

PHYSICAL VERSUS SPIRITUAL SUICIDE: A CRITIQUE ON KAFKA'S SHORT STORY *THE JUDGMENT*



Muhammad Nadeem¹, Asad Rasheed², Eram Jamil³, Abdul Mueed⁴

³Assistant Professor Thal University, Bhakkar

eramjamillcwuj@gmail.com

^{1,3,4}Research Scholars, University of Sargodha, Sub-campus Bhakkar

m.nadeem05@gmail.com, rasheed.asad571@gmail.com, amueed.eng@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper aimed to examine the dilemma of Georg's physical versus spiritual suicide in the short story *The Judgement*. Problem of research was to analyze the spiritual versus physical suicide of Georg Bendemann in the selected short story and how the protagonist is the victim of spiritual suicide. This research was qualitative and the methodology was content analysis. The objective of research was to find out individual versus social conflict, symbolic meaning of the character in the given text. The question of the research also based on these objectives. The analysis of research maintained that Georg Bendemann is spiritually repressed character, the character of friend is his alter ego and represents Georg spiritual life. Father of Georg is the symbol of society who dominates the protagonist and repress his son's desires. Georg revolts against the social doctoral demands and quits his life.

Keywords: spiritual suicide, physical suicide, judgement, George, symbol, society.

Introduction

This research paper studies the dilemma of protagonist Georg in short story *The Judgment* which is physical versus spiritual. On the one side, this will study the societal expectations and on the other side this will study personality expectations. As Aristotle says: "man is by nature a social animal" (Politics 328BC). Every individual has his/her own idealized life for whom he wants to struggle on the other hand there is society who wants conformity, and wants individual live life according to social demand. At this point there become conflict between the two; society and individual. When an individual absolutely follows the social demands then this is the spiritual death of an individual, because generally human beings cannot live absolutely according to social demands. And when an individual is in conflict with the society and then this will be a physical death, because society creates hurdles in individual life. Physical death does not only mean that individual end his life. This paper is going to analyze the character as symbolic

character on one side there is the character of the George who lives his life according to the social expectations of his father, here his father is the symbol of the society. On the other side there is character of friend who is the symbol of spiritual life, and lives his life according to his own wishes who is living away from the society. This short story *The Judgment* is actually the dilemma of physical and spiritual suicide.

This dilemma can be seen in the life of Kafka, Franz Kafka was a German-speaking belongs to a Jewish family Born in middle class family on July 3, 1883 in Prague. Kafka was an intellectual person, he had an extreme desire of an ideal life. He was underestimated child; his mother lacked intellectual ability to understand his son, his father lacked wisdom as he never understood the intellectual power of his son. His father had unfair treatment with Kafka as Kafka wanted to become writer but his father wants to make him a business man. *The Judgment* is most autobiographical story written by Kafka and he wrote this in single sitting, most of his writings has the Kafkaesque technique; it describes the powerlessness, alienation and anxiety of an individual. Kafka lived unhappy and repressed life, this story *The Judgment* best describes his desires for his ideal life. As in the short story *Georg Bendemann*, a young merchant, writes a letter to a childhood friend in St. Petersburg, announcing his engagement to a wealthy woman, Frieda Brandenfeld. Georg then goes to report to his old decrepit father about the composition of this letter. The father questions the existence of this friend or his status as friend. Georg is initially excluded from the nuclear family.

The father accuses Georg of being a devilish human being and condemns him to death by drowning. Georg accepts and voluntarily executes the sentence pronounced by the father, dropping himself from a bridge while declaring his love for his parents.

Research Problem

A research to analyze spiritual versus physical suicide in short story *The Judgment* and how the character of *Georg Bendemann* is the victim of spiritual suicide.

Objectives of Research

- To explore individual versus social conflict in Kafka's short story *The Judgment*
- To find out the symbolic meanings of the characters in the given text
- To examine the options of physical versus spiritual suicide as manifested in the selected work

Research Questions

1. How does Georg react to individuality versus social conformity conflict in the Kafka's *The Judgment*?
2. Is Georg's father a symbol of society?

3. How does Georg's friend symbolically represent his desire for individuality?
4. How physical suicide of Georg is a revolt against social dictatorial demands?

Literature Review

Armstrong (1999) he says that the conflict between father and son is the most personal and universal literary motif. We see many stories containing conflict between son and father. He also mentions that the Father of Kafka was conservative and both have different mindset that lead to a conflict between them, and we see solid representation of this in short story The Judgement. Pan

(2000) comments that, “In this conflict between the father’s authority and the affinity relation to the friend as determiners of Georg’s identity” (p.132). Pan says that the father of Georg is conservative with narrow minded beliefs, father is unable to understand his son’s feelings, and this behavior towards the Georg has the negative impact on him that leads to repression of his identity. Hongyi (2010) stated, “I argue that many of Kafka’s narratives are in fact manifestations of his own bodily concerns and anxieties. I believe that most of these insecurities are linked to the ways in which Kafka thought about life, health, sexuality, selfhood and identity, and they reflect, most importantly, his fundamental struggle with death and mortality” (p.7).

It is found that Hongyi believes that Kafka’s writings is all about the Kafkaesque philosophy. Goldasich (2013) comment that “in the broad sense, the Kafkaesque strangeness can be seen as part of his modern allegory meant to expose the modern conditions of unfreedom” (p.25). Here researcher came to know about the technique or philosophy of Kafka that he used this to expose the modern world problems an individual is facing and the lack of free will which is the right of an individual.

Kareem & Omar (2018) Mentions that readers are not explicitly being told anything from the friend explain to the Georg but reader rather learned from the interpretation of Georg mind. They explain that view point is very important in literature that reader learns many thing about the story and happenings form the viewpoints of the different character. The all we know the story The Judgment we are told by George. Mambrol (2019) asserts that “most critics equate Georg Bendemann with Kafka, and Georg’s father with Kafka’s father” (Para. 4). As it is seen in the story The Judgement and as well as in biography of Kafka that this short story is most autobiographical.

Zehrebin (2019) comments that “The Judgement” into the complex system of relations that describes “Petersburg text of Russian literature”, grounds the possibility to read this story as the variant of the “Petersburg tale” (“петербургская повесть”) and enrich his semantic potential with new meanings.” As it shows that the story is a variant of the Petersburg tale.

Cerfeda says that “The father of The Judgment fools his son into believing in his sickness just to prove his power over him by stealing his friend and condemning him to death” (p.35). Study of The Judgement also shows the dominance of his father over his son. This is fact that Kafka’s father also dominated his son he never give him freedom. In most of the Kafka’s stories father is seen as the dominating character. As it is further mention by; Davide Cerfeda “In the Judgment and The Metamorphosis, the two fathers used to be hard workers, who have been replaced by their sons. With the loss of a male role, they lose their vitality”.

On the basis of above given literature it is understood that there is gap to study the physical versus spiritual suicide in short story The Judgement by Kafka.

Methodology

Method of this research is qualitative and tool of research is content analysis. The text of Franz Kafka’s shorty story The Judgement is used as sample for this research. Kafka’s biography is also used as a sample to link with Georg. The content of research is collected by reading the text of The Judgement and biography of Kafka.

Significance of Research

This research is valuable as it provides knowledge, this research provide knowledge that how individuals are suffering spiritual suicide. Research also aware that individual are repressed in the society. This research contribute for research of individual sufferings, and provides knowledge to English literature students for further research.

Limitation

This research mainly focuses on the character of Georg Bendemann and autobiographical elements in the story. This research is limited to find out physical and spiritual suicide in The Judgement and the Character versus society.

Analysis & Discussion

The story opens on a Sunday morning where the protagonist of the story is sitting in his private room and writing a letter to his friend who is living abroad in Petersburg Russia. Protagonist Georg is thinking about his friend that three years ago this friend flew to Russia to pursue his career in business. In these years Georg life has been changed, his mother died almost two years ago and now he is going to marry Frieda. After writing letter he closed the letter and he is gazing from the window. Georg seems to be an unhappy man as he is shown that he is thinking and kind of having a nostalgic this shows the unhappiness of the Georg. As he has no strong relation now with his friend nut he had some good time in the past that makes him depressed, these thigs having an impact on the protagonist. He is loner and a loner develops the habit of thinking and in such circumstances an individual might think of negative things.

The first part of the story describes about the friend of Georg, the friend is the alter ego of protagonist who followed his own desires he did what he wanted to. In the contrast Georg had no chance to pursue his desires, he remains at home and supported his father in his business it was against his wish but he had to do so because of his father. Throughout the story it is witnessed that his father is a kind of person who do not allow his child to follow his own desire, in the result Georg has no other choice. Though Georg overtaken the responsibility of his father business but he does not seems to be enjoying working there. As his own father in a conversation to his son complains that you always remained closed in your office and you don't like the much visitors. Father blames that you write false letter to your false friend who does not exist.

Although the business is having a success which the friend has no linking. It is mentioned that this progress is due to that "Maybe it was because, during the time in which his mother was still alive, his father had hindered Georg from developing his own activities by imposing his, the father's, own opinions" (p.2) the protagonist Georg is not having any kind of free will as he is driven by the society. In the story father of Georg is seems to be as the societal expectation which are followed by Georg.

Georg told his fiancée about his friend. Her fiancée is disappointed from Georg's friend as he can't even attend their wedding. In fact, Georg's friend is intellectual person while his fiancée is not so he doesn't want to tell his friend about his fiancée. But his fiancée is also a part of society, so here he is also neglecting his personal desires and he says he will tell his friend about his marriage. And he says, "That's the way I am, and that's how he has to accept me" (p.2) means he is neglecting his personal desires and accepting desires of society and says my friend should accept me, in this way, he is tilted towards society desires and in fact, he is telling himself that it shouldn't bother you that I am accepting society's desires. In the letter to his friend he conveys him about his engagement and he begs him to attend his marriage "I don't want to disturb him" (p.2) but after the argumentation with his fiancée he writes in the letter "I know that it is difficult for you to pay us a visit for all sorts of reasons, but would my wedding not be the right opportunity to at least once push all obstacles out of the way?" (p.2) this is the dilemma that at one hand Georg is not willing to disturb his friend to attend the marriage but after the discussion with fiancée he unwillingly writes to his friend for the marriage it is against the Georg will, it suppress his inner desire.

Georg puts letter in his pocket and when he goes to his father room, and he witnesses that there is complete darkness in his father room even its sunny morning outside. When Georg looks at his father he says "My father is still a giant" (p.3) this line indicates that either he is impressed by his father appearance or this line shows his father authority. The other thing is that he said this line to himself not to his father or anyone else, this is his inner voice which is repressed by his father.

When discussion between the father and the son started father shows his dominance over his son. When Georg disclosed that he wanted to write a letter to his friend in Petersburg announcing his engagement and wants his friend to be here for his marriage. At this his father said, “listen! You came to me because of this matter in order to deliberate with me on it”. (p.3) it shows that this matter has no importance in his father point of view, it seems that father is not liking this act and the father says that it is disappointing for him. Georg has no authority over such little matter that he can't post a letter to his own friend. Georg is being obedient to his father but his father still is not happy with his son as his father complains that certain things are happening in the business that he doesn't know. This sort of comment demonstrates the authority. Georg is embarrassed but suddenly he agrees whatever his father said as he says that he will do whatever his father wants him to do. “A thousand friends don't replace my father”. (p.4)

The father neglected the friend of his son and says that there is no such friend and he says “You have no friend in Petersburg. You were always a joker, and you have also not spared me. How can you possibly have a friend over there of all places! I can't believe that”. (p.4) Georg tries to remember his father about his friend he told him that you did not liked him but you had a conversation with him 3 years back. Georg in fact has the soft corner for his father when he sees his father in such situation he changes his clothes and helps him to take him to the bed he covers him up father asks Georg that is he well covered? Georg says yes but suddenly father threw away the blanket and stood at the bed. At this spot father is dominating his son Georg never seen his father such angry he is shocked to see his father behavior.

The father says to Georg that I'm not weak I remember everything I know your friend very well I'm in touch with him I writes to him regularly but you don't, you have betrayed your friend. Before this father even neglected the existence of his friend and also complained that he is now losing the memory but now suddenly he says he knows everything. He teases his son but the son is still ready to help his father and to save him from any danger. Father says that he does not need any help I'm still strong father discloses that he is as much strong that “I have your clientele here in the pocket!” (p.6) at this Georg looks at his father gown. father gown contains pockets in the gown Georg thought in his mind. The father is old and show helplessness but still he is dominating his son.

The father anxiously remarks that now you are aware of what existed outside of you before this you were only aware of yourself. You were innocent but actually you were not you were a devilish man. After all this drama the father asks his son that “I condemn you to death by drowning!” (p.6) Georg could not bear the behaviour of his father and ran out of the home and he attempted suicide his last words were “But dear parents, I have always loved you” (p.7)

Conclusion

The first question of research is how does Georg react to individuality versus social conformity conflict in the Kafka's *The Judgment*? The Georg throughout

the story is dominated by the societal expectation he never really spend any moment of his life according to his spiritual desire. His father has the control over his life he is driven by his father demands. As mentioned above that he has no authority to post a letter for which he consults his father and he also does not wanted to call his friend to his marriage but his fiancée insist and unwillingly writes his friend to attend his marriage. It is clear that he is not living with his own wishes instead he is living according to the society, suppressing his own desires and living according to social demands and this leading him to his spiritual suicide. The next questions is, is Georg's father is a symbol of society? As it is mentioned above in the analysis that the father of Georg is dominating his life. Father never treated Georg as his son rather he always treats like a slave or puppet. He does not spare him to act according to his own wishes and always he suppresses his son desires and wants him to act according to his wishes.

The third question of the research is how does Georg's friend symbolically represent his desire for individuality? The friend in the story has no physical appearance or existence he is the alter ego of Georg who represents his spiritual desires. Georg wanted to live his life according to his friend. He is the pure representation of Georg ideal life. The fourth and the last question of the research is how physical suicide of Georg is a revolt against social dictatorial demands? Georg who was intended to spend his life according to the societal demands and he accept the societal demands but it does not ever made him happy at all. The life of social conformity was like prison to him but he acted accordingly but it does not worked. Society is too much rigid which firstly is the reason of his spiritual suicide and at the end it led him to the physical death. Georg was led by the social forces that made him mad that when his father condemned him to the death, he without thinking for a moment ran to attempt suicide.

Man is born free but he has to live in the society according the societal rules. Naturally man has the power of imagination and he draws his life to his own desires but there are societal norms which are generally rigid and against the individuals desires. But it is better to be at the balanced state that neither individual follow his own desires nor follow the societal expectation completely as a puppet.

Recommendation

This research stick to the character of Georg and his physical and spiritual suicide. The story can also be analyzed the autobiographical dimension.

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