomous barrier between himself and the direct experiences of his environment. Thus Marx conceptualizes alienation both at the individual level (in a subjective sense) and at the societal level (from an objective perspective). At the individual level, Marx shows 'self-alienation', i.e., separation of a person from something which is very much a part of him, and the resulting separation of the person from his essential nature. At the societal level, Marx refers to 'alienation' as interpersonal estrangement from society as a whole. Hence for Marx, alienation is total; one is separated from other men generally. In this way, Marx interprets 'alienation' in a historic- philosophical perspective. Marx discusses four aspects of alienation-alienation from the object produced; alienation from one's work process itself; alienation from himself; and alienation from one's fellow men. These aspects of alienation symbolize, "powerlessness," "meaninglessness", "social isolation", "self-estrangement" and "normlessness" as formulated by Seeman. All these categories of alienation, according to Marx, are not separable and independent dimensions, but are links in a complex chain of development.

For Marx, estrangement emanates from the division of labor and the introduction of private ownership. It is not the technology of mass-production that gives birth to man's estrangement, but the social and economic context of work. Because of this concept man's work becomes external to him, and it generates in him a feeling of misery and not of wellbeing. The result is that man gets 'physically exhausted and mentally debased' which is an extreme form of man's



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alienation. Commentators on Marx have always noted that his concept of alienation contains two semantic elements, alienation in the sense of renunciation or relinquishment, and alienation in the sense of estrangement. Few, however, have pressed this distinction very far, being content with remarking that both in Hegel and Marx – the watershed from which alienation theory descends into modern thought-the two senses are closely linked, if not conflated. Since this may be a reason why the idea of alienation, despite all that has been written about it, remains unclear and far from univocal.

“...it can be pointed out that the historical and philosophical treatments of the phenomenon of alienation refer to the fact that alienation marks out a wide range of conditions of estrangement or separation of individuals or groups from a variety of social circumstances. Indeed, Seeman himself as well as Schacht and many others attribute this range of substantive referents to alienation. Thus; through alienation certain aspects of man’s mal-integration with the larger social order can be understood. The term also involves relatively broad social demands made of individuals and also of groups. Such an understanding of the term makes it clear that alienation is not a ‘personality trait’ and that it is not to be restricted to the limits of psychology. The fact is that the concept of alienation should be formulated as pertaining at least to the realm of Social Psychology”(Sharma,14). Alienation is a term that refers to certain perceptions and feelings that some people have about themselves and about one or more aspects of the social environment – as these two (self and environment) relate to one another. The alienated individual may well see himself as an ‘island’- separated from other people, unattached to them, with few bonds or ties of any enduring or intimate nature. This sort of social isolation, then, we can speak of as one characteristic of alienation.

Why doesn’t a person who is suffering from these feelings do something about his or her life? The answer for persons who are estranged may be that they don’t feel that there is anything they can do about it. The situation may appear to them to be out of control and they feel trapped, hung-up, on a treadmill. This sense of lack of control over their destiny, this feeling of powerlessness, is another aspect of alienation.



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Finally , if one feels socially isolated or estranged ,has no strong attachments, views life as essentially meaningless , sees himself or herself as relatively unable to do anything about it – if one or more of these feelings are present – it becomes very difficult to answer the question, “ Who am I ?” A person’s identity, the sense of who she or he is, derives from relationships with others, particularly those people who are important to her or him. And so, people whose relationships with those around them are viewed by them as empty or unclear, or for whom there is a clear estrangement or isolation of themselves from others, may come increasingly to a state of self estrangement. This condition too, is a characteristic of the alienated individual.

Modernism and Estrangement:

Technology has entered into the nerves of modern man. The major part of life is grounded on technology now. No aspect is left untouched, particularly where communication and socialising is concerned. Capitalists created technology to earn profits at the cost of ‘mass alienation’. Talking about only social sites and other so called platforms of communication, there is no doubt that technology has weakened our ‘collective consciousnesses’. It is turned to be the opium of the masses and bringing about disintegration, stress and estrangement. If we don’t take precautions now, we may better prepare ourselves more of class conflicts, prejudices, health or environmental issues and above all external as well as internal alienation.

Though Marx’s idea was related to industrial society, the negative effects of this digital society cannot be overlooked. There are several reasons which relate the society to alienation today. Marx’s division of society on the basis of distribution of wealth is a world known reality. The new society has no doubt contributed in widening the gap between the poor and the rich and the low paid working class has been kept away from the wealth generating economy. Those that earlier had well paid jobs or there was a hope of hike feels insecure. This fact adheres to Marxian theory of society. However, there are now also growing numbers of well educated younger people struggling to find well paid work while at the same time carrying a large debt as a result of increasingly expensive higher education.



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Let us understand the concept in the light of modern man's plight in the technological era. Technology is developing gradually and all the nations are in the race of becoming techno giants. So many sites and apps are being created claiming to bring human beings together on one platform. May it be just the social media sites like WhatsApp, Facebook or Twitter; or matrimonial and dating sites. The whole concept of going online is based on the same model. Take online education too for example. Virtual classrooms and video lectures, everything is technology based now. And 'if you are not techno savvy, you can't succeed', is assumed.

But the question arises, is whole of this concept of being online really bringing people together or it is creating distances. The distance is leading to alienation. The cause may be any, but globalisation or a digital society is not to be overlooked. Again, as per Marxian theories applicable eminently to today's society, the power still vests in the hands of governments and notwithstanding the fact that people use the political power to protect the elites.

Most importantly in the field of education, technology is playing a vital role. More refined and powerful impact technology is leaving for alienation to sprout is in getting the control of what we want to do, removing the choice and decision making from humans anymore. Yet another aspect the big data market; people are exploited without information of the loss by these IT companies. They collect and sell the data for commercial purposes.

The interference into one's privacy and causing damage is yet another aspect which plays a role in developing alienation. There are uncountable cases where the accounts have been hacked and misused or where the photos and other stuff has been misused. It really becomes impossible for the victims to recover such loss of privacy and social harm caused due to technology. Once onto social media, it's hard to control such occasional damages. Sometimes it leaves an irrevocable scar on the psychology of the victims and they fail to bear; that result into alienation and a fear from the society.

This is called 'alienation caused by social connectivity'. These days the term 'social' has gained much currency. Being 'social' means being 'upgraded' to the so called modern people. A



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recent survey showed that a new social app is launched almost every week. Facebook, the biggest social platform has surpassed one billion registered accounts and currently has more than 2.60 billion monthly active users. Instagram, which is ranked 2nd as photo sharing app has more than one billion monthly active accounts, Tumblr has more than 465 million active bloggers. The number of YouTuber users has also increased to over 265million monthly as of Feb.,2020. (Omnicores)

What does this data mean? That majority of people today is active on social sites and they all are extroverts, they want others to know what is happening in their lives. They boast of having a long list of ‘friends’ and ‘friends of friends’ and ‘followers’. But are they really ‘connected’ with those virtual ‘friends’ ? Some may be their real acquaintances but are they emotionally connected with them? Just by liking all their posts and sending them frequent or occasional wishes on their special days do they ‘connect’?

And then what about that portion of population who believe in meeting face-to-face to keep healthy connections?

There is no denying the fact that we always crave for the company of a friend when we achieve something or loose! When we are extremely happy or sad! When we feel alienated and when we feel like singing or playing a piano. We need a friend to be around or a companion to share our feelings and emotions, to give us a sense of belongingness, who says ‘yes, I belong to you and you belong to me.’

How can that friend be replaced by an FB friend? Is it possible? That ‘emotional connect’ is always missing on these social sites, how so much they promise of ‘connecting people’. Let me tell you my personal experience. I just remembered my childhood best friend one day .I missed her a lot. That started my search. Everywhere for a few days. It’s really not a tough job to find someone these days with whom you have lost contact somewhere in the past. But to my own astonishment, I contacted her, shared few matters, few calls and chats... and that’s all! Now no more craving to talk to her anymore, same she too felt, perhaps. What was lacking was that



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‘emotional connect’. So, sometimes these social sites prove fatal too, as it did not only end up my search for a friend but ended up that sweet past too. Though she is still in my ‘friends list’ and so are many. But what happiness do they provide?

The dependency on media is increasing so much that we have assumed that life is impossible without social media. Media has gained a significant place in our professional as well as personal lives and the scope of media is extremely high these days. Nothing can be imagined without Google. Even when a student has a query, parents or teachers don’t hesitate to say ‘Google it and tell me too the answer.’ This thought process has junked the brains of humanity. We don’t want to read books now, we don’t want to memorize anything, and we even don’t want understand anything. Everything is served to us in a platter of social media and search engines. But there is no denying the fact that life doesn’t come with handouts. Life gives us real examinations, real challenges which we have to face on our own. No Google comes to rescue.

With the advent of internet and other advancements in technology, abilities of humans are deteriorated. We are too much dependant on internet now that we don’t feel like doing anything on our own. God created human and humans think they are very smart if they have created machines. Ironically enough by imparting human intelligence to machines and making these machines smart we are junking our own senses, deteriorating our own intelligence, spoiling our intellect and finally feeling ‘alienated’.

“The technological developments that have taken place over the past decade are colossal. With the use of social media and other networking tools, we have acquaintances all over the world...but are we becoming social robots? The reality is that we have connections but no genuine conversations. We are getting along but are often ‘alone together’. Instead of talking to people we prefer sending texts. The simple reason behind it is that in texts we get to edit, delete, retouch and in turn end up hiding our true selves and present only what we finesse. It has not only altered what we do but what we are. In a room, if five people are sitting together, each is



busy exploring the world on their cell phones and laptops but nobody is interested in learning about the person sitting right next to him or her. We think too much but feel too little.

As Charlie Chaplin correctly said, “we, humans, are meant to live by each other’s happiness and not by each other’s misery.” Each one of us forms an integral part of this society and it is our prerogative to actively work to form a community which benefits all of us. I feel we are letting technology take us to places where we don’t want to be. We have forgotten the essence of belonging to the mankind race. We are meant to stand by each other in good and bad times. People generally say that technology has made our lives better and easier. No doubt it has made our lives easier, but has it really made our lives better? Technology has given us cures for so many diseases but the bitter truth is that alongside these cures came numerous new diseases. Technology has drastically changed our lives both for good and bad. The optimum use of technology is certainly beneficial for us, but we need to stay away from is our over-dependency with technology. I encourage you to realize your technological usage, and evaluate if it is benefiting your relationships or hurting them. It’s essential that we maintain our balance in our society, whether that means with our electronics or without them.”(Saxena)



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