

Franz Kafka's The Metamorphosis: A Psychoanalytical Analysis of Disintegrated Schizoid Behaviour



Shamoon Akbar Khan	Department of English, Edwardes College, Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa shamoongandapur1@gmail.com
Irfanullah Khan	Assistant Professor, Department of English, Edwardes College, Peshawar
Afaq Amin	Department of English, Edwardes College, Peshawar

Abstract: *Franz Kafka is experimental in his literary works. In his novella, The Metamorphosis (1915) he gives expression to his harsh emotional and philosophical experiences influenced by social and interpersonal relationships through the character Gregor Samsa. The Metamorphosis is the depiction of human psychology, interpersonal relationships, transformation, family bondage, and emotional attachments. The research study intends to explore different characters from the perspective of Schizoid Personality Disorder theory and the transformation of Gregor Samsa under Schizoid Personality disorder phenomena. Gregor Samsa's death occurs due to the outside absurd world, rejection, ego loss, and lack of love. Gregor Samsa has been through all these bitter painful emotional experiences and ends in a traumatized death. His lifeless body and meaningless relationship lead him to a tragic end.*

Keywords: Schizoid Personality Disorder, Depersonalization, Emotional withdrawal, Regression & Ego-lost.

Introduction

Franz Kafka, a German-speaking novelist, and short-story writer has gained popularity due to his reflection on human conditions and bitter transformations. The absurdity of existence, the comprehensibility of authoritarian power, and alienation become the thematic subjects of his literary works. He has depicted the horrifying anxieties of the era. In his works, he has drawn an absurd world based on frightful human existence. He tries to depict the intricate relationships that exist among individuals, society, faith, and the system. In *The Metamorphosis*, he gives an outlet to his devastated self.

In *The Metamorphosis*, the protagonist wakes up and finds himself transformed into a monstrous insect-like creature that is showing various aspects of human life. The novella reveals many

different aspects of human life i.e. "consciousness, transformation, identity crisis, alienation, and family atmosphere (Barfi 107). Kafka's *Metamorphosis* is the portrayal of a death of a salesman with all sadistic approaches, loneliness, depersonalization, and withdrawal from the external object to the internal object. The transformation alienates him from the external world and drags him into the darkness. It describes Gregor's inner reality. Gregor's miserable insect life stands analogous to many dimensions of Kafka's own life. Deprivation of love and loss of true self drags him into a hostile condition. Kafka says that "come and 'ave a look at this, it's dead, just lying there, stone dead!" (Kafka 62). Arnold opines that Kafka himself seems to suffer from a "psychological disorder characterized by a love of solitude, lack of interest in the external relationships, and emotional detachment (03). His own life has

been through a metamorphosis of inner confrontation, emotional coldness, and cultural expression of fears. Harry Guntrip states that the Schizoid situation may occur due to cultural repression, social and cultural life. Schizoid personality is characterized by a persistent withdrawal from social relationships and a lack of emotional responsiveness (Strauss 23). They are preoccupied with thoughts to the exclusion of what is happening in their environment. They are in confusing associations. In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor's mother is calling him an "unfortunate son" by suggesting that Gregor already lives predominately in isolation (Kafka 44). Schizoid creates an inner world of themselves to keep safe from the external world. They feel disintegrated from society. They often create an internal mental world, often time they live in a shallow sphere where they can feel safe from the outer world due to their introverted approaches.

According to Strauss, the emphasis in *The Metamorphosis* is on the "absurdity of existence, the alienating experience of modern life, cruelty, and authoritarian power" (Strauss 22). The word "Kafkaesque" is used to signify senseless, moral, and psychological complexity (Arnold 03).

Objectives of the study:

The objectives of the study are:

- to analyze Grete and Gregor Samsa's relationships as the relationship of two eccentrics
- to analyze Gregor Samsa as a victim of a Master/Slave relationship
- to analyze Gregor Samsa's transformation as a Schizoid disorder that leads to identity crises and traumatic situations

Research Questions of the study:

- How is the relationship between Gregor Samsa and Grete transformed from love to hate?
- Why Gregor is being victimized by his father in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*?
- How has the character of Gregor Samsa

driven towards tragic-self contradictoriness in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*?

Research Theoretical Framework:

The research study follows a qualitative and explicit approach to the textual analysis of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. Various psychoanalytical and personality-guided approaches are adopted to comprehend Schizoid disorders. The study intends to explore by giving more intuition to the character how his mind works. The study analyzes the definitional intelligibility of Schizoid disorder, Schizoid state and also analyzes how the main character Gregor Samsa suffers from Schizoid disorder and identity crisis. The theory aims through textual analysis to understand human transformation.

Discussion and Analysis

Grete and Gregor Samsa's relationships as the relationship of two eccentrics

After Gregor's transformation, Grete is the only family member who takes care of and seemingly sympathizes with this condition. Unexpectedly, his mother is shocked by his monstrous appearance and his father becomes hostile and violent. Grete takes all the responsibility on herself and attends to him on daily basis. With time, she comes to know about his likes, dislikes, and his diet. Usually, she brings him a wide selection that she spreads out on a newspaper: old, half-rotten vegetables, bones left over from the evening meal covered with sauce, a few raisins and almonds, some cheese that Gregor had considered inedible two days ago, as well as a slice of bread and butter.

Grete also assumes the role of a spokesperson for the family. She relates Gregor's condition that how he lives, his diet, and also about his room. Gregor enjoys a comfort level with his sister with the hope that everything will become normal. Grete decides to remove the furniture from his room to provide him with more crawling space.

With time, human behavior changes due to external and internal factors. After some time, Grete's behavior has undergone weird and unpredictable changes. Gregor feels the changes

regretted and underestimated through various actions of hers. Being an insect his outer world is full of shame and regression but in his inner self, he has all the feelings and emotions, “a slight feeling of shame, he hurried under the couch” (Kafka 24). Being hopeless from the outer world, he cannot express his feeling to others. He fears attack or thinks that the people will crush him. He is locked into his own skeletonized body covering. He becomes the prisoner of his transformed self. He has lost contact with the outer world and becomes disappointed and depressed. At times, he feels hungry but does not want himself to expose before others and to ask for food except for his sister with whom he enjoys a level of comfort. He goes “under the couch, throw himself at his sister's feet and beg her for something to eat” (Kafka 25). This reflects the feeling of guilt and regression and feels oppressed by his family members. Gregor feels “extreme loss of everything” (Guntrip 57).

Grete takes responsibility of him at first but sudden enthusiasm is followed by a loss of interest. Gregor feels exhausted and suffocated in that environment of a room. He hears, feels, and notices every moment even the coming in and out of his sister. He could hardly breathe in a small place “half suffocating, he watched with bulging eyes as his sister unselfconsciously took a broom and swept up the left-overs” (Kafka 27). Gregor considers himself as a person trapped in a cage “restricted”, over-dependent, and tied up (Guntrip 47). This causes depressive anxiety in him. Things are gradually changing between Grete and Gregor for reasons of their own and she becomes dominating in her attitude. “Nobody could understand him, nobody, not even his sister” (Kafka 27). Grete's attitudes change toward Gregor seemingly due to lack of attention and emotional withdrawal pushes him into abysmal isolation. Grete gets exhausted with her daily routine. Upon entering the room, she feels suffocating, “she would go straight to the window and pull it hurriedly open almost as if she were suffocating” (Kafka 32). With time, she seems “much more uneasy than usual” (Kafka 33). Gregor feels “regression of his ego” and “retreat” from the mutual relationship as

Grete decides to retreat (Guntrip 19). The fluctuation in her mood brings coldness to Gregor's life. There is a change in Grete's behavior that is not intended but triggered by the environment. Psychologically, Gregor was suffering from “depersonalization” (Guha 273). Grete's cold relation keeps on changing from warm and again moves to cold line. “Gregor's sister no longer thought about how she could please him but would hurriedly push some food or other into his room with her foot before she rushed out to work” (Kafka 49). His diet, room, and other needs have been ignored and he remains under the couch for weeks, “he could have stayed there for weeks without his sister doing anything about it, she could see the dirt as well as he could but she had simply decided to leave him on it” (Kafka 49). He is completely ignored by other family members. Grete has lost her mind due to Gregor's daily routine and his “monstrous attitude” (Kafka 50). Their relationship takes the form of “mutual devouring” (Guntrip 67).

Gregor prefers to live “inside in womb” due to his psychological makeup (Guntrip 60). His psychological disorder pushes him to isolation and seclusion. At times, Gregor would show his emotions of gratitude to his sister, “his sister would break out in tears of emotion, and Gregor would climb up to her shoulder and kiss her neck” (Kafka 56). Their mood fluctuates from “warm to coldness and coldness to warm” (Guntrip 62). Grete gets exhausted and frustrated with her brother “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” (Kafka 58).

Grete has an “inner guilt” and a feeling of regret herself, the way she put her brother in a “tantalizing condition” that leads him to death (Guntrip 83).

Gregor Samsa as a victim of a Master/Slave relationship

In *The Metamorphosis*, the relationship of Gregor with his father replicates the relationship of Kafka with his father, Herman. His father takes Kafka as a failure and disapproves of his writings. He wants him as a businessman. At

times, his anger would take the form of physical violence.

In the novella, Gregor Samsa is depicted as a failure in his father's eyes. His father wants him to take responsibility for the family that he takes for the time being. After his transformation, he could not make it but rather becomes a financial burden on the family. That is why he becomes the subject of contempt and all the family members take a withdrawal from him. He becomes isolated and ignored by his family members. His father becomes very harsh at him after his transformation. He is a failure and a disappointment in his father's eyes. Kafka's hate towards his father is reflected through Gregor Samsa.

Gregor Samsa's transformation makes him depersonalized and depressed. Instead of becoming a businessman, a hectic and overloaded routine transformed Gregor Kafka's personality into a monstrous vermin. This transformation depicts the victimization of Gregor Samsa due to the master-slave relationship.

Gregor and his father have the same complex relationship as Franz Kafka and his father. Gregor's anxiety is the result of his father's attitude. By the use of power and authority, his father would make him scared. Dominating father would act as a master.

Gregor is cursing his life. With all his limitations, he has done everything for his family within his capacity but after transformation, he becomes oppressed and suffocated. He is pushed to seclusion and is disconnected from the outer real world "what a quiet life it is the family lead, "said Gregor to himself" and gazing into the darkness, but what now, if all this peace and wealth and comfort should come to a horrible and frightening end?" (Kafka 23). Gregor dissociates from his surroundings and feels disconnected, deprived, and disintegrated from society.

Gregor encounters fear or "threatening anxiety" that he will be "attacked by someone", or someone will "swallow" him (Mansfield 204). Gregor's father puts his son's life in a hostile situation.

According to Schizoid disorder, Gregor experiences "enslavement", the more he is into a relationship the more intense the slave role becomes for him. A Schizoid individual cannot be in a relationship without immediately taking the "slave role" (Mansfield 206).

With time, Gregor is losing himself and his health as he is completely ignored by his family members. He becomes thin and fainting due to starvation. He is asking for food time and again. "I would like to eat something, said Gregor anxiously, but not anything like they are eating. They do feed themselves and here I am, dying" (Kafka 54). According to Gale, Gregor's parents give an "inadequate amount of affection" to their child and "emotional stimulus", they were "emotionally reserved" (278). Even to the extent, that his father warns other family members intentionally that they should not entertain Gregor. Gregor experiences "persistent withdrawal" from social interaction and a lack of "emotional responsiveness" (Gale 278). Gregor's father withdraws every emotional attachment from Gregor. This parental coldness proves fatal for his psychological growth and psychological recovery. Gregor is suffering, exhausted, secluded, and harsh to himself. He has lost his true self. Gregor is dying a slow rather painful death. Gregor's father feels satisfied and at ease by getting rid of that exhausting situation with Gregor's death.

Gregor Samsa's transformation into a Schizoid personality disorder leads to identity crises and traumatic situations

The novella depicts Gregor's lifestyle, family issues, and social and interpersonal relationships after his metamorphosis into a gigantic bug. "He found himself transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin, he could see his brown belly, slightly domed and divided by arches into stiff sections" (Kafka 01). The Metamorphosis is the story of difficulties the modern world poses to human beings. It is the modern world struggle that imprisoned human life and values, and the struggle of acceptance of others in a difficult stage of life. In the novella, Kafka comes with a direct reflection of its negative effects on the human mind and body. In the Metamorphosis, Kafka's personal life is portrayed with all the

struggle against life in the modern world of materialism.

Gregor Samsa being the replica of Kafka undergoes many physical and mental changes—the metamorphosis. He finds an absurd world around himself in which he is a misfit. Gregor Samsa is being pushed through the modern materialistic world with materialistic expectations which lead to disaster. The whole struggle makes him victimized. He takes the heavy calcareous shell of the modern materialistic society. To cater the financial needs of the family, he is turned into a non-human being who is devoid of human needs and emotions. Tragically, he finds himself in a traumatic situation causing his identity crisis. He is losing his true self. He develops a tendency as a coping strategy toward seclusion, and emotional coldness. A Schizoid generally prefers isolation and emotional withdrawal from the outer world. He has withdrawn himself from the outer world. He is caught in a conflict between the inner world and the outer world.

According to Schizoid Personality theory, his oppressed surrounding and hectic routine lead him to detachment and “depersonalization” (Guntrip 82). Gregor is mentally exhausted and frustrated. He is eagerly starving for rest and good company which he hadn't and “there is the curse of traveling” (Kafka 02).

Gregor Samsa's self is split into many parts. He is facing an identity crisis. Symbolically, after transformation everything has been changed; his body structure, voice, and eating habits show his identity crisis. It is unbearable for him that he has lost his true self and his personality has been ingested into a different structure of a gigantic vermin. Identification is a major problem in Schizoid individuals. The identity crisis in Gregor leads to a “state of panic” which then takes the form of “over-dependence” (Guntrip 49).

The reason for Gregor's transformation and personality disorder is due to the harsh atmosphere and rigid relations. It takes the form of disappointment from the outer world which further results in depersonalization. Depersonalization being a Schizoid condition

makes the loss of a “sense of identity, individuality, and loss of oneself” (Guntrip 44).

Conclusion

The novella is not the metamorphosis of Gregor Samsa but the metamorphosis of other characters around him. His sister Grete's essence has been subjected to metamorphosis. Grete being a loving girl changes to a harsh woman. Her sympathy for Gregor slowly diminishes. Finally, she wants to get rid of his brother. The loving relationship is transformed from love to hate.

Gregor has a master-slave relationship with his father and that has direct negative effects on Gregor's personality. Through this, Kafka wants to discourage power and authoritarian structure.

Psychologically, Gregor is transformed due to the harsh and unsympathetic atmosphere around him. The transformation puts him in a hostile situation that leads him to an identity crisis. He finds himself entangled in a traumatic situation.

He gets oppressed by the hectic daily routine and lack of warmth from the family members. Due to metamorphosis, he is transformed. After his transformation, he is neglected and ignored by his family. They have withdrawn their emotional tendencies and he is pushed into the abyss of isolation. According to Schizoid disorder, Gregor has been through regression, depersonalization, and ego-loss. Gregor's inner-self is assaulted. He loses his true self and is experiencing inner deadness. Gregor's death is caused by internal emptiness and social restriction.

Once Gregor finds himself out of his room caught by his father. His father does not like him for his monstrous appearance. His father gives vent to his anger by throwing an apple at him. It hits him in the back and severely injures him. Gregor suffers from injuries for several weeks, due to lack of attention he consumes very little food. Gregor's wounds are in bad shape now and seem to be in pain. His entire body is aching. Instead of taking care of him as he is injured, he is ignored by his family, and his room is used for storage purposes. Slowly his dying and he is counting his last breaths. Now, “he could

already hardly feel the decayed apple in his back or the inflamed area around it. Which was entirely covered in white dust” (Kafka 61).

In the end, Gregor pushes himself into darkness. He is feeling weak due to starvation. His vision becomes blurred and feels an emptiness inside himself. His whole body is frozen. “He remained in the state of empty and peaceful rumination until he heard the clock tower strike three in the morning, then without, his willing it, his head sank completely, and his last breath flowed weakly from his nostrils” (Kafka 62). Before his physical death, Gregor dies a painful social, emotional, and psychic death.

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