

PERUSING THE PROBLEMATIC IDENTITY ON JOSEPH K. OF FRANZ KAFKA'S *THE TRIAL*
WITH THE PROPOSITION OF IDENTITY STAGE BY ERIKSON'S PSYCHO-SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT THEORY

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Original Article

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to seek a psycho-social analysis of Kafka's The Trial. The current study presents the evaluation of psycho-social problems by offering the story of Franz Kafka's The Trial with the perspective of Erik Erikson. The study develops the in-depth analysis of the protagonists Joseph K.'s identity problem and role confusion. This research also analyzes the Joseph K.'s sagacity for establishing a free state of psycho-social moratorium. To respond to these concepts this study has practiced the fifth stage out of eight stages of Erik Erikson's psycho-social developmental theory, recognized as identity vs. role confusion. This study uses content-based qualitative research and textual analysis. The textual data is in the form of expressions and symbols exercise to assess psycho-social problems. The result of this study found that the psycho-social crises of Joseph K. of The Trial based on the renowned stage as identity vs. role confusion by Erikson's psycho-social developmental theory. Which could be realized through Joseph K.'s malignancies in his adulthood stage. But the failure to solve these issues of adolescence made Joseph K. of The Trial undergo the identity diffusion. And at the end, fiasco to establish his identity and free state of psycho-social moratorium, in his life symbolically in The Trial, led him to his death.

Keywords: Identity crisis, Role confusion, Psycho-social moratorium, Social alienation, Indecisiveness

INTRODUCTION

Psycho-social issues in human existence have now become a psychological phenomenon. It has been learned about the evolution of human psyche, and the process of shaping identity. This psychological growth forms a personality of a person. The current study explores the psycho-social problems by analyzing the protagonist Joseph K. of Franz Kafka's *The Trial*. It also finds the protagonist's personality lacks by applying the fifth stage of Erikson's psycho-social developmental theory known as identity vs. role confusion.

Kafka's novel *The Trial* (1925) is one of Kafka's most important novels which moves around Joseph K. Despite the fact that he has done nothing wrong, Joseph K. an ambitious, young banker is detained by two warders. They tell him that he is being held under custody. Joseph K. is a successful bank's head clerk and is unaware of his crime. This man is permitted to return to work as normal after a lengthy questioning. He visits Fraulein Burstner's chamber late that night to

elucidate about that day's happening, where he surprises her with a kiss. It is decided when Joseph K. will appear in court for the first time. He makes his way to the courthouse, which is housed in a run-down tenement. In an unfamiliar judicial system, Joseph's behavior will deprive him of advantages often conferred by hearings. As he departs, the judge tells him this. Despite the fact that Joseph has no idea there would be another hearing the next week, he shows there nonetheless. A court usher takes Joseph K. on a tour of the legal department. Uncle Karl takes Joseph K. with him towards the lawyer's home for having discussion on his trial. After that he has a perplexed discussion about the three types of acquittals with The Painter. Joseph K. has also been told a story of a countryman by the priest, which has a significant resemblance with Joseph K. One year after the incident, two guys enter Joseph's room on the eve of his 31st birthday. They take him to a quarry outside of town, where they stab him in the chest with a long, serrated knife. In the end, Joseph, embarrassed by his own death, says: "Life like a dog!" This bizarre story of a young man caught up in the mindless bureaucracy of the law has become synonymous with the modern age's worries and sense of alienation. It also symbolizes ordinary person's struggle with uncertainty between one's identity versus one's role. It is frequently regarded as an imaginative foreshadowing of authoritarianism. In this perspective, this research investigates Joseph K's identity problem and role confusion by applying the fifth stage named as "identity vs. role confusion", out of eight stages of Erikson's model of psycho-social developmental theory.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This novel has been diversely interpreted by the various perspectives of the Sigmund Freud, who proposed psycho-sexual theory, consisting five stages and based on a person's sexual life, which was altered by Erik Erikson as psychosocial development theory, consisting a person's whole life divided in to 8 stages, with sexual perspective it also caters social aspects of an individual life. But this novel has not been interpreted yet by Erikson's point of view. This research aims to present all key notions about a person's inner self. The purpose of the selection of this novel is the cause of this protagonists' psycho-social situational similarity with Erikson's doctrine as Identity stage. For acquiring the in-depth analysis of the protagonists Joseph K. of *The Trial*, this study explores his identity, role confusion, and evaluates the troubles for establishing a free state of psycho-social moratorium. As Joseph K. of *The Trial* caught in an anonymous crime, strived for his identity. And being motivated to establish a free state of Psycho-social moratorium. Hence while consisting psychological and social issues by applying this renowned stage of Erikson's psycho-social theory on the protagonists of this novel, this study would be valuable for the researcher and any individual who is directly or indirectly suffering from the same issues in this society

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the problematic identity of the protagonist Joseph K. of *The Trial*.
- To find out the Joseph K's role confusion by evaluating his behavior According to Erikson's Identity stage.
- To evaluate the sagacity of Joseph K. for establishing his free state of psycho-social moratorium.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How is Joseph K. of *The Trial* facing identity problems?
- How is Joseph K. of *The Trial* facing his role confusion?
- Why Joseph K. does not have the sagacity to establish a free state of psycho-social moratorium?

LITERATURE REVIEW

E. Seigel (1996) comments on Kafka's *The Trial* by showing how the judicial machinery is constantly linked to the conduct of unconscious crimes similar to those encountered by our patients. The Freudian Superego expression has been opted to analyze a man's behavior towards his social circle. Fellow (1995) Mentions that, sometimes interpretation is the best technique to know the author's intentions. That can be seen to be a conscious one which is proposed by Freudian Psychology.

Curtis (2010) while explaining The Franz Kafka's *The Trial*, cited that, "The most evident resemblance between the authors' descriptions of law, justice, and punishment and their related relationships with speech, knowledge, power, and the body is likely the focus of the dissertation. "Kafka sought to represent the "negative aspects" of his world — the political, social, and legal reality in which he was immersed."

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Identity vs. role confusion stage exists in 12 to 18 years. In this period of time the adolescence quests for a sense of self by an intense exploration of some strong values, beliefs, and aims. In this stage a person experiences a transition from childhood to adulthood is much significant. These children are grown up looking towards the future in the phase of profession, family relations and houses. As humans are social animals, so they want to be known and fit into society. The person's mind in this age is an essential moratorium mind. Morality and ethics are learned and developed by the child because of his transition from childhood to adulthood. Erikson 1963, (p.245). This is a much significant age in which a child learns the roles, as an adult he has to perform in the society. During this time period, a person reevaluates himself. Like whom he or she is? During this age, a person's body shape is also changed and a sense of self reoriented. According to Erikson, at this age an adult might not be comfortable because of changes in his body for an instant until they do not accept these changes. Successful stage will lead toward the virtue of fidelity. In this period of time, they seek possibilities and accept to form their own identity which depends upon the result of their own findings. Failure of this stage is when a child is confused by his or her role. A child cannot establish his sense of identity within a society. And cannot be able to find the answers to such questions, I don't know what I want to be when I am brought up.

DISCUSSION

"Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K., he knew he had done nothing wrong but, one morning, he was arrested." (p.1) This beginning quote depicts the protagonist's identity crises. Without making any mistake he was arrested. According to this perspective the protagonist's ego is going to be challenged. At this puberty stage a person wants to free himself from all confinements. And he wants to discover and recognize his identity and wishes to live with his own imaginations. As Freud mentioned that, "from puberty onward, the individual's great task to free himself from the parents" (p.345). But according to Erikson, "the main concern of the adolescent is creating a new sense of ego identity—a sense of one's identity and position within the larger social structure. Identity and role confusion is the major crisis in the adolescence". So, the Protagonist's arrest reflects as an authority which is the most significant employment to control Joseph K's freedom and his identity.

"You believe that I'm innocent then, do you?" Well now, innocent ..." said the lady, "I don't want to start making any pronouncements that might have serious consequences," (p.19). This statement

elaborates the adolescent's situation in which he wants to see himself in the eyes of others, especially in those who are sexually attracted to him. He often wants to recognize himself by the reflection of other eyes as a kind of mirror. According to this perspective, Erikson says that, "Teenagers spend a lot of time looking in mirrors and are very self-conscious about their appearance." In another statement he mentioned that, "Young people are not in trouble by physical growth or sexual urges per se, but by the fear of not looking good in front of others or meeting others' expectations." (p.299). Here Joseph. K. wanted to get the reflection of himself by the mirror of Miss Bürstner's eyes, what she has a concept about him. Even he does not want to get only reflection from her mirror of her eyes, but rather than a positive reflection as well. In accordance with this statement Rumi cites what a beautiful Quotation, "Love is a mirror. In it you see nothing except your reflection." (The great Rumi) anyways Miss Bürstner also remains so doubtful about that morning happenings and does not want to say anything because of that she would have to face some serious consequences. As a result of all this, the identity of Joseph K's still remains problematic.

"He finally kissed her on her neck and her throat and left his lips pressed there for a long time. He did not look up until there was a noise from the captain's room. "I'll go now," he said, "he wanted to address Miss Bürstner by her Christian name but did not know it." (p.22). This statement is expressing Joseph. K's role confusion which is the result of his identity problem. As it is mentioned that, if the identity is not formulated properly then the adolescent becomes the victim of role confusion. According to Erikson, "Role confusion occurs when a person is unsure of themselves or their role in society." And they have no idea what they are doing whether it is correct or not." For example, for a long time pressing his lips and there indulging in immense thoughts depicts his indecisiveness. That and after hearing a noise from the captain's room. He says that I must leave now that depicts he had some sort of fear Where he does not have the idea what he is doing is right or wrong. Another perspective is if the identity is not formulated properly so the young may fall into a negative identity. So, because of his lack of developing his previous stages, he formulated his negative identity.

"It irritated him that he had not been given more precise directions to the room, it meant they were either being especially neglectful with him or especially indifferent." (p.25). These verses express the Protagonist's identity problem and his quest for his Identity formation. It can be clearly seen that the direction for his identity formation and the roadmap has not been provided to him properly. It also refers that the protagonist Joseph K. acknowledged in the developing period of time he had been neglected or he had not been nurtured in an efficient manner. Because of all this he wanted to complain to the nurturer who could not nurture him properly. And he chose to make it very obvious to them in a loud and unequivocal manner. As it is already mentioned in this period of time, adolescents are rebellious. As Erikson says, "The adolescent is pre-eminently self-centered." (p.301). So, he was also that kind of person. Who is peculiar to find himself.

"He must have seemed very odd standing there in silence, and the young woman and the Usher were indeed looking at him as if they thought he would go through some major metamorphosis any second which they didn't want to miss seeing." (p.47). This statement is referring to an adolescent's identity process in which their transition occurs from childhood to an adolescent age that is the most important period of time. How it is formulated once, so it will remain long lasting. It also refers that, after the age of 12, this stage can come at any time, usually it can be seen that some children pass through this transition early or others pass late. But it is a truth that every adolescent has to pass this transition. Erikson says that, "During adolescence, the transition from

childhood to adulthood is most important." Children are becoming more independent, and begin to look at the future in terms of career, relationships, families, housing, etc." So here Joseph K's transition has been discussed, which is not a physical transition, but the transition is about *The Trial* for his mental ability. How he patiently passes this examination and if a person is facing this kind of situation other people watch them inquisitively. Either this person can pass this trial patiently or not or how he behaved during this period of trial. And this chapter shows difficult pathways which are narrow, dark and complex. That refers to K's identity problem, but it is also depicted that if he crossed these types of complex pathways, he will be able to get a strong and mature identity.

"Looking at you I can almost believe that old saying: 'having a trial like that means losing a trial like that.'" "My dear Uncle," said K., "it won't do any good to get excited, it's no good for you to do it and it'd be no good for me to do it." (p.67). Till now no information has been given about the protagonist Joseph K.'s family. But this chapter of the novel caters to some slight observance about K.'s family. One is Uncle Karl who is the guardian of Joseph K. and his 18 years old daughter Erna. Now come to the statement, which has a huge significance to the title of this novel. As his uncle mentioned while advocating to him for his trial, having a trial usually shows that losing *The Trial*. It seems that it refers to the current situation of Joseph K. in this novel but as it is already mentioned here that, in the adolescence, adolescents are energetic, enthusiastic, and rebellious who do not like to follow anyone's advice for them. K. is doing the same with his uncle and repeatedly asking questions from his uncle Karl about his trial in front of his colleagues annoyed him more. Therefore, he wanted to live just for his own self. All these aspects are in the favor of K.'s identity confusion.

"I forgot to ask you; what sort of acquittal is it you want? There are three possibilities; absolute acquittal, apparent acquittal, and deferment." (p.105). It is considered that this statement is the crux to test a person's identity, in which he learns morality, sense of self, social norms and values. As it is seen that whenever he went to the court or the process of his hearing, he found their ways were narrow and stuffy. Now the painter while explaining these three types of acquittals try to discover his sense of self or sense of morality. For example, while explaining the first one absolute he tells that, "Of course, the greatest outcome is an absolute acquittal, but there's nothing I can do about it. I don't believe anyone could do anything to guarantee a complete acquittal. Only if the accused is found not guilty would this be possible. Because you are innocent, it is possible that you may rely solely on your innocence. Now if he had a proper sense of values and identity, and he was innocent, so he could not be astonished, but he would prefer to get this absolute acquittal. By endorsing this point of view Erikson cited that, "They frequently put everybody, including themselves, to a 'loyalty test". Some teenagers identify with certain political or religious views. (1959, p. 112-113). But Joseph K. started arguing with the painter about the contradiction of the court and considered the painter to be contradicting himself. Anyways, the painter clarifying the protagonist's procedure about the court of judges made him more confused. For example, "It's fairly simple to resolve these inconsistencies," the painter explained. "We're discussing two separate things here: what the law says and what I've learned from my experiences; the two should not be confused." I've never seen it written down, but the law specifies that the innocent will be freed, but that judges cannot be persuaded. However, in my experience, it is the opposite. Although I am not aware of any conclusive acquittals, I am aware of several situations in which a judge has been swayed.

In hidden words, the painter also depicted the beauty of absolute acquittal, but his main purpose was to evaluate his morality in which he was succeeded. By the way, morality depends on the beauty of a person's conscience how much a person has conscience in himself he opts according to that way. While explaining the other both acquittals the painter cited that,

"It's up to you which one you choose. the difference between them is that apparent acquittal needs concentrated effort for a while and that deferment takes much less effort but it has to be sustained." (p.107). For getting rid of that trial, the painter offered him other two acquittals, apparent and deferment seemingly portrayed as short ways to get rid of this trial, but those acquittals were prohibited, and they have their own pros and cons, which were making him more depressed and confused to play any role for getting acquittal. But according to this illustration Joseph K. had understood that it has long life process. As Erikson quoted that, "identity construction is a lifelong process, it is at this time that so many inner changes are taking place, and so much in terms of future commitment is at stake. During adolescence one's earlier identity seems inadequate for all the choices and decisions one must make." Erikson (1959, p. 123) so Joseph K.'s indecisiveness is also being exposed by showing the vague concepts of these 3 acquittals. Here the painter wanted to test his determination. But choosing the back door while going back from the painter it also symbolizes that Joseph K. wanted to get others, if these acquittals did not have their own pros and cons.

"In front of the law there is a doorkeeper. A man from the countryside comes up to the door and asks for entry. But the doorkeeper says he can't let him in to the law right now." (p.146.) This story is the key fact to acknowledge a person's identity problem and this story quoted by the priest which has been used to realize Joseph K. about his identity fault.

This story has lots of symbols which caters depth to the various meanings. And those meanings have a huge resemblance to the protagonist's Joseph K. For example, a man who comes from the countryside is uneducated and does not have the knowledge for reaching the law. It refers to Joseph K. as he has come to this stage but hasn't acknowledged yet to accomplish this stage for acquiring his identity, which comprises a sense of morality and values. Joseph K. had the idea that he would be able to acquire later. For making them fool he was looking towards the short ways for reaching towards accomplishing this period. He was warned by the court or his conscience, but he could not stop as Joseph K. wanted to get acquittal quickly, but the lawyer said to him that, "we mustn't rush towards the things." Rather than doing any struggle he was waiting for the good time. After days and years passed the protagonist Joseph K. remained still there where he was in the beginning of the story. In this perspective, according to Erikson, "Due to the difficulty of commitment, people occasionally experience psychosocial moratoria—a sort of "time out" period for self-discovery. For instance, some young individuals leave college early to travel or try out other careers before making any commitments. Many young people, however, struggle to reach a free autonomous state. They frequently feel alone, as if time is passing them by, unable to find significance in any activity, and as if life is just occurring to them until they know who they are and what they will do with their lives." As Biff puts it in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, "I just can't take hold, Mom, I can't take hold of some kind of life" (Erikson, 1959, p. 91). It also symbolizes the identity stage in which an adolescent to be asked some questions for himself like who he is; whom he belongs to; if that adolescent succeeded in acquiring these answers, he will be able to accomplish the next stage. Otherwise, his identity remains skeptic and he became the example of role confusion and same happened with Joseph K. It is also mentioned that he again seeks the back door even opted once as well. But he was caught by choosing that door. He was still concentrating patiently on seeking his identity. But this question will be unresolved till the end.

While demising that countryman asked a question like everyone wants to access the law, how to accomplish all these years except I just asked permission to let me in? Answer the doorkeeper to that expected dead man. No one acquires the law like you. Now I am going to close with you. According to all this symbolized analysis depicts that, as Joseph K's age was above than his identity stage. to accomplish the tasks of his stage, he desired short ways and backdoors to be succeeded in this identity stage. That's why his identity remained still in vain. In this way it is quoted by the Erikson as, "The struggles of this stage lead to the new ego strength of *fidelity*, the ability to sustain one's freely pledged loyalties (Erikson, 1964, p. 125). But the protagonist's behavior was completely contradictory to this quotation that's why his identity stage remained stuck. Now what happens next to Joseph K. either he would be able to find his identity or give up himself; it will be seen in the next statement.

"But the hands of one of the gentlemen were laid on K.'s throat, while the other pushed the knife deep into his heart and twisted it there, twice. As his eyesight failed, K. saw the two gentlemen cheek by cheek, close in front of his face, watching the result. "Like a dog!" he said, it was as if the shame of it should outlive him." (p.157). This statement is giving the conclusion and answering the previous statement. The protagonist Joseph K. finally failed to find his identity and this scene also has some resemblance to that story which was shared by the priest. This elaboration also depicts that, for accomplishing the identity process is not quite an easier task, which requires a lot of effort to attain this stage. According to Erikson, "While an extended quest for one's identity might be unpleasant, it can also finally result in deeper levels of self-integration and real social breakthroughs." But here the situation was different. Where Joseph K. while having discussion with the priest expresses that Joseph K. was a cowardly man who was reluctant to go close to the priest. He was just two steps away from the priest. But he was not willing to step up himself; he just wanted to lessen this distance by the priest. It showed that he was not enough striver to accomplish this identity process according to his desire, it should be done without doing any effort. All these aspects lead him to the identity failure because of it, he remains confused in the whole story. Although in this period adolescents are keen to find themselves, they are curious to discover themselves by their role in the society. Their desires are on peak, they are so imaginative; fond of making their relationships; focusing on their careers. All these elements were found in the protagonist Joseph K. of *The Trial*. But he could not be able to succeed in fulfilling these aspects. Though Joseph K. was not an adolescent, but his age could not prevail on his mentality. Hence similar to that countryman after a long wait for his identity he was baffled by his circumstances. Therefore, while demising he asked no question but with some repentance said, "Life like a dog."

CONCLUSION

The findings of present study reveals that the protagonist Joseph K. failed to accomplish his identity stage. That is symbolized by his arrest in anonymous crime from two anonymous police officers. He could not get freedom from all the confinements and he could not be discovered by himself. These are the most significant elements of the identity stage. This failure was leading him towards role confusion. He was still worried by accomplishing his obligations for acquiring his role in this larger social world not only for the present but also for the future. As numerous situations are symbolized to his identity stage.

As Joseph K. was failed to acquire any pronouncement from Miss Burstner about his innocence, and didn't meet to her expectations. he was afraid to cross those narrow and stuffy pathways which were similar to passing through a transition from childhood to adulthood. But even according to Erikson's point of view, many young people have trouble achieving a free moratorium. Until they

know who they are and what they will do in life. And if a free psycho-social moratorium state cannot be established in an adolescence stage so it would be difficult to accomplish later. Each character was portrayed as to play his or her role for leading Joseph K. to role confusion. Like, during the discussion about acquittal with the painter for getting rid of this ambiguous trial. The painter was puzzling Joseph K. with the perplexing explanation about three types of acquittals. In this discussion, The Painter also revealed Joseph K's sense of identity by showing him a backdoor for going outside from that Painter's room. So, all these glimpses were expressing the indecisiveness and loneliness of Joseph K. that was making him more confused.

Finally, it is discovered that Joseph K. of *The Trial* was indulging in more identity problems due to lack of his sagacity and the brutality of external circumstances. This explanation also shows that completing the identity process is not a simple undertaking, and it takes a lot of effort to get to this point. But things were different in this case. It demonstrated that he was not a strong enough striver to complete this identity process according to his wishes; it would be completed without effort. And rather than Joseph K. could remove those wounds of his identity stage competently, but his issues became more complex due to his own gaffes. All of these factors contribute to his identity crisis, and as a result, he is perplexed throughout the novel. Despite the fact that Joseph K. was not a teenager, his mentality was not affected by his age. As a result, while demising, he said, without asking any questions. "Life like a dog." Actually, the life is not very brutal for those, who recognized themselves, and acquired the purpose and role in their lives. But this Joseph K's last saying is the significant expression of his lacking identity.

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