

## “METAMORPHOSIS” OF A HUMAN MIND AND BODY

T. O. ASWATHI<sup>1</sup>, DIVYA. M. M<sup>2</sup> & KAVYA PURUSHOTHAMANAN<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Student, Integrated M. A. in English Language and Literature, Amrita School of Arts and Sciences,  
Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi, India

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English and Languages, Amrita School of Arts and Sciences,  
Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi, India

### ABSTRACT

The human mind exercises incredible power over the physical body. The coordination and well balance of the mental processes and physical activities has been a subject of talk since ages. Most of the times, the thoughts and emotions in us lead to a chaotic state that overshadows the proper thinking and acting ability of our mind. Through this research, the resulting frenzy paranoid condition where the mind-body communication turns preposterous and vacuous is analyzed.

The absurdist fiction, *The Metamorphosis*, by Franz Kafka, produced in 1915 and the short psychological thriller film directed by Christopher Nolan, *Doodlebug*, focuses on the philosophical problems turning up from the relationship between the mind and the body. The paper tries to unravel the series of mental changes the characters undergo. These changes eventually symbolize the alienation of such humans from the humans of the outside world. In the plot of *The Metamorphosis*, it seems at first to be about the protagonist's physical transformation into a 'monstrous vermin' and his family's desperate attempts to cope up with it. The paper tries to explore how evidently the writer is successful in bringing the character's oppositely connected human mind and bug-like body in-coherence; just as in Nolan's *Doodlebug* too, in which the doodlebug is really a miniature of the chasing man.

**KEYWORDS:** Mind, Body, Relation, Coherence, Metamorphosis, Doodlebug, Absurdist Fiction, Paranoia & Transformations

### INTRODUCTION

Human beings are material objects that live under the proper coordination of the mind and the physical body. Discussions and varied opinions still rise on the existence of the mind and the body. The mind is all about the mental processes, thoughts, and imaginations, while, the body, for performing all the physical activities. Many theories have been put forward to explain the relationship between what we call our mind and brain.

The thoughts in a human mind can be explained as the “mental cognitions—our ideas, opinions, and beliefs about ourselves and the world around us”<sup>(1)</sup>. These ideas and opinions blend with our emotions (yet another mind driven force) and turn to have an up laid influence on our body. The first systematic analysis of the mind-body issue was developed by Rene Descartes and believed that the mental and the physical were two different substances and later explained how the interaction between them is possible.

The mind-body problem explains how mental activities get related to the corresponding physical states. This defines the relation between the mental states and the physical activities, given that the physical body is an entity and

the so-called human mind, a non-physical one. The mind-body problem is, in fact, the perception of reality. According to Plato, the real knowledge exists in the World of Being but when the soul shifts to the World of Becoming it is no longer pure and becomes contaminated<sup>(2)</sup>. The dualist and monist approach proposed are yet a subject of conversation and study for many of the psychologists worldwide.

The communication between the physical entity and the non-physical often tend to result in some complexities. In such situations, the mind happens to exercise more influence over the body as the scattered thoughts and emotions muddle our brain, thereby affecting the physical activities. The works from writers like Franz Kafka and Fyodor Dostoyevsky came under the light of the mind-body relation. The 20<sup>th</sup> -century literary productions thus saw the deep penetration of symbolic words into the readers' minds, questioning its very existence and functioning.

### **MIND-BODY PROBLEM IN THE NOVELLA AND FILM**

The novella, *The Metamorphosis* by Kafka was published in 1915 and belonged to the then less known categories of absurdist fiction and slipstream genres. This fictional narrative focused on the life of a man who suddenly happens to find himself metamorphosed into a giant insect in the wake of a day. The short story is explicitly multi-dimensional and revolves around a wide range of psychological themes like isolation, absurdities of life, consciousness, and existence, and more, the delinking of mind and the body. A similar plot is structured in *Doodlebug*, the short film directed by Christopher Nolan and both the projects straighten out the misery, perplexity and corresponding milieu of the characters.

The sudden, unexpected and drastic events in the life of Gregor Samsa make up the plot of *The Metamorphosis*. Through the short story, Kafka tries to cast the light on such psychological situations that still find a reference in contemporary society. The reality is drawn out through the symbolic and surrealistic images with a psychological story as the backdrop. Change is one of the central themes that the novella tries to project. Showing his dexterity through the "Kafkaesque", Kafka deliberately brings absurdity and elements of surrealism to his plot, exemplifying the entangled chaos in life.

The strikingly creative plots of Kafka's writings are often characterized by the profound incorporation of psychological and philosophical ideas that are blended in a unique manner with the elements of symbolism and surrealism. The ability to transform the real into the unreal dipping it in the ink of mental absurdities and corresponding physical challenges outdraws Kafka's works from all the other works produced hitherto. He burrows deep into the psychology layers of the character and delineates the bizarre side of one's imagination & thinking. *The Metamorphosis* is a sheer example of this technique. The brighter side of the short story is the relevance it holds on the readers even now. The insect, Kafka's metaphor for his writing self-removed from the everyday world, was no longer a beautiful thing, but a repulsive and filthy one. This is exactly the image he gave us in *The Metamorphosis*.<sup>(3)</sup>

The title of the play doesn't only point to the physical metamorphosis of the lead character but to the mental metamorphosis that reflects in the attitudes of all the other minor characters around him. The unexpected response of Samsa's family and the parents' unwillingness to accept their son as a huge insect shows the mindsets and the perpetual fragility of relationships. Apart from this, the prime focus of the writer becomes his intention of bringing out the mind-body absurdities and problems going through Samsa, though it mentally does promote much to the transformation of his character. What Kafka tries to exhibit through the metamorphosis in Samsa is the real attitude and consideration people show each other. Samsa, though being their son, is always considered merely as the source of the family income.

It becomes evident to us when we find his parents and sister struggling to make both the ends of the family meet. “It hardly surprised him that he was showing so little consideration for the others; once such consideration had been his greatest pride.” (Kafka, 24)<sup>(4)</sup>

Correspondingly yet disparately, Nolan’s 1997 short psychological thriller film, *Doodlebug* centralizes on the life of a man who finds his life condensed to that of a little bug on the floor. “The depths of insanity are explored by a man chasing something in his apartment with a shoe,” promises the video description of the three-minute *Doodlebug*. The film is a clear-cut paranoid, edgy and spooky tale of the character played by Jeremy Theobald, who lives in a filthy apartment, all alone. The chase the protagonist does behind the small bug in his apartment later meets the reflections of his own mind. He is acutely anxious and paranoid on his state and looks at the insect as a fearful scary creature. The palpable frenzy air around the character on his chase behind the little creature drives the viewer to the peak of anxiety that is synonymous to what the character carries in him. Through this three minute long psychological digger, Nolan attempts to explore the depths of insanity and parallelism, which are the themes with which he often weaves his materials. It is concomitantly philosophical and artistic.

Theobald’s character in the movie tries to kill the little insect in his room and ultimately he finds that every movement the bug made when he tried to kill it with his shoes, later gets resonated in himself. Through the convulsions and complexities in the physical body and its movements, the movie maker tries to bring out the raveled intricacies inside one’s mind. A discord or lack of harmony, between his mind and body is the chief reason behind this psychosis. The movie begins with the close-up shot of his swiftly moving eyes that is curiously in search of something. His eyes speak the absurdly worried and traumatic condition and the aversion he shows to all minute plocks and vibrations of mechanical devices in the room simply foregrounds this. The psychological unrest in the character is unveiled when we find the insect he tries to kill is nothing more than a miniature of his own self. The uncanny insane act ultimately points out to his self-destruction.

Through the short film, Nolan more or less tries to propagate the failure of humans in controlling their mental power. The overpowering emotions and thoughts, in many instances, affect the proper functioning and stability of the mind. The entire film happens in a small filthy congested room, showing a man, apparently in torn out dress with a shoe in one of his hands, hunting for something nonexistent.

In *The Metamorphosis*, Kafka underlines this situation where we find Samsa trying to step out of his bed in his usual manner after turning to the large insect. When he first gets out of his bed after waking, he tries to stand upright, even though his body is not suited to being upright. He also thinks of going to work, despite the fact that he can’t by any means do so, and when Grete leaves him the milk at the beginning of Part 2, he is surprised to find he doesn’t like it, even though milk was a favorite drink when he was human. In essence, he continues to think with a human mind, but because his body is no longer human, he is unable at first to reconcile these two parts of him.<sup>(5)</sup>

In the later run of the novella, we come across the ways how Samsa tries to perceive in his human mind his being as an insect. He makes his human psychological identity get accustomed to his physical state. But complete accordance remains far-fetched. Days pass and Samsa turns more of himself into an insect, craving for more and more foodstuffs, preferring dark, stingy and congested rooms, crawling on the walls. Through these instances, the writer substantiates the fact that the physical lives shape and direct our mental lives (which at times get reversed). A state of tough turmoil sprouts in him when the demand for removing furniture in the house arises. The cleaning of the room could provide physical

pleasure to his current state, but emotionally, the human in Gregor could not acknowledge the situation. In other words, his mind and body remain opposed to one another. Gregor, unable to relinquish his humanity, chooses emotional comfort, leading him to desperately cling to the picture of the woman in furs.<sup>(6)</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Both the short film and the novella runs under a correlative and agreeable backdrop of psychological trauma and chaos that rise from or in turn give rise to social alienation and complete aloofness. The lead roles are structured amid of simmering tensions and worries that all of a sudden mark a heavy blow on them. This blot from the blue breaks their mind-body accordance and coordination. In *Doodlebug*, there is an instance where the hero first tries to disconnect the call he receives. But when he still happens to hear the sound of a lady through the other end of the receiver, he drops it immediately to a jug of water. He thus completely shuts himself off from the outside world and concentrates on his mission to kill the bug. Even at the end, he fails to realize that it's his own past haunting him in the form of the little creature. Each time he tries to stamp on it, a larger version of himself is created, thus showing the looming past.

The sacrifice man does satisfy the needs of others go unnoticed many of a time. This is what happens to Gregor Samsa in *The Metamorphosis*. By attempting to establish control over other things and needs, we are in fact eliminating our own place and dignity. Kafka uses the symbol of metamorphosis only to attract the people's interest and attention to the theme of alienation. The larger version of a human that appears in the short film can symbolize the society just as how the Samsa family is constructed in the novella. Both the institution's outcasts and spells out an individual who doesn't worth them in any possible way. Relationships remain fragile and flimsy now and then. A mind to mind communication stands polar now. Changes occurring to Gregor and Nolan's unnamed protagonist only reflect their inner feelings, pain, and fears.

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