



# The Tribulation of Hollowness in Gregor Samsa's Life in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*

Mostak Hossain

Senior Lecturer

Department of English

Bangladesh Army University of Engineering & Technology (BAUET)

**Abstract:** This article aims to analyze the causes and sufferings of hollowness of Gregor Samsa who is alienated from his discriminating society. He is the protagonist in *The Metamorphosis*. By analyzing some incidents of this novella, the result of this paper illustrates that there are some phenomena that influence hollowness of being in Gregor Samsa's life. There are some causes of hollowness in Gregor Samsa's life: They are; a. He has no freedom, b. Unaccepted behaviour from some persons, c. Some bad faith, d. Lacking of consciousness, e. To be or not to be f. Pressure of excessive work, g. To fulfil the desire of his family h. Restlessness I. Negativity about present life and his future. Those factors always pain him and in such a way hollowness comes in his life which makes him a captivated person in this world. He himself evades all of the formalities and hides himself also only for hollowness. So he cannot reach at the apex of success. Moreover, the consequence of hollowness of Gregor Samsa, his life has been stopped by the death which bestows the emancipation of his hollowness.

**Keywords:** Hollowness, Alienation, Metamorphosis.

## I. INTRODUCTION

To expand the concerned points, a vivid view on the main notions of the story is necessary. The story begins with a traveling salesman in fabrics named Gregor Samsa who woke up one morning after dreaming a bad dream that he saw himself as a giant like creature and he tried to understand how he had been transformed. "What's happened to me?" he thought. It was no dream" (Kafka 3).

Before his transformation, Gregor was devoted to his family and he provided all of the things for his parents and his sister when his father was a failure businessman five years earlier. At that time his father's business collapsed and he borrowed some money. Since Gregor Samsa was very dutiful for his family, he was very worried about his family and he wanted to manage the crucial situation. So he had pushed himself into a job which he looked down upon and got up at four each morning, rain or shine, to travel the country reaching his cloth samples. But his real desire was for artistic expression, how to make a good relationship with others and how to fulfill his emotion. At that time he had to do his job for his family and he sacrificed his own liking and demand.

After his transformation. He looked around his room, the environment of the room was normal, and decided to go back to sleep to forget about what had happened. He couldn't move an inch but he tried, only to discover that he could not because of his new body. He was vexed because he tried to claw the scabies on his stomach, but when he touched himself with one of his many new legs. That incident was very irritable to him. He mirrors on how confused life as a traveling salesman is and how he would quit if his parents and sister did not depend so much on his income. He looked at the clock and saw that he had overslept and missed his train to go to his office. And he was thinking about what he could do. He was in his room like an imprisoned man and he could not go out from his room. But he tried to go out again and again. Because he had to catch the train to go to his office. If he missed the train, he would not reach at his office in time and the manager rebuked him. Even he could be dismissed. The behaviour of the manager was so abominable but Samsa was to tolerate since his family depended on Samsa and he tried to pay the borrowed money what his father borrowed that amount of money from that company. After that Gregor's mother knocked at the door, and when Samsa answered her, Gregor understood that his voice had changed. All of the family members surmised that he might be ill, so all of them asked him to open the door and went out.. He tried to get out of bed, but he could not move his transformed body. While struggling to stir, Samsa heard the voice of his office manager. Then he understood that the manager was very angry with him and he had come into his house to find out him since Gregor had not been available in service.

Gregor's transformation into a beastly and ugly heterotrophic creature was asking for help, but all of the family members and others did not understand about what he wanted and needed and fulfillment was not met. After that he opened the door after a long time in virtue

of trying so many times. Then all of the persons saw him and got shock and fear. They understood and wanted to imprison him. Gregor had to spend most of the time in his room. One day he went out from his room then his father attacked Gregor by throwing an apple. Captivated in his room, his protective shell was losing its power day by day for that attack. The story then paints the interaction of Gregor and his family as he slowly famishes to death for want of the right kind of food. At last he dies from the great wound in his back. Then the merciless charlady sweeps up his exhausted carcass and throws it out with the garbage. His family can live freely, leave their shadowy apartment together as a family and chance into the sunny world outside to celebrate their independence from a painful life. His death brings relief and rejoicing for his family and releases them to a new, fresher, more positive and independent life without him.

Actually, when he was living in his room as a captivated person, he thought about so many things and he was frustrated. And the environment of the outside was also not tolerable. He was suffering from so many problems. So he alienated himself from others. There were some factors which always pained him and in such a way hollowness comes in his life.

In another point, we get a picture of a certain society and that is about the society of a fabric salesman. The central character has become a verminous giant struggling with the time and has reach to an end the life time .This is the phenomenon of a capitalist society how the capitalists capitalize and get separated gradually.

In fact, *The Metamorphosis* is a depiction of Franz Kafka's own life, even when Gregor Samsa metamorphose into a large bug. Kafka's this story presents symbolically his inner thoughtless and we get some notions about his life. His professional life was so painful and the relationship between father and son was tyrannical, Kafka thought that he got bad massages from his father and his father treated him wrongly. Kafka mentioned in a letter to his father, he was suffering from a sense of guilt when he was a child. And *The Metamorphosis* is the outcome of this.

## II. Discussion

In this story, Gregor considered life like before. He would think beautifully and he was the sole wage earner for the family. Now, he's a bug and for this reason, the other members of his family lose both the financial and emotional safety associated with him. After the transformation, Gregor looks around his living room. It seems to him very familiar. But he starts feeling disgusting and uncomfortable because he is transformed. Happiness of life just disappeared for being a transformed animal like him. His living room has become smaller and not enough to live. "His room, a regular human room, only a little on the small side, lay quiet between the four familiar walls" (Kafka 3).

Gregor was a traveling salesman who had no free time to establish a good relationship with any person because he had to accomplish the task as a salesman. When a person is involved in such type of work, he does not pay any attention on relationship. He becomes isolated from family and society. Here, Kafka ironically shows the reason of separation of any man from the society. Actually, no one is free in this materialistic world and capitalism is responsible for it. Here Gregor is the victim. "I've got the torture of traveling, worrying about changing trains, eating miserable food at all hours, constantly seeing new faces, no relationships that last or get more intimate" (Kafka 4).

Kafka may have tried to say that Gregor has turned into a bug since; he didn't sleep a sound sleep. His parents will not wake him up early again. It is an irony of fate. Gregor is a bug now and he thinks that human kind needs enough sleep to be good always. "Human beings have to have their sleep" (Kafka 4).

The environment of the company was totally inauspicious for him. Specially, the behavior of the manager. Gregor Samsa was suppressed by the company. He had no chance to plan anything. The company was making money by imposing excessive work on Gregor Samsa. And he was accomplishing the deeds. Capitalists are regularly doing it to the workers. He was the victim of the capitalistic world and also alienated himself from his family and society. The inhuman aspect of Gregor's job is emphasized here. "He was a tool of the boss, without brains or backbone" (Kafka 5).

This possibility for resistance is perceived in *The Metamorphosis* through a *transmogrified* body which often refuses to behave and act in a normal way. In this story, it is very tragic; on the other hand, there is a plenty of playfulness and humour within *The Metamorphosis*. Gregor was repressed by his family. It showed together serious and farcical elements. His father wanted to shove Gregor back into his room since he was bewildered of his son. If the manager was not there to witness the metamorphosis of Gregor, His father would have killed Gregor. The following passage, in which Gregor's father's reaction was horrific:

Pitilessly his father came on, hissing like a wild man. Now Gregor had not had any practice at all walking in reverse; it was really very slow going. If Gregor had only been allowed to turn around, he could have gotten into his room right away, but he was afraid to make his father impatient by this time-consuming gyration, and at any minute the cane in his father's hand threatened to come down on his back or his head with a deadly blow. Finally, however, Gregor had no choice, for he noticed with horror that in reverse he could not even keep going in one direction; and so, incessantly throwing uneasy side-glances at his father, he began to turn around as quickly as possible, in reality turning only very slowly (Kafka 15).

Kafka shows the absurd character who belongs to the absurd world around him but, pathetically, tries to struggle out of it into the world of humans—and dies in despair. Gregor had to depend on the family members to get food. A man cannot live hopefully in this way. On the other hand, the family members were also suffering.

This, then, was the way Gregor was fed each day, once in the morning, when his parents and the maid were still asleep, and a second time in the afternoon after everyone had had dinner, for then his parents took a short nap again, and the maid could be sent out by his sister on some errand. Certainly they did not want him to starve either, but perhaps they would not have been able to stand knowing any more about his meals than from hearsay, or perhaps his sister wanted to spare them even what was possibly only a minor torment, for really, they were suffering enough as it was (Kafka 18 & 19).

He was psychologically separated from his mother and he was also very depressed. In such a way, a man becomes pessimistic in his life and hollowness comes to him. Then, he shows his negativity and he falls flat in every sector like Gregor. Gregor alienated himself due to hollowness and at last he fell through.

Now Gregor was cut off from his mother, who was perhaps near death through his fault; he could not dare open the door if he did not want to chase away his sister, who had to stay with his mother; now there was nothing for him to do except wait; and tormented by self-reproaches and worry, he began to crawl, crawled over everything, walls, furniture, and ceiling, and finally in desperation, as the whole room was beginning to spin, fell down onto the middle of the big table (Kafka 27).

Variation or transformation, it is a microscopic prospect of life which can occur in any person's life. It is natural in the world, even when one does not prepare to accept it, he/she has to do it. To anyone, Variation or transformation is a normal part of life, and when it comes, a person can learn how to adapt to that new change and he/she continues on with his/her life. Another type of change is very peculiar and unexpected which is found in Franz Kafka's novel, *The Metamorphosis*. After being metamorphosis, Gregor Samsa was very sick and frustrated since Gregor had very bad physical health, turning to one side is impossible for him and he had breathing difficulty, as well as his breathing problems had been mentioned more than one time.

So Gregor kept to the floor for the time being, especially since he was afraid that his father might interpret a flight onto the walls or the ceiling as a piece of particular nastiness. Of course Gregor had to admit that he would not be able to keep up even this running for long, for whenever his father took one step, Gregor had to execute countless movements. He was already beginning to feel winded, just as in the old days he had not had very reliable lungs (Kafka 28).

Since the condition of Gregor was very crucial, his family gradually disdained him, and thought about getting rid of Gregor. At last, Gregor Samsa died of starvation. The following passage shows the final stages of that process:

Gregor's serious wound, from which he suffered for over a month- the apple remained imbedded in his flesh as a visible souvenir since no one dared to remove it-seemed to have reminded even his father that Gregor was a member of the family, in spite of his present pathetic and repulsive shape, who could not be treated as an enemy; that, on the contrary, it was the commandment of family duty to swallow their disgust and endure him, endure him and nothing more (Kafka 29).

This is the death scene of Gregor. He breaths his last after being cast off by his sister, as well as his family, in reality, from any human being because he is no more useful to anyone. "He still saw that outside the window everything was beginning to grow light. Then, without his consent, his head sank down to the floor, and from his nostrils streamed his last weak breath" (Kafka 39).

This is the ultimate panorama in the novella in which his family members celebrate Gregor's death with a trip to the country. Now, things are going up well for them because they all have jobs. They are able to move to here and there and save money as they do not have to bother with the giant insect in the next room anymore. They might have a new man who can serve them with enough cash.

Growing quieter and communicating almost unconsciously through glances, they thought that it would soon be time, too, to find her a good husband. And it was like a confirmation of their new dreams and good intentions when at the end of the ride their daughter got up first and stretched her young body (Kafka 42).

### III. Conclusion

So, it can be said that *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka is a master piece of human psychology where, the matter of isolation is very much clear. Gregor's separation from his family is the separation from society. However, his separation is not intentional unlike the families who isolate themselves by the decision they take. Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* records the strange tale of Gregor Samsa's alteration into an insect and the desolate isolation and individual quest for a momentous existence. In modern literature, it investigates the universal distress and struggles of an individual person in order to get emancipation from the agony of life but 'Life is not a bed of roses' to Samsa. He is to see off this beautiful earth with nothing but dissolution and this theme is embedded although this discussion. Alienation from the earthly life was written in his life. Symbolically, Kafka just tries to make us understand the true existentialism of

human life where there is the identity crisis as well as isolation and hollowness of minds that are not dull and passive rather than developing with the circumstance.

## References

- [1] Bennett, Michael Y. 2015. *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre and Literature of the Absurd*. Cambridge University Press, Print.
- [2] Davachi, Azadeh. 2010. "Existential Absurdity and Alienation in Kafka's *The Meta-morphosis* and Hedayat's *The Blind Owl*". MA the.,Universiti Putra Malay-sia, Print.
- [3] Franz Kafka, and Stanley Corngold. 1996. *The Metamorphosis: Translation, Background and Contexts, Criticism*. New York, W. W. Norton,
- [4] Kiesel, Helmuth. 2002. *Kafka's "The metamorphosis" and Other Writings*. New York: Continuum, Print.
- [5] Mendoza, Ramón G. 2011. "The Human Vermin: Kafka's Metaphor for Extreme Alienation." *Critical Insights: The Metamorphosis*: 133-165. Literary Reference Center Plus. Web 11 June. 2022.
- [6] Robertson, Ritchie. 2004. *Kafka: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, p. 53
- [7] Sokel, Walter H. 2011. "From Marx to Myth: The Structure and Function of Self-Alienation in Kafka's *Metamorphosis*." *Critical Insights: The Metamorphosis*: 215-230 Web 11 June. 2022.
- [8] Straus, Nina. 1989. "Transforming Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis" JSTOR. The University of Chicago Press, Web. 11 June. 2022.
- [9] Winthrop, Henry. 1967 "Alienation and Existentialism in Relation to Literature and Youth." *The Journal of General Education* 18.4: 289. JSTOR. Print. Web. 11 June. 2022.
- [10] Zeeshan, Malik Shahrukh. "Alienation, Franz Kafka Metamorphosis."

