



PROJECTION OF PATRIARCHY THROUGH FRANZ KAFKA'S *THE METAMORPHOSIS* AND SYLVIA PLATH'S *DADDY*

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ABSTRACT

Patriarchy is a serious issue which has been the area of concern and study from time immemorial. The feeling of loss and isolation due to the male dominance can be widely felt. The submission of other members of the family to the eldest male member is the primary meaning of this term and not only women but also the other males of the family are a victim of patriarchy. Existential and identity crisis come along with this problem which can result in several traumatic experiences.

*The objective of this paper is to understand patriarchy and its influence with special reference to Franz Kafka's fiction, *The Metamorphosis* and Sylvia Plath's poem, *Daddy*. The influence of patriarchy can be felt on both the genders and they equally suffer physically, emotionally and psychologically. Divided into several parts, this paper explores the two famous works critically and also highlights the way in which these stalwarts have portrayed their views and sufferings. Both the works are analysed in detail in this paper along with references to other texts as well.*

Keywords: Patriarchy, genders, isolation, loss, sufferings, confession, autobiographical elements, existentialism, absurdity.

PATRIARCHAL INFLUENCE ON THE GENDERS

Patriarchy is a term for societies in which male is the favoured gender and they hold power, dominion and privilege. It literally means the rule of the fathers. But today, one means much more with “male dominance” than the rule of the fathers; it includes the reign of husbands, male superiors and more. The head of the family enjoys an absolute power and freedom is hardly given to other members of the family. The influence of patriarchy can be felt emotionally, physically and psychologically by both the genders equally.

Issues related to patriarchy are often discussed by many scholars and sociologists and many books have been written on this theme. Franz Kafka and Sylvia Plath are two such famous writers who have been the victim of patriarchy and have suffered throughout their lives. Kafka was the eldest son of a psychologically abusive father and his mother was too weak in front of his father, hence she could not protect her child from the abuses of her husband. Kafka grew up to be timid, bookish, meek and full of self-hatred. His novels reflect his negative and unsuccessful relation with his father. Five years prior to his death, he had written a letter to his father, stating how his childhood was deformed due to the bitter relationship between them. His personal feelings, grievances and expectations had been highlighted in his long letter. Kafka’s relationship with women was also unsuccessful, hence he could not raise up a family on his own.

Sylvia Plath is an American poetess, famous for her confessional poems in which she has confessed her innermost feelings and deepest thoughts. Her personal problems were the death of her father, Otto Plath and her unfavourable relationship with her husband, Ted Hughes. Plath has written about her multiple suicide attempts in his poems, especially in *Lady Lazarus*. Psychological problem has been a constant companion of Plath throughout her life.

Hence, it can be figured out that both were a victim of patriarchy and also their struggles with depression caused due to the disturbed relationship with their fathers and also with her husband in case of Plath.

THE ELEMENT OF TRANSFORMATION IN KAFKA’S *THE METAMORPHOSIS*

The Metamorphosis is the story of a young man who, transformed overnight into a giant beetlelike insect, becomes an object of disgrace to his family. He is treated like an outsider in his own house, deprived of proper food and was constantly attacked by others.

Finally, the story ends with his demise and his father is shown to be completely unaffected by this. The Samsa family goes out for a vacation and talks about the marriage of their beautiful daughter. If their daughter is married in a well-to-do family, they can start dreaming afresh since their son-in-law would be there to help them in every way. The demise of their son is fully neglected and thus, he is not given the respect that he deserved.

Themes related to absurdity of life, suffering, sympathy and a disbalance between the body and mind are showcased in this most celebrated fiction. Gregor Samsa, who is the sole breadwinner in the Samsa family is maltreated by his own parents due to his transformation into a monstrous vermin. The responses of the various characters add to this sense of absurdity, specifically because they seem almost as absurd as Gregor's transformation itself. This work has autobiographical elements in it since Kafka himself was a victim of his father's misbehaviour which led to self-hatred. The author got punished for nothing and that aggravated the relationship between him and his abusive father. In *The Metamorphosis* as well, Gregor Samsa shares a bitter relationship with his father and his father hardly cares about him throughout the novella. He just wants to get rid of his deformed son who is of no use to the family now.

Not only Gregor, but also his parents and sister undergo a metamorphosis or transformation in the course of the novella. His sister gradually turns into a matured woman since she begins to take up matured duties like caring for Gregor and also finding a job to support her family. She is the one to bring him food even after his transformation. At the end of the novella, she is portrayed as a pretty, young lady, ready to get married, which highlights that she is an adult both physically and emotionally.

Initially, the members of the Samsa family appear hopeless and static, owing to the difficulties resulting from Gregor's transformation as well as their financial predicament. But over time they are able to overcome their money problems, and when Gregor finally dies, and the family no longer has to deal with his presence, all the family members are reinvigorated. As the story closes, they have completed an emotional transformation and their hope is revitalized.

SAMSA'S EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

Gregor Samsa...the name Samsa is a cryptogram for Kafka and also there is a phonetic contraction of the Czech word "sam" meaning *alone* and "jsem" meaning *I am*,

hence it means “I am alone” which is a cry of the inner pain. Samsa’s father symbolises patriarchy since he is the head of the family and he does not give freedom to the other members in every aspect of life. He controls his family and expects everyone to obey his orders and his wishes.

Despite Gregor’s help, his father shows no sympathy for his son after his transformation. His father is only concerned about money and not his son even for a moment. An estranged relationship between the two can be figured out just like Kafka’s strained relation with his own father. Samsa soon becomes a disgrace and he is isolated from the entire family. The family members do not even try to figure out the cause behind his strange transformation and ways to cure him. Although his sister brings him food, he is unable to eat those, and he is left alone in one corner of the room, often tortured by the outsiders. On the other hand, Gregor tries to adapt himself to his new form and he still wants to help his family financially. Even after his transformation, his human instincts were still alive which led to further complications.

Herr Samsa, Gregor’s father is showcased as a reluctant person, who hardly is affected by his son’s death. His wife and daughter are a bit compassionate and they hugged each other closely to give each other comfort. But soon they were called by Herr Samsa --- “Come over here, then. It’s time to let those old things be. And have some consideration for me, too”. Right after his statement, the women obeyed and hurried over to him and caressed him. This proves the submissive nature of women in front of the male authority, represented by his father. Towards the end of the story, the family left the apartment together for a vacation. They all seemed to be relaxed, discussing about their future prospects. The warm sunshine outside reflected their current mood and a willingness to start their life afresh.

A powerful, judgmental, abusive father, and a quiet, reclusive, abused son: "The Metamorphosis" is an emotionally wrenching story. A strained father-son relationship is a theme Kafka turned to in two other stories from 1913 (when "The Metamorphosis" was originally written), "The Judgment" and "The Stoker." There is a lot of evidence from Kafka's diary and other sources that suggests he and his father, Hermann Kafka, did not share a good relationship. There are hints that Hermann was abusive and controlling, and constantly referred to his son as a failure.

PLATH'S LIFE AND THE INFLUENCE OF PATRIARCHY

Sylvia Plath, an American poet, novelist, and a short story writer has a great influence on American literary history, renowned for her tragic and death-related writing style. She lost her father at an early age of eight and life changed from that day onwards. Plath became extremely depressed and suicidal due to this major loss and blamed her father for many things. In her poem *Daddy*, Plath seems to compare their relationship with Hitler and the Jews. She compares herself to a Jew, claiming she begins to “talk like a Jew”. She draws numerous parallels between her father and Hitler, describing his “neat moustache” and “Aryan eyes”. By drawing parallels between Hitler and the Jews and she and her father, she implies that her relationship with her father is oppressive and cruel. Comparing the tone between this work, one can debate the nature of their relationship.

Plath's relationship with her husband, Ted Hughes was also an unsuccessful one. She predicted on the day after she met Ted Hughes that their relationship would lead to her death, according to extracts from her diaries. Hughes was suspected of having an affair with Assia Wevill which led to her suicide in 1963. Critics have revealed that Hughes was becoming physically and psychologically abusive to his wife in the course of their marriage which pushed her more towards suicide. Her suicide note is also a mystery since it could not be figured out whether she wanted to be rescued or to ensure her children's safety.

The poetess' life was tragic from the very beginning and the condition worsened with each passing day. In her famous poem *Lady Lazarus*, she mentioned ---

Dying

*Is an art, like everything else/ I do it exceptionally well. / I do it, so it feels like hell.
I do it, so it feels real. / I guess you could say I've a call.*

Plath regained her strength through poetry and her hardships turned her into a brilliant poet. But her poetry found its strength in her own private horrors of suicide, death, and depression. She became the first one to win the Pulitzer prize posthumously.

PLATH'S CONFESSIONS IN *DADDY*

In Plath's poem *Daddy*, Plath uses heavy and dreadful wordings to showcase her hatred to her father as well as the agony in her miserable life. This poem can be read as a confessional poem, a genre for which Plath was quite famous. Most of her poems are either inspired by the theme of her obsession with committing suicide or the very difficult relationship with her father. In the theme of death, she talks more frequently of suicides. On the other hand, while talking about her father, she was ambivalent at best and derisive of her father at worst. Otto Plath, Sylvia's father was an etymologist and he could not speak English well, but his daughter was well-versed in this language. So, there was a gulf between the world that was inhabited by the father and the world of the daughter. Since her father passed away when she was eight, she perhaps portrayed him as a deserter in her mind. Also, in that age, children often consider their parents to be gods, as said by critics. Anxiety often accelerated her depression and her confessional poems highlight her struggles with depression. Plath's poems are the divisions between her "eros" (life drive) and "Thanatos"(death drive).

Daddy can also be read in the light of deconstruction because what is written in the poem does not refer to what is there inside her mind. It is the contradiction between her love and hatred to her father that present how she struggled with her dead father and her abusive husband in her real life and how her destiny came to a tragic end with suicide. After the first reading, hatred can be felt everywhere through the vivid words used by Plath. But on reading it for the second time, the feeling of love can be unravelled from an alternative incompatible view. The binary opposition between love and hatred, thus, can be witnessed throughout the poem.

"Daddy" can be seen as a response to Plath's relationship and experiences with her father. Otto Plath died when she was eight years old, and in "Daddy" it appears Plath has developed somewhat of an Electra complex. However just as in many of her other poems in which her father is presented as the key figure, Plath reveals that she has somewhat mixed emotions towards his death.

One element of the poem that is controversial but definitely intriguing is Plath's use of Holocaust imagery. She portrays her father as a Nazi repeatedly throughout the poem, referencing his "German tongue," "neat moustache," and his "Aryan eye". Herself she

depicts as a Jew, even going as far as describing “an engine” that takes her off “to Dachau, Auschwitz, [or] Belsen”. Such imagery is employed in order for Plath to establish a sort of “oppressor-oppressed” relationship between her and her father. The poem additionally admits that Plath tried to replace her father with her husband, Ted Hughes. She describes him as “a man in black with a Meinkampf look” (comparing him to the previous Nazi image of her father) and also as “the vampire who said he was you”. Plath shows no apprehension in exposing even the most intimate aspects of her life, which is what makes her poetry so powerful.

RELEVANCE OF PATRIARCHAL ELEMENTS IN TODAY’S WORLD

The term patriarchy was used to refer to the autocratic rule of the father in the family. However, in the recent times, this term is used to show the power showcased by adult men. Patriarchy means exploitation of women by men—as defined by many, however this is not correct since both the genders are a victim of it.

Through Mahesh Dattani’s play *Bravely Fought the Queen*, it can be figured out that both the male and female members of the Trivedy family are victims of patriarchy. Lalitha, Praful’s wife is shown to have fascination for bonsai trees which reveals her own situation in the patriarchal world. Even her growth is restricted due to the societal pressures like the bonsai. Dolly and Alka are illtreated by their husbands and mother-in-law, who was severely oppressed by her husband in the past. Due to the bitter relationship between Baa and her husband, Nitin’s sexual orientation washampered, and he could not reveal it to the family members, therefore he married Alka and their married life fell apart. Jiten is portrayed as an intolerant, abusive, violent man and a drunkard. He hit his wife, Dolly severely when she was pregnant and their daughter, Daksha was born a spastic.

Girls, a short story by Mrinal Pande highlights how society takes women for granted and conditions them to play the secondary role in the family. Lali, the mother of three daughters and expecting a fourth child is shown as a woman who is praying for a son so that she can get rid of repeated pregnancies and also to make her family happy. The hypocrisy of the society comes into forefront on the holy day when “kanyakumaris” or young girls are worshipped as goddesses. The female members of the family who think women to be inferior are shown to respect young girls like goddesses. This hypocrisy is quite shocking for the narrator of the story as well as for the readers.

Hence, it can be seen that even the women are likely to embrace patriarchy and follow its rules. If women themselves do not protest, bringing about change is next to impossible. Patriarchy is still prevalent in the world and people suffer due to this constantly.

The paper can be concluded by saying that both Franz Kafka and Sylvia Plath are successful in their own portrayal of patriarchy. They have an exceptional quality of describing every aspect in detail so that the readers receive a message and it create an impact on their minds. They have highlighted their sufferings which is like an alarm for all the readers to bring about a change so that people do not suffer like them again. Their writings were also a way to release their pent-up emotions and thoughts. Kafka and Plath's brilliant writing style make them famous till date.

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