

A Marxist Analysis of Kafkaesque Society in Metamorphosis.

Rehan Aslam Sahi¹

¹ University of Gujrat

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Abstract:

The metamorphosis is a novella which is written by Franz Kafka under the impression of absurdism. But as modern writer's work, we can observe the taste of other literary theories as well in this novella. The aim of this paper is to point out those key elements that demonstrates our society having economy as its major key pillar. The worth of the person is only being described by the amount of vitality he shows toward family, peers and other social institutions; and this vitality is measured in terms of providence. The extent of capital decides one's status and role in society that whether he is going to control the other class (the proletariat) or get controlled by other class (the bourgeoisie). This distinction is also somehow illustrated in the novella. This paper is written after in-depth analysis of the novel by keeping the lens of Marxism. The sample is simply the text of the novel, no external source is used for highlighting the elements of the literary theory.

Keywords: Marxism, class skirmish, Elite Class, Working Class, Proletariat, bourgeoisie, Capitalism, Class Differentiation, Spirituality, Materialism, Metamorphosis, Resources.

Introduction:

The society around us operates on the basis of the capitalist principles that the resource-owning class is growing richer and more affluent every day, while the working class only gets a fraction of the total capital. The principles of capitalism have divided the society into two classes. Bourgeoisie (The Haves): The Haves are the class of society which explicitly possess almost all of the resources of society. This class consists of approximately 10% of the total population of the society, but they possess 95% of resources. The remaining 5% of resources are controlled by the elite class and dispersed among the 90% of the population of the society called the proletariat (the Have nots). The distinction is also made for the smooth functioning of the society.

This distinction is eradicated by 19th century philosopher and economist Karl Marx in his principles of a socialist society collectively known as Marxism. Marxian economics centers on the critique of capitalism, which was outlined in detail by Karl Marx in *Das Kapital* (1867). In general, Marxism holds that capitalism, as a mode of social and economic development, is flawed and will eventually collapse.

Capitalism:

Capitalism is a system of production in which the capitalists (the owners of the business) own all the resources (the factory, tools and machines, raw materials, the finished product, and the profit from selling it). Workers (laborers) are employed for wages and do not own any share of the profits.

Socialism or Marxism:

Karl Marx, like many other classical economists, thought that the relative variations in market prices could be explained by the labor theory of value (LTV). According to this idea, a product's worth may be determined objectively by calculating the average number of labor hours needed to make it. Put otherwise, a table should be valued twice as much if it requires twice as much labor to construct as a chair. Marx's conclusion that this labor value constituted worker exploitation was an addition to this theory. According to Marx, the two main aspects of capitalism that cause bosses to exploit workers are the extraction of surplus labor and the chaotic character of free market competition.

Literature Review

English literature has several works that clearly represent the Marxist idea. There are many works of literature besides Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* that depicted the ideology Marxism. These amazing works include "Death of a Salesman" written by Arthur Miller, "The Hairy Ape" by Eugene O'Neill and Franz Kafka's "The Garden Party." Moreover, many scholars have taken up to themselves to point out different aspects of Marxism in different works of literature.

- Ria Mistry's article titled 'A Marxist Perspective: "The Doll's House," "The Garden Party," and "A Cup of Tea"' applies Karl Marx and Frederick Engels' ideological framework, as observed in the analysis.
- In their article on "Marxism and Literature: Marxist Analysis of 'The Garden Party'," Tayyaba Bashir, Shahid Hussain Mir, and Arshad Mahmood discuss the impact of Marxism on economic and social theories.
- Mei Sun, in the article "The Collapse of a Low Man's Great Dream: Reading the Fusion of Traditional Marxism in *Death of a Salesman*," effectively portrays the conflict within the American consciousness between the pursuit of material success and the influence of societal norms.
- Houriyeh Farhoudi and Yaser Zolfaghari explore the Marxist perspective in their paper, "Under the Shade of Ideology: A Marxist Study of Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*," demonstrating how the play aligns with Marxist theory within the socioeconomic system.

Marxism- As a literary theory:

The essence of the Marxist literary perspective lies in the recognition that the commanding heights of society, where the reins of capital production are held, wield unfaltering control over the entire fabric of our communal existence. In order to delve into a literary piece from a Marxist standpoint, one must comprehend that literature functions as a mirror to society and possesses the potency to ignite transformative impacts within it. One of the core principles embraced by Marxists is the notion that literature possesses a transformative power capable of sparking a societal revolution. It holds within itself the immense strength necessary to shatter the shackles of capitalism, enabling society to transcend towards a state governed by principles of equality, devoid of any class differentiations, and enriched by spiritual values.

When delving into a work of literature with a Marxist perspective, the reader concentrates their full attention on the following pivotal aspects.

- In every society, a distinct division arises, with two dominant classes, distinguished by their wealth and control over the means of production: The Bourgeoisie, those who wield power and wealth by owning the means of production, and the Proletariat, those who labor and operate the means of production under the influence and domination of the bourgeoisie. Given the bourgeoisie's possession of the means of production, they hold the power to sway the realms of politics, government, education, art, and media through their control over finances, thus weaving influence over these domains. Capitalism harbors an inherent flaw as it gives rise to the commoditization of everything, enabling the bourgeoisie to exert control over the proletariat.
- Furthermore, despite the claims of a small number of people, social values are a reflection of tangible goals rather than abstract ideals. The justification for this is that material goods, such as money, are the isolated objects that are not impacted by subjectivity; they remain constant by

all social standards. On the other hand, spirituality is entirely personal. In the end, failure in material pursuits—rather than spiritual failure—shatters the foundation of a fulfilling existence.

- The inevitable result of capitalism is the formation of a distinct social hierarchy, in which different classes clash in the turbulent dance of social unrest. The two groups will have different ideas about how to divide the wealth created, so the owners will still hold the final say in how decisions are made. The never-ending conflict produces the metamorphic spark. The working class believes that society is divided into different groups based on factors such as gender, politics, religion, and ethnicity. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the upper class has cleverly created these divisions in order to deflect attention from the real divide, which is the economic one based on wealth.

- The proletariat is controlled by different means of media such as arts, literature or digital media, as the bourgeoisie have complete influence on all these means. Therefore, text is read while keeping these few points in mind for highlighting different aspects of Marxism.

Research Method:

A few procedures are seen to be helpful when using Marxist Theory to analyze a text. The content analysis approach is used with a text of a chosen novella "Metamorphosis."

First, it is recommended reading the book with an emphasis on finding out how the characters communicate differently from one another. Individual relationships, even ones that might be used to support a social Marxist critique, are highly valued in Marxist thought.

Second, the role of each character in building the capitalist society is deeply observed, how their social status influences their actions towards other people or characters in the novel.

Thirdly, the novella's main theme is to establish parity between the bourgeoisie and the working class. This will be accomplished by establishing a communist society in which everyone shares equally in the wealth and power of the group.

Marxism – The Metamorphosis:

This paper enhances our comprehension of the societal characteristics in which the absurd protagonist of the novel (Gregor Samsa) resides, which bears striking resemblance to the capitalist society. The society contains various elements of capitalism that Karl Marx criticized. Gregor's value in his workplace, at home, in the eyes of his employer, and in the eyes of his family is directly proportional to his ability to generate revenue. From the moment of transformation, his social status is changed because he is unable to perform economic obligations toward his family is altered. This alteration causes the behavior of the people around him to change drastically. Different aspects of the Marxism in this novella, are given as:

Capitalistic Society:

The society in which Gregor is residing is very alarming. This can be observed from the beginning of the novel. 'The Metamorphosis' starts with the transformation of the Gregor Samsa into a bug and rather than thinking about the reasons that may have caused this transformation, he thinks about the time he has lost in his bed and now his manager will be upset that he is late from the office. This expresses the importance of being useful in that capitalist society. Gregor is not thinking that his new structure supports his job or not. He is of thought that he must continue his job no matter what condition he is in. He has never even taken a sick leave which illustrates his passion or rather his necessity to continue his job no wonder what the consequences. Moreover, he is the only person in his household who has a job so there is no room for any kind of laziness whether it is caused by serious illness. He must get up on every morning, he must get on the train and he must do his job daily or his family is going to suffer consequences. Gregor himself has reached to the edge where he just wants to leave the job behind but his responsibilities toward his family are not letting him to do so.

"If I didn't hold back for my parents' sake, I would have quit long ago" (Kafka)

Class Division:

Every Capitalist society is divided into two distinguished classes, the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The novel contains representatives of both classes. According to Marxist theory, working class has only value when they are able to generate resources for the elite class. Once they have lost this attribute, then they must be get rid of. The manager represents the latter class while Gregor is the representative of the former class. As the novel proceeds after the transformation of the Gregor, the manager arrives at his house for acquiring the answer why Gregor is late from his work. Kafka has made the character so hateful that he even made him nameless. The actions of the manager are as hideous as they are supposed to. He urges Gregor that he must come to work but as he come across the fact that Gregor is of no use anymore, he runs from there. He does not ask, what happened, why did it happened, he just infer from the present scenario that Gregor has become economically feeble, thus from company's point of view, he has no more utility.

Materialism Verses Spirituality:

The ideal abstracts that are considered to be the main props on which the society stands are actually subjective and personal to every person. Contrastingly, the materialistic things are objective. The upper class makes it their duty to show off their materialistic belonging to the poor class, so in order to make the working class even work harder to attain the position among the elite class. The protagonist, member of a working class having no means of production of their own, Gregor Samsa works hard enough already to attain enough resources to have enough so that he could be able to compete with upper class of the society. Such as: "Day in, day out on the road, I've got the torture of travelling, worrying about changing trains, eating miserable food at all hours." (Kafka)

Alienism

Our society consists of different social institution. These institutions help us to get acquainted with the society. Lower class or the proletariat finds sense of belonging as long as they are the part of something that has importance to the elite class. Gregor immediately suffers alienation from the society he has been a part of as he undergoes transformation from a man into a bug. First of all, upon glancing one look of Gregor, his manager leaves without saying anything. As Gregor is the brilliant part of his company's sales team, but now, he cannot fulfil his tasks, therefore his manager abandons him. Not only his employer, but also his family for whom he has been working day and night continuously, without even seeking an ounce of pleasure for himself, feels there is an outsider living in their house. At first, his sister still thinks of him as her brother and continue to feed him although bad food but in the end even she refuses to recognize that bug as her brother. Thus, this represents that the alienation occurs mostly in the working class whose solely purpose is to create revenue for the elite class. And once, this purpose is separated from them, they get a treatment from the society that perhaps, they weren't the part of. His own parents lock him out in the room. They do not let him out or anyone see him. Grete, his sister is the only person, for months who comes to him for food and other things.

This alienation causes deep effects on the protagonist, Gregor both physically and psychologically. At first, upon this estrangement, Gregor tries to keep everything well in order as humanly as possible, so that his family may see him as the part of it. His sister when sees the pleasure upon crawling in the open space, even removes the furniture from the room. Gregor skulks around the room freely, finding new sources of happiness. But later, his family turns that Gregor's space into storage room. This inattention to Gregor brings much sadness to him and affects him psychologically and physically. His sister's words about Gregor that:

"It has to go, realized long ago that it isn't possible for human beings to live with such a creature, and he would have gone away of his own free will." (Kafka)

These words break Gregor's heart and that night the anxiety he feels upon this estrangement causes him to die.

Distribution of wealth:

Elite class in every capitalist society makes the members of working class work all around the clock and still the wealth distribution is not according to the effort. The elite class still gets the

major share of the whole capital while let the working class feed on the scrapes. In this novel, exact depiction of the capital society is being shown. Gregor part of the working class, supposed to work for the betterment of his family. Through his work, he is making his boss richer and richer and at the moment of his transformation, he doesn't even possess enough riches that his parent wouldn't have to work. His father considers himself as a capitalist employer, as the father was able to have some job, was able to support family to some extent but still he chose not to.

“the money Gregor brought home every month- he had kept only a few dollars for himself- had never been quite used up and now amounted to a small capital sum”. (Kafka)

He chooses to rely on his son, he chooses to put all burden on the son, even though Gregor wants to leave this job but in the fear that his family will not be able to uphold these circumstances of unemployment for even a while, he continues to withstand these hardships. But on the same time, his father also shows the mind-sets of the working class, buttering the manager that Gregor can still continue the job. Once, Gregor is out of the job, he does not wait for Gregor to recover, he instantaneously starts a job as he himself knows that without any job, the survival of the family would not be possible.

Conclusion:

Kafka makes it clear by using the transformation of a human into an insect that bourgeoisie thinks of proletariat in the same manner. In the eyes of the elite class, working class has the value no more than an insect but with a purpose of making them richer. Once this purpose is detached by the working class, their existence only means an insect crawling around. Even Gregor's family does not think of him more than an insect. This illustrates the struggle not between the social classes but also within classes. The tragic end of Gregor is not seen more than a death of an insect. Therefore, this novel has perfectly exemplified Marxist theory used in literature. That how the capitalists are skinning the low class to the bone and not thinking them more than the object of making the money and once the low class realizes their true value of existence, they have psychological effects and they view themselves not more than a vermin and thus deteriorate away. This novel plays an important role to express the need of noticing this exploitation and then fighting it as it differentiation in class may lead to some serious consequences.

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