



## KAFKAESQUE: AWE, MENACE AND POWER RELATIONS IN THE CASTLE, THE TRIAL AND THE METAMORPHOSIS

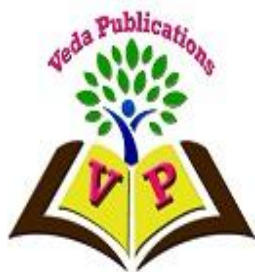
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### ABSTRACT



The term Kafkaesque inherits the confusion, distortion, surreal, absurdity and sense of foreboding. The elements of terror and awe are well developed and articulated through the characters and critical situations in which they are placed by Kafka. Fredrick Robert in his work *Franz Kafka: Represented Man* states that Kafkaesque is more about mysticism, unknown power and human fear. It constitutes the numerous characteristics such as distortion of time and space, unavoidable sense of menace and foreboding and also the mechanism of panopticon. Kafka's approach to the novels is censorious: he artistically left his characters in implausible situation that bring out the inexplicable reality of the modern world. Kafkaesque also encompasses the sexual and political repression that lead to the acquisition of framework within which the notion of awe and menace is panoptitized. The structure of power that framed the term Kafkaesque is critiqued through Foucault's work *Discipline and Punishment*. Kafkaesque is symbolic of mundane world that seemed complex, irrational, unjust and oppressed. Kafka has created the world that consists of humans who endured the pain excreted from the labyrinth of terror and menace. The repressed sexuality is an essential characteristic that structured the term Kafkaesque distortions, considering the historical representation of Kafka's personal experiences it is anatomized through Foucault's *History of sexuality*. Therefore surreal events that draft the Kafkaesque bring out the quirks of reality representing the modern world constantly proliferate the sense of awe and menace in contrast to the mysterious world of Kafka

**Keywords:** *Kafkaesque, Power, Sexuality, Mysticism, Foreboding, Panopticism, Terror.*

**METHODOLOGY**

For the concerned research the descriptive method has been used as it allows us to have a deep insight into the life of Kafka and his work. The letters written by Kafka to his friends and family explore the darkness of his heart and give birth to the element of mysticism in his novels. Frederick's work expands our vision about the religious, social, political and legal aspects of Kafka's life as vividly exemplified through his characters. The autobiographical elements are beautifully developed in the concerned novels to the extent that characters define the term Kafkaesque as acknowledged by Robert Frederick. Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment* allows us to review the structure of power in Kafka's work considering the socio-political scenario of his time. Fredrick Robert in his work *Franz Kafka: Represented Man* introduced us to the term Kafkaesque that constitutes mysticism, unknown power, human fear, distortion of time and space, unavoidable sense of menace and foreboding and also the mechanism of panopticon. The analyzation of the novel *The Castle* by Anthea Bell explored the essence of mundane situations that are blindly accepted by his characters and prepared the frame work for the term Kafkaesque. In order to critique Kafka's sensuality that played an elevated role in his novels one need to study the Foucault's *History of Sexuality* that rejects the representation of women as the object of repression and sex. The letters and novels written by Kafka and research works of other scholars are the sources that have been taken into consideration for the concerned study.

Kafkaesque style is derived from the situations or circumstances developed by Franz Kafka in the most of his works such as *The Castle*, *The Trial*, *The Metamorphosis* and *Amerika*. The elements that vividly define the term Kafkaesque are nightmare terrors, mysterious situations, surreal disorders and vague illogical notions. It is observed that the characters of Kafka's novels are trapped in labyrinth with the dark mysterious settings where they are forced to find the meaning of meaninglessness in their lives. Fredrick Robert Karl, a literary biographer writes extensively about Franz Kafka and defines the term 'Kafkaesque' in his work *Franz Kafka: Representative Man*:

"If we view life as somehow overpowering or trapping us, as in some way undermining over will to live as we wish, as malevolently for human endeavor to flatter then we enter Kafka's world of Kafkaesque". [Frederick 758]

The above statement can be scrutinized considering the protagonists of the concerned novels who are centered by the complex situation without finding any resolution as they are forced to confront the situation with endurance. Joseph K. K and George Samsa are such characters who find themselves in the labyrinth and are tortured to such an extent that they become conscious of their existence. Joseph K's resentment is the result of court's processing in the novel that represents the courts of Austria-Hungarian government under the monarch. In *The Castle* K's suffering has intensified the power of castle that are equally comparable to the suffering of Jews under the dual monarch. Joseph K and K's constant trials fail under the political structure and their liberation seemed to be blocked by the centers of power. Whereas in *The Metamorphosis* Samsa finds the way for his freedom in the transformation of giant beast overnight. The novella began in following words:

"When Gregor Samsa woke up one morning from unsettling dreams, he found himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin.....What happened to me? He thought. It was no dream"[ *The Metamorphosis* 1]

Kafka's novel *The Trial* opens with the arrest of Joseph K. also Kafka has been successful in sustaining the curiosity for his readers about the reason for his arrest. The above instances from the novels have justified the statement provided by Dr Karl as Gregor Samsa and Joseph K. find themselves against a force that does not lend them to perceive the world in the way they wanted to perceive. Kafkaesque is not about how the person is trapped in the awful situation but it's more about how the person deals with the critical situation seeking for freedom and satisfaction. Later Dr Karl became more refined in order to define Kafkaesque as he said:

"Kafkaesque does not always mean surrender to the horrendous destiny instead, it becomes something to battle



against. When we use the adjective we often lose sight to that.”[*Franz Kafka: Representative Man* 760]

According to the above statement Kafka's characters can be analyzed. In *The Metamorphosis* for instances Gregor Samsa's transformation into 'monstrous vermin' vividly exemplifies his helplessness and his struggle with all his equipments in the form of animalistic sensibility. His metamorphosis represents the world of freedom where he can define his own 'self'. Gregor's character is developed in the light of Kafka and it is through his own experience that Kafka has been able to put Gregor in the situation of Kafkaesque where Gregor is completely suppressed by his own desires and will under narrow societal space. Kafka's true plight is expressed through Gregor's in the following words:

“O God’, he thought ‘what a demanding job I've chosen! Day in, Day out on the road. The stress of trade are much greater than the work going on at head office and in addition to that I have to deal with the problems of travelling, the worries about train connections....To hell with it all” [*The Metamorphosis* 4]

According to Dr Karl's interpretation Kafka's mysterious world come forth as the comment on modern man's life and their survival in the world where they find themselves dislocated or 'other.' In Dr Karl's opinion the term Kafkaesque brings forth the dilemma of modern age that activate our consciousness and raise the question, how we access to the world being an individual with all the available knowledge and equipments. The above statement clearly questions the modern man about his essence of existence in the modern world which is further analyzed through the tensed life of protagonist of the novel *The Castle*. The castle is symbolic of power and authority that is being exercised over the protagonist named K. K's struggle to reach castle seemed that he is caught in a vicious circle as Sisyphus whose efforts to find the essence of life has failed miserably. The character of k. can be scrutinized in contrast to modern man and his struggle to deal with identity crises in the materialistic world. K's identity is questioned in the

following words by Schwarzer after his visit in an inn late night:

“He had roused the man, questioned him, and duly warned him off the count's territory, as it eventually turned out, for he claimed to be a land surveyor engaged by the count.”[*The Castle* 4]

There are various other elements that shape the Kafka's style. If critically analyzed his style clearly reflects what problems an individual has to face considering the modernity of the time. Individual being the part of society has failed to follow the norms that are maintained for the benediction instead developed the sense of fragmentation within the system where society becomes 'occident' and individual acts as 'orient.' Dr Karl in his epilogue to *Franz Kafka: Representative Man* expanded the term Kafkaesque in the following statement:

“Kafkaesque now belongs as much to that perception as it does to Kafka in effect, we have pre-empted the world. If we view life as somehow overpowering or trapping us, as in some way undermining our will to live as we wish, as strengthening the forces that wait malevolently for human endeavor to falter then we enter Kafka's world of the Kafkaesque” [Frederick 758]

There is not a peculiar way in which the term Kafkaesque can be defined. Kafka's style has become intense in this sense as his characters are not only repressed by the external forces but internally they are fragmented. In order to discover 'self' it's highly important to analyze the external forces that are continuously intervening. In *The Trial* court and law exercising power over Joseph K. and despite his efforts he is caught in the vicious repetitive task to prove himself innocent. In chapter seven of *The Trial* 'Advocate – Manufacture – Painter' Joseph K's interaction with painter he confirmed his innocence without his own claim. As he said on being questioned by painter:

“Are you innocent? He asked 'Yes', said K. The answering of this question gave him a feeling of real happiness.....To savour to the full his elation he added: 'I am completely innocent". [*The Trial* 165]



The above statement vividly confirms that Kafkaesque consequences also constitute sense of terror, menace and insecurity. Also, the accused has indulged him in the quest of missing element that has the ability to save him from the awful consequences. This quest carries the sense of hope that allows the accused to continue his journey. Another important conception of Kafkaesque style is briefly stated by Dr Karl in his *Franz Kafka: Representative Man*

"The Trial and courts are obviously evokes here as is the quest for someone in authority in the The Castle, part of that unending search amidst expansion and contradiction of space." [Frederick 684]

His words can be concluded as this journey of search for something that might saved one is for the perfection and absolutes but journey moved toward which is unattainable and unachievable. As in Kafka's *The Trial* the search for an advocate is what that can save Joseph K. to be certified as criminal but he is unable to reach advocate's help because of his illness. Here advocate is symbolic of human ways to survive in the modern world. Kafka's ambiguous narrative in his novels is well exemplified by Dr Karl as he said:

"His tales seems to be the ordinary one of a young man caught in a problem, a third person narrative with a traditional omniscient author. But the confusion of realm – the disruption of time and space, the use of labyrinthine images, the succession of bizarre characters and meetings, the proliferation of duplicating figures and scenes – relocates narrative very close to interior monologue or even deeper." [Frederick 112]

According to Dr Karl, Kafka has used psycho-narrative technique in his works as character's thoughts are analyzed by the third person narrative, sustaining the confusions and curiosity involving the multiple anonymous narrators. For instance in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* readers come to know about Gregor's transformation through anonymous third person. Gregor's transformation is not only physical but also psychological as it is analyzed that he has lost control over his life being in animalistic state that ultimately defines him as 'other'

completely unusual to survive in the advanced world. It highlights Kafka's ability to portray his characters as an 'other' as in the same manner he defines himself to the outside existed world. It is interpreted that the term Kafkaesque cannot be confined to the words rather it is the term that constitutes multiple layers in the most artistic manner. As Dr Karl said:

"Kafkaesque in fact, seems to denote a will of it's own and it is apparently destructive of human endeavors. Clearly it runs counter to human direction or goals or aims and it serves as a form of bedevilment. Kafkaesque in our country has replaced the now old-fashioned fate or destiny or even circumstances and happenstances. It has become the representative adjective of our time." [Frederick 756]

His novels *The Castle* and *The Trial* are studied as satire on the efficiency and chaotic system of bureaucratic of the time based on Kafka's experience with criminal and civil court in Prague. In order to have deep insight into the political power structure Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment* is considered. Foucault in his work provided us with the concept of 'contract-oppression'- oppression through domination and 'war- repression'- repression through internal conflict. These two approaches allow us to scrutinize the power socially and politically. Power not only creates the binary opposition as self and other but also developed the hierarchy. The 'court' and 'castle' represent the hierarchal structure that existed during the Austria- Hungarian Empire. In the discourse of power we realize that power does not only have political connotation but power also exists in the sexual relationship. According to Foucault power that holds the charge of sexuality undoubtedly increase the effectiveness of domain controlled. Foucault clearly defines the role of power and the ways it is to be approached. As he said:

"One might thus contrast two major systems of approach to the analysis of power: in the first place, there is the old system as found in the philosophies of the eighteenth century. The conception of power as an original right that is given up in the establishment of sovereignty and the



contract, as matrix of political power, provide it's point of view." [Power and Knowledge 91]

In *The Trial* the court is symbolic of political power that is exercising force over the accused man named Joseph K. without declaring his crime. It is to be focused that the system from which power is exercising, is miserably unstructured and it is symbolic of Austro Hungarian Empire. Kafka has smartly typified the arrival of industrialization as the result of establishment of dual monarchy as the use of telephones in his novel. In *The Trial* Joseph K. received the calls through telephones in order to inform about his summons in the court. In chapter seven Joseph K. provides us some glances of the officials associated with the court sustaining the sense of superiority in the following words:

"For although the pettiest advocate might be to some extent capable of analyzing the state of things in the court, it never occurred to the advocates that they suggest or insist on any improvements in the system, while and this was very characteristic almost every accused man." [The Trial 134]

One can analyze that Kafka's opinion about the political system is being presented through the words of his characters. Their frustration and complains exemplified their helplessness against the court as the power holder. The ordinary man among the accused carried the passion for the reformation of system but that resulted in the waste of energy and time. Through the above statement Kafka has commented on the absolute centre of power – Austro Hungarian Empire that relied on the cosmopolitan bureaucracy. The court in the novel is the representation of judicial system and Joseph K. exemplifies the same level of frustration of Jews under the dual monarchy. It is only the court that can order other and supervise the action of ordinary people, no one has the power to question the functioning of court in the certain ways. In Foucault's opinion power constitutes awe, terror and risk that result in oppression of someone who is termed as inferior. Foucault has questioned the system of court in the following words on the basis of his discussion with Maoists in *Power and Knowledge*:

"In my view one should not start with the court as a particular form and then go on to ask how and on what conditions there could be the people and go on to ask what place a could have within this. We must ask whether such acts of popular justice can or cannot be organized in the form of court." [Foucault 13]

Foucault has explicitly questioned the administrative authority of dual monarchy in the form of court which can be studied in contrast to the trials and struggles of Joseph K. He has been arrested without any warrant and put forcibly in an unorganized place where the act of justice is violated. Similarly in the novel *The Castle* – castle is labeled as an absolute form but it encourages us to ask - is it really people's entity where the act of justice is conducted. Kafka, through his metaphors 'castle' and 'court' has questioned the authority of the particular time. Dr Karl's contribution to the subject of power is recorded in the following words:

"In The Castle, Kafka has sealed off an institution a state, a government and a people by surrounding the castle with a "moat" of messengers and other functionaries who make it impossible for communication to take place." [Franz Kafka: *Representative Man* 706].

Dr Karl has come up with the strong analysis of power and the way structure of power works from its centre or innate forces resulted only as an illusion of the power instead of power itself. This illusion is what oppressing the villagers and they find themselves to be in the institution where their actions are constantly supervised. In his novel *The Metamorphosis* the societal pressure under which Gregor was forced to follow his routine can be analyzed as the structure of power working over him. Gregor's suppressed desires and will transformed him into 'monstrous vermin'. It is this metamorphosis that liberates him from the prison of normative life carrying no essence of his existence. Foucault's first system of approach to the analysis of the power is well explained as the establishment of sovereignty that creates the matrix of political power. Another system of approach is exemplified in following words:





“In contrast, the other system of approach no longer tries to analyze political power according to the schemed of contract-oppression but in accordance with that of war-repression and at this point, repression no longer occupies the place that oppression occupies in relation to contract that is, it is not abuse but is, on the contrary, the mere effect and continuation of a reaction of dominations.” [ *Power and Knowledge* 9]

According to above approach of power as war-repression that constitutes relation of domination exist in *The Metamorphosis* where Gregor is constantly dominated by the monotonous responsibility towards family and society. Also Gregor's family members are the victim to societal obligation and it was this power in the form of domination that forced them to hide Gregor in his room being terrible beast. The matrix of terror and menace intensified the power that is exemplified through the reaction of Gregor's father when Gregor move out of his room.

In the novel *The Trial* the system of approach to critique power is contract-oppression that constitutes the political power, occupying the legal entity in terms of the working process of 'court'. On the other hand in *The Castle* as Dr Karl states that the 'castle' can be critiqued as an unassailable empire and established sovereign. Thus it symbolizes the domination through the character Klamm. Kafka, being a mysterious writer has not defined the powers that centered the castle. So, power here can be approached through both systems 'contact-oppression' that mean the castle symbolizes the political power or war- repression that typified the castle as the force exercising the power in the form of domination. Kafka's repression can be critiqued in his own creation of characters serving to reflect the restriction in which he is caught. Kafka as an artistic figure is being suppressed by the people of his time who can't understand his work of art. In Dr Karl's opinion Kafka has alienated himself from the society and family which is clearly visible through the portrayal of his characters. For instance the character K. in *The Castle* once mentioned about his family in the old country and never referred it again. As an artist he carries the tendency to express his

relationship with his family as we know he shared the formal relationship with his father Hermann Kafka. Also he is deprived of parental love and care as largely brought up by the series of servant and governess. He is completely suppressed by his alienated thoughts and his complex relationship.

In broader sense another important aspect in which power can be critiqued is through the term 'Panopticism'. Foucault has introduced us to this term in his work *Discipline and Punishment: the birth of prison*. He states:

“The major effect of the panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange that surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independence of the person who exercise it.” [ *Discipline and Punishment* 201]

Kafka's *The Castle* asserts the automatic functioning of the power through architectural apparatus in the form of castle that tend to render its current function purposeless. The exercise of unnecessary power over the villagers oppressed their actions in the certain ways that gives the shape to the mechanism of panopticism. In *The Trial* the power and hierarchal authority is encapsulated within the legal system of court. The structure of power imposed on the character Joseph K. brings forth the same frustration and rigidity that for the villagers in *The Castle*. In this context female characters are doubly marginalized and their subjugation is well critiqued by Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. He has introduced us to the term 'repressive hypothesis' according to which sexual notions inevitably for pleasure is considered as taboo, society generated power under which discourse of sexuality is completely repressed. Kafka as social individual is not only repressed as Jew but also as the symbol of sex. Foucault's idea of 'repressive hypothesis' foster an argument – Kafka's fear can be given words despite the opaque symbols used by him. As Foucault said:



“What sustains our eagerness to speak of sex in terms of repression is doubtless this opportunity to speak out against the powers that be, to utter truths and promise bliss, to link together enlightenment, liberation and manifold pleasures, to pronounce a discourse that combines the fervor of knowledge”. [ *History of Sexuality* 7]

It is this power that restricts Kafka to come up with his own desires of sex somehow he manages to liberate himself through the transformation of Gregor Samsa in ‘monstrous vermin’. Samsa being a beast is able to establish the relation with power that he accomplishes his desire with the naked women in the frame. In the novel *The Castle* Klammer as an authoritative figure dominates Gardena and Frieda, intensifying an effect of panopticism within the structure of power as castle. Also suppression of Amalia by castle’s official Sortini is the result of power in contrast to the discourse of sex. In the discourse of sex character of Frieda displays the power in two certain ways – one that repressed of course under Klammer another that liberates her and allows her to confess her love relationship with K. Her confession of love in the following words rejects the power of Klammer:

“And as if his support and strengthened her Frieda clenched her fist and beat upon the door, crying: I’m with the land surveyor ....That silenced Klammer at any rate”[ *The Castle* 48]

The word confession allows her not only to come up with the truth but also provide the liberation from the forces of ‘repressive hypothesis’. Here confession becomes highly important and plays a significant role. Foucault has well defined it as an essential component that plays a part in love relationship and justice. The discourse of sex, repression and power require the deep insight to examine the female character but also enhances the establishment of panopticon. Without providing any space to women Kafka is artistically efficient enough to set the permanent visibility over them. In this context women are critiqued as other and unusual where Kafka is an observer. Simone de Beauvoir, in following words has well defined the role of males in the society in the context of women oppression that

justifies Kafka’s description of women character in his novels:

“The male plays no role or only a secondary one: unfertilized honeybee eggs subdivided and produce drones; in case aphides, male are absent for the number of generations and unfertilized produced females.”[*The Second Sex* 42]

Kafka through his experiences of repression of sexual desires produced the women in his novels only as the sexual component though born out of his hallucinations without any history. For instance the character of Leni and Elsa in *The Trial* and Frieda and Amalia in *The Castle*. These women characters are symbolic of sexual orthodox contempt created out of his experiences based on the inferior structure in which women are placed particularly by his society.

The sense of suppression, individuality isolation, mysterious setting, functioning of power subjugation emerges together to built the term Kafkaesque. It is anatomized that Kafkaesque brilliantly established the aura of awe and menace in the novels *The Castle*, *The Trial* and *The Metamorphosis* considering the historical background of Kafka. Kafka’s recreation and reshaping of self within the complex relationship that he shared with the society and family made him a remarkable man who critiqued his weakness as his achievements after overcoming the mountain of mixed feelings such as frustration, anguish, sensuality, awe and menace.

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