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Kafka's Metamorphosis: An analysis on Social Structure, Disability And Alienation

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Abstract

Franz Kafka's novella '*The Metamorphosis*' (1915) from a philosophical stance portrays the varied lingering menace of human lives and living. Through microscopic vision there's a lot of use of different construction and awareness with personal and social wills and the realm of absurdism related to life. From comparative theoretical research there has been a lot of study of how the novella religiously becomes a masterpiece of the modern era leading to the complex dimensions of human life with aspects of existentialism and acceptance in the larger cosmos. With an aesthetic touch we find a lot of complex allegorical references, symbolism with familiarization to urban juncture, circumstances and extraordinary situations in our lives that resemble the bonded familiar connections to us. The various studies of this novella deal with the physical, psychological and the sociological references to the human era. There's a familiar connection to the real world which serves as a parallel connection to the reading and study of this text. Kafka's notable literary work holds an impeccable place in the chief exponent of 'Absurd in the literary world'. the formation of the novella depicts the various trauma of the oppressive reign of the bourgeoisie which was surfacing in the early 20th century erstwhile. While analyzing the various domains of the work and the critical study related to this, the repression of the human life and feelings and the desires are shown as a major realm in the reading.

Keywords: Absurdism, social structure, disabilities, Kafka, Metamorphosis, modernism, existentialism.

INTRODUCTION

The story of Metamorphosis is of a traveling salesman caught between the whims and demands of his family and social patterns named Gregor Samsa. "One morning, when Gregor Samsa woke from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin". Samsa is seen struggling with his transformation with regards to humanity and existence. The very opening of the novella creates a startling puzzle of absurd construction. The transformation depicts a lot of questions

but the answers are unresolved and not only this does the story behind his transformation not give proper answers or back story for this. kafka portrays the bare and sketchy outline and allows the reader to fathom deeper into the concepts of his writing. When the readers look into the story of Samsa there's a subtle correlation that develops from the protagonist. The relation shows the banal living of middle class livelihood.

From the concept of Gregor's transformation we can correlate how the Victorian era of England witnessed the sociological and existential tremors from the British Naturalist, Charles Darwin in his work '*On The Origin Of species*' introduces the world to an etymology of 'survival of the fittest'. The theory suggests that organisms best adjusted to their environment are the most successful in surviving and reproducing which impacts on the survival situations for Gregor in this particular novella too. The struggle for existence in the revolutionary theme of mankind is one such theme which floats from the opening of the novel in itself.

The incoherence of Samsa's mind and body creates hopelessness and absurdity which leads to the alienation of his human identity. At the end we witness the fall of his character and how he succumbs to his own death like a perilous end. At the very beginning when Gregor investigates into his bodily transformation and the role of massive psychological distress due to the metamorphosis we also witness an upheaval which he faces due to workload and the resentment he had towards his job in particular and the rising trepidation that was lurking around him. Through the psychological realm Gregor must have witnessed the economic drawback that he was about to face due to the varied physical changes he had witnessed. The symbolic reference clearly shows how living and the various episodes of our life are unpredictable and cannot be assumed beforehand.

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FAMILY, ALIENATION AND EXISTENTIALISM

The allegorical novella deals with Gregor's upheavals related to the metamorphosis of his physical state. "Kafkaesque," "which has become part of the English vernacular... that described the alienation and exclusion of the individual in the face of modern bureaucracy" (Kaplan, 2014). The theme of alienation is recurring and evident through the surface of existential crisis that Gregor faces after the sudden change in his physical aspect. According to the Oxford dictionary existentialism is a philosophical theory or approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining their own development through acts of the will. In Kafka's masterpiece work the alienation feelings creep into the psychological aspect of the protagonist at an alarming rate and govern his being and acts as an authoritative power on him. As Gregor transforms into an insect it shows that the perception of others about him makes him feel isolated and alienated completely.

Gregor was an important part of the family but the way he is treated in a very different manner and keeps him at a distance clearly shows the torments he was facing from his family as well. "Should he really call for help though, even apart from the fact that all the doors were locked? Despite all the difficulty he was in, he could not suppress a smile at these thoughts" (Kafka, *Metamorphosis* 2021). The eventual details in the text clearly shows how the family behaved ignorant and were arrogant towards the condition of Gregor. he was kept in a locked room due to the physical disability he showed. Gregor's appearance and presence seemed to be a struggling burden for the family at a large scale which disturbed the mental sanity of Gregor himself. Gregor undoubtedly became a slave to the abstract reality of the world in which human appearances play a convivial role to even survive. The absurdism strikes not from Gregor's change of physical state but how his life undergoes a drastic fall and catastrophe due to this. His family, workplace were much concerned to keep him away from the human era which implied that his transformation was a matter of derogatory living in respect to the society. From a microscopic lens it can also be viewed that their concern to keep him away was much more empowering than to really know what led to his changes. This illustrates specific elements of the existential angst that suffocates that protagonist at an alarming rate. This pressure creates a lot of havoc and decline in ethical and moral grounds. This pressure eventually creates a heavy mass on him and

Gregor feels that to escape the absurdity death is the perfect tool to balance his family and societal condition.

One can assume that the clock had already turned Gregor into a vermin much before he was actually metamorphosed into one. He "has procrastinated ... in regard to a decision about his unbearable situation at work" (Czermak 12). The reader "is left in doubt about the source of Gregor's doom and the existence of enough personal guilt to warrant such a harsh verdict" (Czermak 12). The critics have found many similarities between Kafka and Gregor Samsa. After finishing "The Metamorphosis", he had written in his diary: "I am living with my family, the dearest people, and yet I am more estranged from them than from a stranger."

MODERNISM AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE

In this work of fiction, "Metamorphosis" there is a vibrant glimpse of the metaphysics of life and death. The scientific and industrial revolution that affected Europe and developed in the 20th century marks the developments of social superstructure at a large scale. The literary field resonated a lot of changes starting from literary movements to a sense of disillusionment, fragmentation, isolation, escapism. The structure of the bourgeoisie and the proletariats refer to the revolutionary concept that focuses in this literary work as well. The human behaviors as portrayed in the novel show the deficiency of modernism that creeps into the psychology of a person. Sascha Bru suggests that modernist writers could "depict society in a state of disintegration and dehumanization." (Bru 111), for questioning the conventions and customs of a society. With the overpowering stings of modernism and the working class concept, Gregor from the beginning struggles immensely for an identity and a position. Kafka individualizes this struggle and makes it a concept where the general peace of mind, apprehensions, and self-worth are questioned by the protagonist himself. The impeccable societal pressure torments the human turned vermin, Gregor was facing. Human freedom was completely hijacked and the theory of structuralism implies a radical range here in this literary work. It focused instead on how human behavior is determined by cultural, social and psychological structures. It tended to offer a single unified approach to human life that would embrace all disciplines. Gregor faces an overload of tension from his workplace which eventually upturned his human behavior with obstacles, limited compassions and empathy. The wrestling of the

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balance between the human mind and the continuous power struggle leads to a downfall of the character.

The isolation and despair is prevalent from the very onset of the novella that can be seen from a critical view too. If we follow the concept of reasoning, the very reason of living for Gregor was completely metamorphosed creating a wreck and havoc to his mind and body. It can be clearly concluded that Gregor's death was due to the undue pressure that he was continuously imposed on following the social structure and modernism because he started believing that he was living an ideal life anymore. We can quote him saying: "If I didn't have my parents to think about I'd have given in my notice a long time ago, I'd have gone up to the boss and told him just what I think, tell him everything I would, let him know just what I feel" (Kafka, *Metamorphosis* 2021).

Gregor's struggle projects the subconscious rebellion that was acting as an alternate tool to the needs of a life of a person living to meet the needs of his family. On December 4th, 1913, thirty year old Franz Kafka writes in his diary: "To die would mean nothing else than to surrender a nothing to the nothing, but that would be impossible to conceive, for how could a person, even only as a nothing, consciously surrender himself to the nothing, and not merely to an empty nothing but rather to a roaring nothing whose nothingness consists only in its incomprehensibility (1949a). The protagonist rules in the realm where humanity locks him in, with horror, fear, abhorrence, loathing, disgust, scorn and crude amazement. The very banishment of Gregor shows how Kafka traps the inhuman world through the lens of modernism and the class struggle with the age of globalization. Nicolae (2015) insightfully discerns the connections of Kafka's novella to the modern situation-

'The Metamorphosis,' she says foregrounds the condition of the individual in modern society, an individual who is weighed down by the awareness of his own insignificance in relation to others and his own dreams. By means of memory he tries to resist his new identity in an alienated and alienating world/space in which the others gradually turn from passive witnesses into mighty 'victimizers' whose indifference proves too much for the weakened self (143)

GREGOR'S ABJECT PHYSICAL DISABILITY

Gregor Samsa's pre-metamorphosis shows according to the parameters of the society he was an able-bodied person capable of being the bread earner of the family. The production of capital is an important factor owing to the industrial concept of living and survival. "Persons with disabilities frequently find their opportunities limited because of social rejection, discriminatory employment practices, architectural barriers and inaccessibility to transport" (Munyi). Throughout various centuries it has been witnessed how disabilities lead to outcast of family members and disparity upholds and rises to the pinnacle because they perceive the belief that the disabled members are an extra burden to their peace and sanity. Gregor's family completely abandons and isolates him into a room and doesn't want to address the abject disability of his anymore. As Chomba Wa Munyi has observed, "attributes of disabled persons are distinctly divided into positive and negative categories, and are likely to critically affect the relationship between persons with disabilities and nondisabled people. They form some of the attitudes which can stigmatize persons with disabilities, impose artificial limitations upon them, deny them equal opportunities for development and living, and inequitably demote them to second class citizens to be pitied (in the sense where pity is seen as devaluation tinged with contempt)" (Munyi). Gregor faces this repulsive behavior which eventually dooms him and empowers him.

Gregor is disabled to an extent that he realizes that he holds no place in the larger world and not even in his family and he loses all interest because he believes that his source and way of income has been interrupted and hindered due to the physical transformation he has undergone overnight. not only the physical change but he shows a deficiency to speak as well like a normal human being and his voice sounds morphed like an animal. Gregor's struggle is not only literal but also metaphorical with the modern ruins and the bridled torments of the technological life world which started engulfing the mental conflicts and the disability of Gregor. Gregor can no longer be the productive member of the society and the Marxist theory clearly defines how human existence and value is directly proportional to the value in terms of capital. his family resents him because of his dependence on them - "We can't carry on like this. Maybe you can't see it, but I can. I don't want to call this monster my brother, all I can say is: we have to try and get rid of it. We've done all that's humanly possible to look after it and

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be patient, I don't think anyone would accuse us of doing anything wrong" (Kafka 30)

Historical sources show how poverty through disability has long been a burden for earning and has led to poverty. Disability can only be looked upon in a lighter note when the person is independent and not a burden for the others. "Discrimination and marginalization, however, is not only between the non-disabled and disabled individuals but also exist within the categories of disability shared by other individuals", Uttara Ghosh notes. Ghosh recognizes the internal ableism of the disabled community, saying how "persons with less disability consider themselves superior and consequently more acceptable in the sphere of able bodied than the others with a superlative degree of impairment" (Ghosh 3). Gregor's physical semblance might have undergone a rapid change but what creates a massive disability is the way he is looked on and the way he is isolated from the normal living by his own family. After Gregor's transformation, Gregor not only adapted easily and quickly to his new body but managed to die in peace, somehow still full of "tenderness and love" towards an increasingly unsympathetic, at times overtly hostile, family. The other three [family members], however, consistently exhibited "complete hopelessness" and subscribed to "the belief that they had been singled out for a misfortune such as had never happened to any of their relations of acquaintances." For them, the entire experience remained chaotic, and they were only able to discover a modicum of "composure" and acknowledge emotional gains once Gregor had passed. (Krause 59).

The "hostile manner in which he is treated and the sure prospect of a life utterly bereft of ordinary human social interaction" lead Gregor to starve himself to death, because "the prospect of being imprisoned indefinitely in a bare room all alone is unbearable" (Metzger 57). The greatest source of Gregor's distress was not his incapability to accept his change but the way he faced an immense lack of compassion which multiplied his shame and guilt for his own self. "Prevailing attitudes not only determine the social expectations and treatment accorded to a person with a disability in the society, but also his or her self-image and function" (Munyi). Gregor's world is shrunk to the room of his own and to the very close of non-existence. The physical distortion becomes a source of discomfort for the people living around him and the idea of personhood and humanity is altered and sporadically his traumas overpower and burden him.

"Physique (as well as certain other personal characteristics) has an enormous power to evoke a wide variety of expressions and feelings about the person. In fact, physical deviation is frequently seen as the central key to a person's behavior and personality and largely responsible for the important ramifications in a person's life. This spread holds for both the person with a disability himself and those evaluating him" (Wright 118, qtd. in Munyi). The torments both as an individual and as a collective no longer broadens any moral entity in respect to the society but envisions the influence of power and might on the body and the soul. He is absorbed into the shackles of time and the hollowness of the modern world.

CONCLUSION

The massive and rapacious spike of modern technology not only engulfs the simple, naive living of humans but also exploits the circuit of the common household at an alarming rate. Gregor Samsa's self alienation and humiliating metamorphosis and the change connects insightfully to the darker side of the modern developments of the society. In the era of machines and race, the study points out how civilized men and psychology can be upside down due to the physiological changes of a person and how the security of living can be completely exploited and removed. The inorganic way in which Gregor is minimized into a small creature and then into nothingness clearly reminisces the literal spirit of the modern world where the greatest challenges can arise from a person's physical appearances and the patterns of cobweb leading to class dominion.

The eclipse of the world lies in the pathos of the disillusionment of human beings and also uproots the compassionate spirit of human behavior. The horrible vision of the world with its discrimination, wherein the alienated and isolated individuals seek to transcend themselves and their living conditions so as to escape the present reality of life, forms the setting of Metamorphosis. from the widest spectrum it clearly shows how the recurrent themes of the novel owe to the myriad of disabilities living in our society.

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