

THE METAMORPHOSIS : **A QUEST FOR EMOTIONAL IDENTITY**

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Abstract

*This paper aims to explore the quest for emotional identity as experienced by the narrator in Franz Kafka's novel *The Metamorphosis*. The novel opens with a realization by the narrator that he has been transformed into monstrous vermin, which can be seen as his unintentional isolation from family and society. His metamorphosis can be interpreted as a form of emotional escape from stressful reality and its dangers. It studies the emotional and psychological changes experienced by the narrator in the process of trying to be apart of something greater than what he is born into. And how he alienates himself from the surroundings while pretending to be someone that others want him to be. It's about a metaconflict which sprouted in him due to a confused state of 'who he is' and 'what he wants to be'. Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is a masterpiece of modern literature, which explores universal issues of despair, hope and conflict that Kafka himself witnessed in his personal life as well.*

Keywords : *Emotional Identity, Identity Crisis, Social and Emotional Isolation*

Introduction

Franz Kafka originally wrote *The Metamorphosis* in German *Die Verwandlung* in 1912. It was published for the first time in 1915. During 1933 it was further translated into English. Kafka was a disciple of the students of Brentano when he attended the Charles University to study psychology. Therefore, his works are a reflection of his psychological principles. It is the mouthpiece of the emotions of a human being trapped in the body of an insect as the novel opens with a realization by the protagonist Gregor Samsa that he has transformed into horrible vermin. In order to avoid the shame and unease that his transformation would probably cause, he was locked within the boundaries of his room by his family where he eventually dies. The novel not only describes the causes and effects of Gregor's mysterious transformation but also gives a psychological insight of the protagonist's world giving it universality since we can correlate the novel with our lives. According to Vladimir Nabokov, *The Metamorphosis* beyond a fantasy, it's a symbolic representation of Gregor's world emotionally and psychologically. The psychoanalysis of the novel would take us to conscious, unconscious and pre-conscious domains of mental status since dreams confront one with reality in a disguised form. Gregor was trying to see his reality disguised in the form of insect which represents the extent to which he felt worthless. The novel tries to explore the realities of life faced by a worthless person, 'the day you become worthless, you are no longer tolerated by your closed relations and well-wishers'. Therefore, the novel reveals the relevance for meaningful involvement and the utilitarian aspect of every human being. The diminished utility either of human beings or of commodities may give rise to alienation.

Utilitarianism Results in *Metamorphosis*

In the novel, Gregor's transformation is parallel to the realities of a non-productive person in the society. He perceived himself to be so useless and unworthy that he imagined himself to be "Ungeheuer Ungeziefer". In German "Ungeheuer" means a creature that doesn't possess any place in its family while "Ungeziefer" refers to an unclean beast that is not suitable for sacrifice. It depicts the attitude of uselessness and worthlessness of his life. This attitude of incompetence sprouted out as a result of taking up the job which is not liked by him "what a strenuous career it is that I've chosen!" [1]. He took up the job because of the urgency to pay off the debt that was taken by his father from his company's manager. He, therefore, lacked competence while working as a salesman because of no personal interest. It was a compulsion to meet the ends. If this situation is compared to the present day scenario, then it is a matter of concern that there are very few amongst youth, who actually, evaluate their aptitude, consider their interest before taking up a career and eventually pursue the job while keeping in mind the value system that they have inherited during the process of learning the ideal way to lead life. After his metamorphosis, Gregor's immediate worry was about the possibility of losing the job instead of worrying about his state. He is afraid to get late for work. It exemplifies Mill's principle of utilitarianism that "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness." According to the novel, Gregor only thinks about his business, never goes out in the evenings, relaxes by working with his fretsaw and studies train time-tables in that time which he can spend in amusement. In order to achieve success at workplace, He has sacrificed his personal life.

Most of the present-day generation is inheriting a modern yet destructive approach towards the concept of utilitarianism. This novel shows the extent of negative emotions like uselessness, meaninglessness and worthlessness of a job incumbent, who has to perform a job where he has no inclination, interest or motivation of his own. He is continuing the job just because it's beneficial for his family. The job is the reason of his families' happiness; deep down he felt like a dung-beetle who lives and dies a life of non-recognition, meaninglessness and worthlessness. Gregor's uncreative work, repetitive and non-challenging routine, long tiring and exhausting work schedule turned his life mundane. The effect of life circumstances on the quality of life are reflected by the emotions represented. If given a chance to live a life of free-will, he'll probably give up his job of salesman. His natural instinct to grow and develop well has vanished away. Although man by nature has a potential for growth but when life experiences hinder natural growth then the person starts feeling low or sick that has been symbolized by Gregor's metamorphosis into a worthless creature."

Metamorphosis as an Outcome of Alienation

According to McClelland's *Theory of Needs* (1961) all motivation of an individual arouses from its desire to fulfill the need for achievement, power, and affiliation. The major cause of Gregor's transformation to a bug is that he is overworking, self-sacrificing his personal life for family survival and facing threatening debt to his employer which is brought up by his father. Such a condition sprouted for him because of the financial and emotional burden. Freud's "Pleasure Principle (1922)" explains that at time of psychological vulnerability people have tendencies to seek pleasure by avoiding pain. Gregor behaved so normally towards his transformation that he gave little or no importance to his transformed state in order to forget the pain of his monotonous life by finding pleasure in the form of a bug; that is free of responsibilities

and a master of his own will. He found his mutation amusing “Despite all the difficulty he was in, he could not suppress a smile at this thought (that he was able to control his legs as per his will)” [1].

Gregor’s conception about his family can be explained with the help of Bem’s “Self-perception Theory” (1960’s) which says that people develop their attitude by observing and concluding from the attitude of others that must have been caused by their own behaviours. Even his family foresees Gregor much like he himself sees his family. They didn’t feel appalled like outsiders on his transformation into a giant cockroach; indeed, their concern is about the threat of upcoming financial crisis because of his inability to earn anymore as a salesman or as anyone else. For them, Gregor has turned into a burden; that needs to be taken care of instead of acting as a caretaker. He has turned invalid and will only create hindrances in their progress and may lead to their disgrace in the society. The family didn’t worry about his pitiful condition or why such a condition has befallen on him.

According to Marx (1822) the true essence of a human being is ‘freedom of creativeness’ the constraint of which may lead towards a life of meaninglessness and alienation. Gregor took up a job against his self-interest which alienated him not only from his family but from his true self too hence his metamorphosis represents ‘loss of self’. He has lost his identity while trying to be a part of something greater than what he was born into. He alienated himself unintentionally from the surroundings while pretending to be someone that others wanted him to be. This situation is dominant in today’s capitalistic society where fellow human beings are alienated from their fellows as well as family because of no personal space in order to grow well. Even his metamorphosis is a meta conflict which sprouted in him due to a confused state of ‘who he is’ and ‘what he wanted to be’. Karl Marx criticized the capitalist system and advocated the creation of a classless society which will generate equality. He stated that workers are treated as commodities under capitalistic society. In Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, the chief clerk too arrived at Samsa’s home to enquire about the reason for Gregor’s tardiness to work. In spite of his dedication and hard work, his boss expresses his dissatisfaction from his performance ‘Your turnover has been very unsatisfactory of late’ [1]. Without waiting for a reasonable explanation from Gregor, the clerk had already assumed that he’ll put forth an inadequate excuse for his idleness. These disappointments are commonly experienced by people in today’s economy. But such a treatment shatters one’s fantasised notions about their job that it will lead towards a fulfilled future and pushes them towards alienation.

According to the *Encyclopedia of Britannica*, alienation is a state of feeling separated from self, work or the labour of work. Seeman (1959) explained five important traits of alienation formulated by Emile Durkheim: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation and self-estrangement. Later ‘cultural estrangement’ was also added as sixth element of alienation. Initially Gregor faces physical metamorphosis but as the story progresses, we can conclude that his state is quite similar to his previous life as a human being. He has no control over his transformation which shows the extent of his helplessness.

Powerlessness is defined as a state of feeling when our destiny is beyond our control. It is determined by external agents like fate, luck and institutional management. Meaninglessness is a state of feeling purposelessness in life. Gregor turned into a parasite like his father after his mutation. This happened because of his self-surrendering attitude towards his work. Normlessness means lacking a commitment to social conventions and indulgent in practices of distrust and unrestrained individual competition. Gregor became mechanical with increased obsession for his job; which in turn appeared to dehumanize

him by terminating his personal interest. His habit of locking doors at night and reading train schedules during his free time shows his detachment from common aspects of happiness. His transformation didn't have a drastic change on his family life since he has no connection with his family members. He is no longer important to his family as he does not possess the role of breadwinner. Social isolation is a state of feeling lonely or prohibited in social relations. Self-estrangement is a state of feeling alienated from society and things around you.

One can feel alienated from work or life because of unexpected challenges witnessed within surroundings. Self-estrangement causes psychological stress by generating the feeling that he has no meaning to work and gradually losing his positive sense of self. This deteriorates the mental health-giving rise to: depression, anxiety, stress, indecisiveness and suicidal thoughts. The person starts avoiding relationships and faces with self-confidence issues. These symptoms may result in “Dissociative Identity Disorder” due to which a person develops more than one personality that may function with or without his awareness like Gregor was entrapped within the body of an insect with the emotions of a human being. Self-estrangement is the major factor in alienation as a person detaches himself from everything including his own self by perceiving that he's not good enough and loses his purpose of existence. The family considered him a burden and wanted to get rid of him made him disheartened. The declaration for Gregor's termination by his little sister's confrontation was more shocking for him.

Emotional Inconsistency as an Outcome of Alienation

Emotions are not only an attribute of human beings but of all evolutionary beings, they are equally applicable to insects, animals, and plants. They make us lively, shape our personality and define who we are; they are the result of influences that we come across in the surroundings (Plutchik, 2001). Emotional identity characterizes how one responds to positive and negative behavioural traits. *The Metamorphosis* intimates an emotional journey acquired in order to escape from the emotional outburst. It also describes the extreme attitude of family members as well as the society after Gregor's transformed condition. He himself isn't sad by his transformed state but it's “the overcast weather—he could hear raindrops hitting against the metal window ledge—[which] completely depressed him” [2]. And instead of facing this situation he thought “how about if I sleep a little bit longer and forget all this nonsense.” [1]. He despises his way of life and job so much that he just wants to flee from this situation. He wants an escape from all the responsibilities surrounding him as he can't feel his real self anymore. He sees himself not as a loved one of his family. Plutchik(1890) described emotions as “basic adaptations needed by all organisms in the struggle for individual survival”, Gregor feels transformed as an insect because of his monotonous life. Gregor isolated himself unintentionally from his family in many ways which define the depth of his emotional suffrage. He has developed the habit of locking his room's door even if he is at home—a place where everyone can feel safe and secure. When his sister Grete whispered: “Gregor, open the door. I beg of you.” [1] We can figure out that he has entered in such a position where he can't trust anyone not even his family. This physical metamorphosis represents his emotional escape from the stressful dangers which he can witness around him. Gregor's transformation shows that something has been broken within him emotionally. The absurdity is that he never paused to think about the cause of his transformation or found it absurd.

Conclusion

The novel ends with Gregor's complete physical as well as emotional alienation that results in death. He dies realizing the worthlessness and meaninglessness of his life as a non-productive being. The fact that he is no more wanted as a loved one in the form of a son, a salesman, as a brother or as member of society tore him apart. The novel portrays the attitude of people towards others with mental or physical illness. He didn't die of physical cruelty by his own people but due to the shocking treatment that he faced because of his transformed appearance.

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