

ELEMENTS OF ALIENATION AND EXISTENTIALISM IN DOSTOEVSKY'S *NOTES FROM UNDERGROUND*

Abstract

Alienation is considered as a recent phenomenon in the arena of literature. The approach of alienation as central theme can be traced in early 20th century but its root is before 19th century. Alienation can be term as a form of rootlessness, loss of identity, or a state of isolation, which provides the perfect platform of literary studies. It is a major theme of human predicament in the prevailing epoch. It is a powerful force which can move either way, humans may have influenced negatively, vulnerability, and violence, on the other hand it also provides one to introspect and intellectual independency. These features make it natural to leave such an indelible impact upon the contemporary literature. The theme of alienation has a close association with existentialism or absurdity. The theme finds a prominent place in literature and is dealt with persistence in contemporary literature. Modernisation and advancement of science and technology, one can clearly see how individuals are shifting from rural community to isolated urban life. European novelists explore these relationships with each other and with social institutions, leading us to be increasingly individualistic in our thinking and thus alienated. Human finds isolated in this hostile world and fails to understand the very purpose of the life. The researcher through this study will discuss and analyse the theme of alienation in Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground*. It is a novel written by Fyodor Dostoevsky, published in 1864. It is considered one of the first existentialistic work of the fiction, exploring the themes of nature, free will and the consequences of living in a society that values rationality and progress. Throughout

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the novel the narrator struggles with his own sense of alienation and tries to find some kind of purpose or meaning to live the life which he fails.

Keywords: Existentialism, Alienation, European Literature,

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the Oxford definition, existentialism is a philosophical system or theory that emphasizes the existence of the particular person as a free and responsible entity who decides his or her own development by willful actions. Existentialists believe that in a meaningless world, mankind must find their purpose. In a world where everything is irrational, they must make sensible decisions. They place a premium on human existence, acts, freedom, and decision-making.

"Existentialism arose from the Wasteland that was Europe during and after World War II." (Charlesworth, 1976). Existentialism gained popularity in the years following World Wars I and II. The psychological state of the population was the fundamental reason behind this. Thousands of deaths and war-like scenarios occurred practically everywhere on the planet, leading to a society in which individuals began to question the nature and meaning of their own life. People grew increasingly aware of their dread of existence, which helped existentialism gain acceptance.

Alienation first appears from the opposite sex like the narrator is in the novel initially behaves with Lisa the prostitute like he was her well-wisher but when she visits his shabby apartment he was extremely frustrated and rude to her. Other form of alienation is man from his fellow man which includes man's misunderstanding with his fellow men and also creates hateful remarks in his mind which is cruel and intensive. Henry Winthrop is the alienation of the man from its society which is of course due to the social reform reforms or revolutions one strives for as he slashes she is against the norms of the society which is majorly depicted throughout the novel that how the narrator is overwhelmed and exhausted from the Russian society. The environment which is nature that involves three major concerns first the inability to enjoy nature say theologically second the destruction of nature field forest and streams third the man's danger to life and health Like the narrator was suffering with liver issues and still ignored the illness lastly alienation of men from God which is when the man loses the ability to think or loses hope and faith it occurs due to the modernization of t. Author now speaks about existentialism that how existentialistic writers have arose the readers the thought of alienation in their life. He mentions four concepts in existentialism that is commitment, engagement, authenticity and encounter Firstly in commitment he refers the ability of mankind to develop Philip's philosophy of life which is also mentioned by Sartre. Secondly engagement or involvement so that thoughts values and ideas can develop in the human mind so it is easy to deal with identity crisis if it occurs thirdly the authentic authenticity which is being uniquely oneself and having communication develops the authenticity as one learns new things which is which in the book the narrator completely avoids. Lastly encounter refers to experience shared or experience by oneself but if the experience is bad then it may lead to the person avoiding each other which exactly happened with the narrator during the party which with his which was a complete disaster. Hence proves the point that existentialism and alienation are interlinked generally as well as in the novel.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Choudhary (2019), in *Notes from the Underground*, the protagonist contends with internal tensions, self-contradictions, and self-pity on a regular basis, to the point where his life becomes an incarnation of an unknown agony. The book boldly declares the human mind's dilemma. Man does not have any kind of safe haven or retreat from the grief and anguish of modern consciousness (Choudhary, 2019).

In the article inverted “*alienation and existentialism in relation to literature and youth*” (1967), Henry Vincent through has explained that how alienation and existentialism has always been a disease of society which makes the in the work of literature and its youths behaviour. He mentions existentialism writing like Sartre and Camus who have strongly explained the suffering of mankind resulting in their society. And claims that the literature may expand intellectual side of the young alienated people. The “underground man” is the narrator of *Notes from Underground*, and the entire work is made up of his diary entries. The “underground man” adds that he writes for self-reflection and to better understand his views. He is at a loss to understand his life, to understand the fundamental nature of his being, and to make sense of his existence (Rapoport, 2008, p.1). The “underground man” is trying to define himself after coming into contact with his existence in the world. His notebook entries reveal his sadness, dissatisfaction, and loss. He's on his own, and the only way he can genuinely see and understand himself is to be alone. Introspection is how he manifests his own presence in the universe. The “underground man” is having a hard time to have a better knowledge of his own nature and the nature of the universe around him.

In Thesis Title, “*A Reflection on Russia's Existential nihilism from Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment and Notes from the Underground*” (2019) Anika Tahsin has explained existential nihilism which is creating one own rule to survive in the world which is absolutely absurd or meaningless. She has mentioned how the condition of 19th century Russia after the World War second leads to the writer like Albert Camus, Soren Kierkegaard, and Friedrich Nietzsche came out with their philosophy. She explained the condition of the 19th century Russia which was major reason of Dostoyevsky to express his views on the political, economic and social side is beautifully highlighted the point it has beautifully highlighted the point of alienation two out as all the after effect was created creating a suffocating lifestyle for the people of Russia which is unfortunately Dostoevsky was the living victim of hence he created such a character who is much triggered by the condition of the mankind and frustratingly alienates himself leading to create such a sophisticated personality and led his life by his own created rules and writes a diary which was a sort of escapism for him.

In the thesis, “*The symbolism of the 'underground' and 'the court' in Fyodor Dostoevsky's Notes from the Underground and Franz Kafka's the trial*” (2019) Ugwu Lawrence Eneche explains that both the authors have similar philosophies and symbolic representation. The reader in both stories is left wondering and even dubious about the direction the author will take the plot in. In the article “*Joking with a Heavy Heart: Bo Burnham as the Modern Underground Man*” (2022) Jasper S. Beck has to explained how in the COVID-era comedy special *Inside from 2021*, comedian and director Bo Burnham makes the same questions like what is the meaning of life? More than a century later *Notes from Underground* is recognised as existential philosophy even though neither of these texts openly discuss it. In this comparison essay, I argue that within is also a deeply existential

work, similar to *Notes from Underground* in terms of the issues it addresses and the strategies it uses to do so. Both of these self-referential expressions of suffering and confusion about the existential state lead to nihilism as their ultimate conclusion. It is possible to see how humanity suffers with the same existential concerns in diverse situations by contrasting these identical works from such radically different eras, illustrating the continued importance of existential questions. There are 11 sections in the Dostoevsky excerpt from *Notes from Underground*, which makes it very easy to summarise he took surprise by how many stylistic parallels there are between two works that were created 157 years apart when comparing *Inside* and *Notes from the Underground*. Both tales, on the surface, are about men who are cut off from society and are confined to their own minds as they struggle to make sense of the absurdity all around them and suppose this is why he connect with them. They both also have a propensity to contradict their own statements, as if they don't really believe what they say.

As Burnham comes to terms with the absurdity of reality throughout the course of the movie, the noises and sights of nature begin to fill his room. This is best illustrated in the song "That Funny Feeling," which recreates the ambience of a campfire at night using only artificial means. A concept of something that is believed to be outside of the existential state is actually a component of it, as seen by the mixing of the natural and unnatural in this image. This is how Existentialism is described in *inside*. You cannot escape this frequently very awful situation you find yourself in, even though you desperately want to do so. And the author comes to the conclusion that Boss Burnham and the Narrator both embrace the current calculated and spiteful performance and accept that the headache won't go away.

III. ALIENATION AND EXISTENTIALISM ELEMENTS IN THE NOVEL

Notes from the Underground provides a thorough description of the characteristics of The Underground Man, protagonist of the novel. He has a fundamentally contradictory and ambiguous personality. He tells us that his liver hurts, but he immediately follows up by saying that he's not sure if it's his liver. "My liver is bad, well-let it get worse." (p.11), Dostoevsky. Despite being aware of his illness, he stubbornly refuses to see a doctor out of spite, even though he knows that by continuing with this vindictive behaviour, he will only put himself in danger.

The Narrator is a nihilist, which implies that he considers societal norms to be basically meaningless and that they are not rooted in nature. The civilization in which is objectionable to him. In addition, having poor weather, St. Petersburg has administrative and hypocritical culture. It is usual and commonly accepted to accept bribes. The narrator is filled with resentment towards all facets of society, yet he is conscious of his lack of ability to influence it either positively or negatively. He is incapable of even becoming a bad government servant. Instead, he attacks himself and refuses to go to a doctor, venting his anger and choosing to stay in a harmful environment out of spite. The Underground Man's actions are the first indication of his masochism, his delight of his own suffering and humiliation. The Underground Man's acute self-consciousness is a significant additional component that affects his indecision. He is often insane, but he is also exceedingly analytical and intensely aware of every idea, urge, and sensation that passes through his head. Because of his increased awareness of all the "opposite elements" inside of him, he is unable to decide what to do or to confidently carry out any of his aspirations. Dostoevsky does not necessarily want to glorify the "man of action," despite the Underground Man's self-delusion regarding

the cause of his alienation. In fact, both those who act hastily but blindly and those who spend too much time thinking about the "beautiful and lofty" are criticized in the book. The world is essentially split in half by the Underground Man. People in the first group are both "disingenuous" and "active." Although they are not necessarily dumb, these people are only marginally more "conscious" than the Underground Man. They are able to make these decisions painlessly because they are unable to consider every choice they make. When they encounter an obstacle, they stop in their tracks carelessly because they do not analyse obstacles any more than they analyse their own motivations. People with education and consciousness, like him, make up the second group that the Narrator sees.

The Narrator takes pride in his consciousness, but he also sees it as a curse. When he talks about the enjoyment a cultured man can derive from a toothache, this masochistic notion takes on literal significance. "Next you'll be finding pleasure in a toothache!" you will exclaim, laughing. "And why not? There is also pleasure in a toothache..." (p.24), Dostoevsky. The Narrator believes that this is the only form of pleasure available to the truly developed man in the nineteenth century, despite the fact that he is ashamed of it as he is of anything he finds pleasurable or deserving of pride. We see the toothache as an illustration of the absurdity that results when intelligence and sensitivity are not accompanied by action, which is one of several times in the novel where Dostoevsky's message likely differs from the Underground Man's. Then he explains the conflict between the sentimental and idealistic ideologies of the 1840s, when the Narrator was a young man, writing his diaries. The Narrator exhibits a conflict between disdain and a yearning for the ideal of true love. He exhibits the same contradictory viewpoint towards the sublime literature of the Enlightenment and Romantic eras, when everyone from the philosopher Immanuel Kant to the author Victor Hugo praised the "beautiful and lofty." As evidence of his familiarity with these periods' leading authors, The Narrator alludes to Victor Hugo, George Sand, Lord Byron, and other authors throughout the course of the book. Narrator continues to use his intelligence as justification for his inactivity in these chapters, and his inactivity as evidence of his intelligence. He views all men who are active as being "dull and narrow-minded"—the very qualities that enable them to act. The supreme intelligence of the Underground Man, however, prevents him from dispelling any of the uncertainties that prevent action. Every problem he starts to solve leaves him with a new, unsolvable problem. He had previously stated that intelligence inevitably leads to inactivity, but now he seems to be saying that inactivity is a sign of intelligence in and of itself. According to Underground Man, he may only think of himself as intelligent because he has "never been able to start or finish anything." The nature of the society in which Narrator lives is directly related to his discussion of humankind's creative and destructive instincts. Narrator had to deal with a burdensome, pointless bureaucracy on a daily basis when he worked as a civil servant in St. Petersburg. Additionally, he made several comments about the artificiality of the city throughout the book. This book is the precursor to a plethora of literary works about the state of humanity in the modern era in this regard. Many of them express similar concerns about the alienating impact that modern bureaucratic existence has on the average person.

Another illustration of the Underground Man's inability to communicate—or even to imagine—any emotion other than bitterness is found in his speeches in sixth and seventh chapter. Liza is absolutely correct when she says that the Underground Man's speech sounds like it was taken straight out of a book. The Narrator turns to the notion of the redeemed prostitute, a popular literary convention from the nineteenth century, after his initial attempts

to strike up a conversation fail. European literature is full of instances where a noble, almost fatherly male character persuades a young, attractive prostitute of her errors in judgment. In fact, the opening line of "Apropos of the Wet Snow" is taken from a poem by liberal Russian poet Nikolai Nekrasov. It is written from the viewpoint of a man who uses "a word both sure and ardent" to save a prostitute's "fallen soul" from "error's darkness." In the poem, the prostitute marries the man in the end.

At the end of his notes, The Man criticizes us, his audience. He asserts that despite the fact that we are all similar to him in some respects, we lack the bravery to live our lives to the fullest. We are quite unlikely to agree with this assertion, and we are also very unlikely to believe that by adopting the Underground Man's style of life, we would be in a better position. However, Dostoevsky illustrates how living in an urban setting tends to make us feel more distant from both ourselves and other people through the Underground Man. Today's *Notes from Underground* readers were largely unwilling to associate themselves with the Underground Man.

Instead of seeing him as a victim of societal issues to which they were also exposed, they preferred to view him as an intriguing psychological study of a highly abnormal person. However, the Underground Man's beliefs and actions appear in a lot of contemporary literature, from Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus to Dostoevsky's later works. As *Notes from the Underground* has become part of the cultural heritage of the west, its literature appears to have come to the conclusion that there are far more people living underground than we might have thought.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study's objective is to draw attention to the connection between existentialism and alienation in the novel *Notes from the Underground*. Philosophically speaking, existentialism and alienation are connected ideas. The philosophical philosophy known as existentialism places a strong emphasis on the inherent meaninglessness of human life as well as on individual freedom and choice. It focuses on the individual's subjective experience of the world and the struggle to find meaning in a seemingly meaningless universe. Alienation, on the other hand, refers to the feeling of separation or disconnection from oneself, others, or the world. It is a sense of being disconnected or estranged from something that one should feel connected to. Alienation can manifest in many forms, such as social, economic, or existential.

In conclusion, existentialist philosophy views alienation as the outcome of the individual's attempt to find authenticity and purpose in a world that appears to have no meaning. The Underground Man, a character in Fyodor Dostoevsky's work *Notes from the Underground*, serves as a lens through which alienation and existentialism are explored. Due to his haunting past interactions with his co-workers, he is a profoundly alienated person who is cut off from society and himself. Hence he is unable to connect with others and sees himself as fundamentally different from those around him. He is also consumed by a sense of existential despair, as he struggles to find meaning in his life.

One of the key themes of the novel is the conflict between the Underground Man's desire for freedom and his fear of it. The story teller longs for freedom and autonomy, but he

is also terrified by the consequences of this freedom. He is afraid of being rejected by society and of being left alone with his own thoughts and feelings. This fear leads him to engage in self-destructive behaviours, such as drinking and gambling, which only deepen his sense of alienation and despair. He blames his situation on external factors, such as society and circumstance, rather than taking ownership of his own choices and actions. This denial of responsibility leads to a sense of alienation and meaninglessness, as the Narrator feels disconnected from his own life and unable to find any real purpose or meaning.

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