



Question of Being in Kafkaesque World: An Ontological Study of Kafka's 'Researches of A Dog' and 'The Silence of Sirens'

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Abstract- Being alludes to a condition of having a presence and existence. This existence provides the rationality of things either they are humans or objects. First comes the being which is later followed by the thoughts, ideas and actions. Kafka presents characters confronting with existential traumas in a world with no pre-defined set of rules. In a state of being thrown, they find themselves struggling in creating good faith when they have limited number of resources and opportunities. Current research unfolds the different modes of being adopted by Researcher Dog and Odysseus while striving for authentic existence yet different environmental factors push them back towards bad faith. With constant struggle, they are able to cope with existential challenges and succeeded in storing a prominent place. Kafkaesque world is a sort of puzzle due to its multiplicity of meaning that is caused by complex narrative. In current research, selected short stories are studied through the frame-work of ontology and question of being is discussed at length to understand the existential trauma in proper.

Keywords: Dasein, Bewilderment, Consciousness, Nothingness, Existence

I. INTRODUCTION

Kafkaesque World

Kafka was a quiet, lonely, alienated, and introverted child with a passion for reading. He performed well in gymnasium, especially in the arts. Kafka conceived of himself in a lifelong battle with his father. He suffered from oedipal complex and his fictional work contains traces of his father's (Hermann Kafka) authoritative and dictatorial personality. He was unable to break free from the labyrinth of his family. He struggled throughout his life to harmonize his relationship with his father but failed. Biographer Ernst Pawel remarks, "The father, with his crude selfishness, parvenu mentality, and mindless vulgarity, bore a large if unwitting share of responsibility for his son's troubled childhood" (Pawel, 1984, p.58).

Kafka is one of the most debated German writer as his writings are full of allegories and symbols that have multiple interpretations so every theory is applicable on Kafkaesque World. Being a janus-faced novelist, it is not easy to explore every dimension of his writing as there are as many perspectives as many theories of literature and philosophy are present. Many critics have studied the Kafkaesque world from every possible angle and almost each and every theory has been applied ranging from psychology, philosophy, literature, political science to anthropology.

Kafka's whole work is so diversified that it cannot be interpreted under the heading of one particularly philosophy, it accepts one at a time and refutes it soon afterwards. His works have the influence of many philosophies but signify their worth under the heading of Kafkaesque. J.A Cuddon in his dictionary of literary terms defines it as:

The kind of nightmarish atmosphere which he [Kafka] was capable of creating through the pervasive means of sinister, impersonal forces, the feeling of loss of identity, the evocation of guilt and fear, and the sense of evil that permeates the twisted and 'absurd' logic of ruling power" (441).

Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought interprets it as:

Nightmarish sense of having lost one's identity, and of bewildered helplessness against a vast, sinister, impersonal BUREAUCRACY which is intuitively felt to be evil, yet which appears to have a crazy kind of transcendent logic on its side" (1977, p.451).

Kafkaesque world is symposium of all literary movements of 20th century; it has the essence of existentialist, modernist, post-modernist, surrealist, Dadaist, absurdist, post-colonialist and many more as Gilman says:

What is most remarkable about the bountiful interpretations and biographies is that every critic was right and every biographer was right. Kafka turns out to be as much an expressionist as a Zionist, as a mystic, as

a pre-and post-communist Czech, as an existentialist, as a post-modern, as a post-colonist, as a (whatever he will be next month) (Gilman, 2005, p.9).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In attempting to explain the work of Franz Kafka, criticism involuntarily enters into the realm of biographical approach as much work of Kafka resembles his actual life. The difficulties faced by both Kafka and his critics are problems which have dogged philosophers through the centuries: what is real knowledge; what is the meaning of meaning; and what is the reality of meaning? Kafka's short story "A Country Doctor" serves as an excellent point of departure for yet another attempt to chart the region overshadowed by Kafka's, and more generally man's ontological problems. Kafka criticism has tended to be too narrow, that Kafka writes of all sort of human ventures ranging from ordinary events to most extraordinary happenings that causes multiple interpretations.

In his definitive Motif Index of Folk-Literature, Stith Thompson documents a wide variety of transformation motifs, including transformation of man to animal, transformation of man into an insect, and even more specifically applicable, transformation of man into a beetle. Evidence for the universality and age of metamorphosis as a motif can also be found in the only Latin novel surviving in whole, *The Golden Ass* written by Corinthian Greek Lucius Apuleius, which dates back to the second century CE. (15)

"Since in literature and philosophy it has always been quite fashionable to speak of the body as a prison house of the soul" (Foulkes, 1967, p.462) and this idea have been propounded by many in their literary ventures so did Kafka. A.P. Foulkes in his article "Kafka's Cage Image" takes a bird eye view of Kafka's fictional world. It is a common phenomenon that many writers takes this body as a prison in which soul dwells as a prisoner that longs for self-identification so Kafka is not the first one to consider the body as cage. Plato's parable of cave is very famous one yet in Plato's opinion there is always a possibility of goodness in this world yet Kafka is hopeless in this regard and denies every possibility of goodness. Kafka is a pessimist indeed who is not able to trace any positive sign in this world. Foulkes takes a thematic outlook of Kafka's fictional world in this article.

Kafka has never been a religious writer in strict sense and his fictional world does not show many signs of his Jewish origin yet Walter H. Sokel carefully studies different stages of Kafka's life and keenly researched the literary tradition of Kafka and afterwards draw inferences that there are strong traces of Jewishness in Kafka when was twenty-nine in 1911. In his article *Kafka As a Jew*, he says "there exists a connection between the peculiar nature of Kafka's mature writing and his discovery of what he considered to be authentic Judaism, which he regretted bitterly not having known until then (Sokel, 1999, p.837)."

Much similar conclusion was researched by Samolsky in his article "Metaleptic Machines: Kafka, Kabbalah, Shoah" in the same. Samolsky does not confine his discussion to religious tendencies but he considers holocaust and other such historical incidents in his article. In this way, he observes a link of Kafka's fiction and these historical incidents. He also gives a comparative study of Nietzsche's philosophy in relation to Nazism and reactionary interpretation of that in Kafka's works. He formulates a link between Kafka and Judaism as he says, "Kafka's interpretive manner, his exorbitant theosophy of the letter, is resolutely Kabbalistic. His text here borders on the sacrosanct, miming ancient Judaic modes of exegesis (Samolsky, 1999, p.179)."

Kenneth Hughes in his article "Reviews: Kafka Research 1974-1979: A Report" concludes that work on Kafka is much deficient and biased. According to him, Kafka's fictional world has been inadequately interpreted specially in the west. In his thorough review, he considers Sokel, Heller, Franz Kuna, Henry Sussman, Alfred Wirkner, Christoph Stolz and others. He suggests "typical kinds of research have been done in Kafka studies in the past several years. It is not too much different from the work which preceded it (Hughes, 1981, p.183)." In his opinion no appropriate work has been done through Marxist perspective on Kafka.

Kafka has so many influences and Buddhism is one of them. Judaism and Christian influence have been found by many scholars. Buddhism does not have a direct influence on Kafka but it was indirectly to him by Schopenhauer. Schopenhauer visited east and had ample reading of Buddhist texts that made his philosophy more continental in nature. Gregor Samsa in *The Metamorphosis* is one such character that is going through suffering, death and rebirth cycle. 'Samsa' name also suggests close resemblance with samsara as "The term Samsara appears for the first time in the Upanishads; by circa 600 B.C. it is a primary tenet of both Hinduism and Buddhism. Samsara (also pronounced and written Sansara) is this world of craving, lust, suffering, death, rebirth, and disease (Ryan, 1999, p.133)." Michael P. Ryan researched this phenomenon in his brilliant article "Samsa and Samsara: Suffering, Death and Rebirth in *The Metamorphosis*".

R. M. Alberes and Pierre De Boisdeffre's *Kafka: Torment of Man* is a biographical interpretation of Kafkaesque World as whole book consists of Kafka's life events in relation to his literary writings. From the very beginning, they take a start from "Letter to Father" to narrate the story of his early life and Kafka's childhood was under the fearful spell of his father from which he was unable to free in his whole life. So there is constant reference of uneasy life between father and son throughout his fiction. Book also unfolds oedipal traces in Kafka's writings that have been analyzed through the perspective of psychoanalysis. Kafka was writing in post-naturalist era so his short fiction bears so many signs of naturalism that have been analyzed in this book too. Female, love affair and marriage have great influence on one's life and specially these incidents impact literature to great extent so both writers take great pains to document all such incidents of Kafka's life for better understanding of Kafka's fiction. Modern world is far different from classic one as there are shades of alienation, boredom, despair, dread, death, uncertainty and absurdity. All these elements are present in modern fiction and in modern life. Both writers marked those instances of Kafka's life and try to evaluate his masterpieces in the light of those. *Kafka: The Torment of Man* is an impressive biographical study that explore many dimensions of Kafka's literary genius.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Heraclitus (535CE-475 BCE) and Parmenides (520CE-450BCE) were the Greek philosophers who initiated the debate of being and non-being. Socrates in *Metaphysics* further discussed the questions relating to being. Gradually, the issue of 'being' emerges as a school of thought in philosophy that is known as ontology.

Martin Heidegger in his book *Being and Time* uses the term "Dasein" which means being there, which specifically refers to the human existence in this world. He argues that to comprehend the human existence it must be understood as being. World is all around and it has narrowed down the opportunities and space for a being. Being has to encounter a fixed set of circumstances. To elaborate this condition further he mentions a term "Thrown", it is an extension of the debate of conditioned environment in which a being has to survive. In such pre-determined circumstances the decisions taken by humans determine their beings. It gives meaning to their existence. Heidegger's another major work on ontology is *The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, in this book he talks about the history of ontology and its relation with phenomenology, ideas of Hegel, Husserl, Kierkegaard and Husserl.

Jean Paul Sartre's work *Being and Nothingness* elaborates his ideas of ontology. According to Sartre there are two kinds of being. One is "being for itself" which means the conscious stage of being and other category is "being-in-itself" that defines the unconscious stage of being. "Being-for-itself" or being of consciousness is about the existing objects.

Current research is qualitative in nature and close reading methodology is adopted for in-depth study of selected short stories. Ontology is concerned with a phenomenon of being and Kafkaesque World is considered to be existential in nature so ontological philosophy assumes to be most appropriate theoretical frame work to decipher the question of being in Kafka's selected short stories.

IV. DISCUSSION

Researches of a dog "is a only story he wrote in which all the significant phases of the protagonist's development, from early childhood and pubescence to old age, are fashioned into a life-narrative (William, 2007, p.101)." Whole story that revolves around a dog who initiates different research projects to have answers of his different queries yet from this angle this seems animal fable. To declare this story as fable will be unjust because it would be only surface interpretation. Kafka's protagonists turn into insects or they are animal by nature but this aspect does not qualify his stories as animal fables because these stories are storehouse of existential horrors of modern man and these short pieces provide the modern reader with a chance to analysis the ontological dilemma of modern man through the glasses of Kafkaesque World.

"Kant believes that the difference between animal and human is human reason, or rather the human potential to actualize reason and thus ultimately to reason (Gerhardt, 2006, p.162)." Throughout the story the dog proposes several interpretations of his environment, and then experiment with each interpretation. In this respect Odysseus and the investigate dog differs. Odysseus does not perform any experiment or formulate a particular interpretation. Both characters however gain a new acoustic awareness through their endeavors. This is the strongest similarity between the two texts.

We were thrown in this world one day and we don't know the reason why we have been condemned to exist? Why we have not been given choice to exist or not? We are in struggle to solve this puzzle and for so

many intellectuals are striving to answer this puzzle but instead to deciphering; it becomes complicated and causes estrangement for one's own self. As the protagonist narrator of the researcher stumbles through life, he comes across many contradictions. These contradictions cause him to question his existence and world. Through his questioning, the dog strives to impose an interpretation onto the world. The dog's process of finding a coherent interpretation of the world, which he never can accomplish in the same way that Joseph K. cannot write his fate, is the subject of research of a dog. The dog's conflicting drives to interpret its own development, moreover, from the musical dogs to the experiment concerning the nature of nutrition, culminating in the hunger episode. These experiments are, in turn, symbolic of hermeneutic process. Ultimately the dog gains the knowledge of existence in his struggle to interpret.

The dog's description of himself and his surroundings is filled with contradictions. Kafka's this story seems to run in the same way as *The Silence of the Sirens*. The dog makes a statement and contradicts it in the same line in the end. "How my life has changed, and how at heart, it has not (Kafka, 2007, p.132)." The exclamation claims two things that stand in opposition to each other. In one breath the speaker asserts that his life has changed and has remained the same. This shows that narrator lacks the means to discern whether or not his life has changed. Such a state is termed as existential bewilderment according to ontology as *Dasein* is unable to demystify its current existence. The introductory sentence alludes to problematic existence as tension between the previous dejected existence and present existence has been highlighted in the opening sentence of the story.

The main protagonist of the story is baffled by the existential trauma and unavailability of satisfying answers of his queries so he is caught in a state of indecisiveness. He does not have good relation with his neighbors and he does not pay visit to them yet praise them on certain times even after mocking them. Another important thing to note is that not only researcher is suffering from indecisiveness but all dogs are suffering as they have urge to question and to be silent. Such a situation indicates a phase of nothingness; severe sort of anguish and bewilderment; that has captivated the whole dog community who is symbolic of modern man.

This miserable state of affair can be witnessed in Kafka's life too. Kafka's diary is a detail account of his miserable and baffled life. His life, like K., Joseph K., Gregor Samsa, Hunger Artist, Josephine the Singer, and Researcher Dog, is a constant striving for his identity and being. He had very few moment of happiness in his life. He abandoned his married life for the sake of writing. Yet in his entry of 19th January, 1922, he accepted his longing for family and children: "the infinite, deep, warm, saving happiness of sitting beside the cradle on one's own child opposite its mother" (Kafka p.401), but he was unable to fulfill his desire. He broke with Felice twice yet in his death bed he encountered Dora Diamond, who filled his life with new inspiration. Gilman describes her as. "Dora was the promised cure for Franz, she would bring her Eastern health to cure him of his western nervousness" (2005, p.124). Mrs. Kafka's (Dora called herself after his death as Mrs. Kafka) lively entry in his life could not prevent his fate of being a bachelor like Sisyphus, as in his same day's entry he relates himself with most tragic figure of existential realm;

There is in it also something of this feeling; matter no longer rest with you, unless you wish it so. In contrast, this feeling of those who have no children; it perpetually rests with you, whether you will or no, every moment in the end, every never-racking moment, it perpetually rests with you, and without result. Sisyphus was a bachelor (Kafka p.401).

One must take a close look at the dog's perception of himself, which are often incomplete or inconsistent. He describes himself as reserved then later on interprets himself as inquiring one. His shyness and nervousness stand in direct opposition to the curiosity he displays in actively pursuing the truth. Arithmetician immediately conjures up images of mathematics, exactitude, and precise science. On the other hand, dog had a strong sense of respect for the rules or laws, the right procedure, and social obligations. This is apparent in the scene with dancing dogs.

The dog's struggle to make sense and to find an interpretation is really the subject of the story, just as the title indicates. The dog employs different procedures for testing his experiments. His methodology goes through its own development as it moves from strictly asking questions (in scene with the musical dogs) to actually acting on the environment and testing his theories in form of experiments. The investigations are important for dog's life and he termed them 'indispensible'. In the starvation scene the dog is willing to risk even his life for the sake of science. This indicates the significance of the procedure to the dog himself.

The dog analyzes things into their constituent parts. This is apparent in his careful dissection of the performance of the seven musical dogs as well as his attention to many different classes of dogs. The dog searches for an explanation, a meaning, but finds none. This lack of meaning disturbs him terribly. He is dissatisfied with usual explanation.

The dog's investigation culminates in the question of nourishment, ultimately leading to the starvation scene. His scientific methodology reaches its highest form in the physical experiments. The dog tests interpretations in these experiments. In the first experiment the dog tests the traditional scientific interpretation of the dance ritual. Traditional science teaches that the dance ritual is done primarily to give the ground strength to attract the nourishment from above. The contradiction is that the dog directs the dance ritual toward the sky. This contradiction is the starting point for the first experiment. If the dance rituals only effect the ground, the dog hypothesizes then the nourishment from above should still fail, even if the rituals were entirely directed to the ground.

The experiments are symbolic of hermeneutic process of going back and forth between the text and its interpretation. In the dog's case his surroundings are the text he interprets. The story *Researches of A Dog* is about the dog's quest to find a coherent interpretation of his world. The experiments serve as a test of the coherence of his interpretation.

"The second case investigated by the dog features a single musical dog (who barks when barked to) and occurs in one of the story's more striking scenic portrayals, which, understandably, has caught the eye of nearly all commentators (William, 2007, p.113)" The scene with the musical dogs gives insight to the early stage of the dog's process of interpretation. The episode inspires the young dog to investigate the question of nourishment. At this early stage, the dog's investigation consists mainly of the shock, and rational attempts to answer his own question. At first the dog thinks the musicians are using their calmness. But he then further observes to test his conclusion. Similarly he considers the explanation of their behavior as fear, but then takes back his original thesis. The dog's explanations only run into more questions. Finally he decides to ask the musicians themselves rather than consider on his own. But dogs did answer him and refused to response any of his queries.

The dog is so shocked at this blatant disregard for law and custom. His anger nearly causes him to forget the music. The dog states a new theory concerning the silence of the musical dogs, which relies on their disregard for law and custom. In this way his knowledge of the musical dogs is connected with guilt. Standing upright is the ultimate crime against the custom of dogdom. The investigation dog turns to these musicians for explanation and enlightenment yet only finds that they turn a deaf ear to the most basic of dog laws. The dog is so baffled and horrified by their behavior that he can no longer just watch. The dog's entire understanding of the world comes crashing back upon him, and he must act. He does this mainly for self-preservation. Dog has undergone a transformation during the experience of the musical dogs. He has become aware of his own musical voice. In his early years he lacked every form of this awareness.

The dog acted only for the sake of self-preservation, only to protect his naïve world view. The dog did not act on his own surrounding to test a hypothesis. It is this respect that the hound's early methodology is distinct from the later means of investigation. In the later scenes he acts upon the environment to test his hypothesis, as opposed to the mere questioning of the early stage.

Through the starvation journey the dog arrives at a new type of knowledge completely different than that which he set about to gain. This happens because fasting is not just an experiment on the environment, but also an experiment performed by the dog on himself. The hunger scene is the first point in the story where the dog performs an experiment on his own body.

The dog gains knowledge through starvation and becomes aware by hearing. This aural knowledge is similar to the sudden awareness the dog had once experienced with the music dogs. A similar consciousness occurs in the scene with the hunting dogs. The investigation dog cannot resist the melody of the hunting dog in much the same way that the music of the dancing dogs had exerted complete power over him.

As in other Kafka works, it is impossible to ascribe one particular meaning to this new consciousness. The dog accomplishes something, despite the lack of solid results. His primary accomplishment is a new awareness, which is expressed in various ways. The most obvious awareness comes at the end of the story in regard to science and instinct. The dog learns an appreciation for the science of music and decides to extend his investigation to this area as well as to the border area of two main sciences.

There is still much more to the dog's method than asking questions, however. The dog also attempts to take things apart, to separate the big problem into manageable smaller problems. The dissection of a problem into its component part is a method that the dog employs throughout his life. In this move from particular to the general, the dog analyzes things into their constituent parts. This is apparent in his careful dissection of the performance of the seven musical dogs as well as his attention to the many different classes of dogs.

The dog's new consciousness expresses itself in other ways as well. He becomes aware that his investigation is his only means of survival, in much the same way that Odysseus can only survive through the process of

finding a consistent interpretation of his existence. The dog becomes aware of this when he compares his means of survival to the means that other dogs employ.

The dog's goal, then, is to arrive on some truth and to escape the lie of his earthly existence. The earthly existence is deception, because the dog cannot arrive at any absolute truth in this world. There is no one from whom the dog can find out the truth. The dog is fully aware that he cannot arrive at the truth, since even he is part of this earthly deception.

Despite the futility of absolute truth, the dog is aware in some other sense that he can feel at home in this deceptive world. In other words he can come to term with his existence. He accomplishes this through the process of searching for a n interpretation. Yet the dog openly admits and acknowledges that the absolute truth is unattainable. Kafka's *Researches of A Dog* is really about the dog's quest to make sense of his world in the face of enormous inconsistencies.

Kafka demonstrates through the example of Odysseus that insufficient means can be sufficient for survival. Odysseus tries in vain to comprehend existence in the face of the Sirens and his uncertainty about them. His efforts are futile, in fact, and the narrator makes clear that Odysseus has no prospects for survival, because nothing helps against Siren's silence. Yet Odysseus' agent is not the wax and chains, but rather his search for a means to outwit the Sirens. Odysseus affirms his existence in his attempt to understand his existence with a consistent interpretation. Although no interpretation can be sufficient or absolute, Odysseus finds meaning in the search. He discovers knowledge in the incomprehensibility of his existence through his search for a consistent interpretation, i.e. his search for the means to outwit the Sirens.

Kafka's text gives rise to new type of knowledge from the uncertainty and in the core of this lays a close association with existence. Kafka makes the familiar text foreign by changing a few details of the well-known myth. According to myth, song of Sirens is destructive and deadly yet Kafka reverses the myth by attributing deadly quality to the silence of Sirens. Silence in itself is a mystery much like nothingness that can be interpreted on multiple levels yet does not give its proper understanding in any one of those interpretations. Nothingness is a concealment of being and silence is the concealment of speech. The contradictory nature of sound, silence and song has a problematic result as wax can protect him from song of Sirens but silence cannot be protected as it is the absence of sound.

Odysseus will be destroyed when he is going to hear the silence of Sirens but it is not imaginable to hear the silence. Silence and hearing are having the same problematic co-existence of being and nothingness. This tension demonstrates the difference between certainty and uncertainty, as well as presence and absence. Silence is present as well as absent at the same time. "Kafka is really concerned with the integrity of the soul of Odysseus, not with his possible creativity (1976, p.22)" as Strauss claims.

Odysseus gains knowledge and accepts his existence in this in-between state. The music, sound, and lack thereof are exactly what get him into predicament. His entire behavior was caused by song. One can witness parable's agent as the process of searching for a means to outwit Sirens, which involves finding an entirely consistent interpretation of existence in that moment. The agent is then the process of choosing between pretending to not hear the silence or actually not hearing the silence. Either alternative requires rational argumentation. Which one Odysseus chooses, or if he ever chooses, remains un-decidable. If it is un-decidable, then it is also incomprehensible. It is exactly in this incomprehensibility of his contradictory state and choice that Odysseus finds knowledge of existence.

Ontologically speaking, inherent meanings work same like Sirens' silence as they are there to destroy and limit one's existence. Inherent meanings also operate silently and take away one's individuality. Existence entity does not know yet destroys his being and becomes a part of herd. Meaning of existence has been destroyed by the silence of inherent meaning designed by others over which one do not have his control. Odysseus protects his being from the attack of Sirens by not hearing their silence which is deadly and destructive. Foulkes rightly says that "various interpretations of "das Schweigen der Sirenen" have been offered, but they are rather unconvincing, and usually leave much unexplained. W. Emrich maintains, quite rightly I believe, that Kafka's fictional world is a faithful reflection of present-day confusion and chaos (99)."

V. CONCLUSION

Kafkaesque world is full of animal stories that seem to be animal fables yet they provoke existential terrors. It is an interesting topic of research to probe into the core issue why animals have been chosen to play a key role in fiction. Chris Danta (2007) has researched this phenomenon in his essay, "Like a dog... Like a lamb": Becoming Sacrificial Animal in Kafka and Coetzee". He discusses two great fiction writers of all times in comparison to each other in their treatment of animal imagery, animals and phenomenon of transformation.

There is a popular joke:

A doctor asked to mental patient, "What are you doing?" "I am writing a letter", he replied. Doctor amused and inquired, "To whom?" He directed his gaze towards doctor and responded, "It addresses to me." Surprisingly, doctor said, "What does it say?" "How can I know, I have not yet received that" patient laughed. Much similar pattern can be witnessed in both stories when characters are struggling to create their authentic existence in the face of chaos and bewilderment. Not only being but the very existence of characters is threatened by existential traumas. Even in this baffled state of affair, Odysseus and Dog both tried to maintain existential ethics and put their efforts to define their being as authentic one.

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