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Beyond Existentialism: From Umwelt To Uberwelt : A Comparative Analysis Of Kafka's "Metamorphosis" And Akhtar Mohi-U-Din's "Growth".

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Abstract

Franz Kafka, a 20th-century writer, is renowned for his exploration of themes such as alienation and absurdity. Akhtar Mohi-u-din is a Kashmiri fiction writer.. His stories are known for their innovative descriptions, unique narrative styles, and captivating presentations. His literary efforts opened new avenues for future storytellers and enriched the Kashmiri storytelling tradition. Existentialism is a philosophy of the twentieth century. It analyses the existence of human beings and throws light on the way they find themselves existing in the world. Two nineteenth century thinkers, Soren Aabye Kierkegaard, a Dane, and Friedrich Nietzsche, a German, are recognized as initiators of the movement particularly in their concept of the individual existent, as also in their diagnosis of the modern human predicament. In fact Kierkegaard is regarded as the father of existentialism. He maintained that the individual has the sole responsibility for giving one's own life meaning and to live life passionately and sincerely despite many obstacles and distractions including despair, angst,absurdity, choice and death. Existentialism is a philosophy concerned with finding self and the meaning of life through free will, choice and personal responsibility. It is a philosophical movement oriented towards two major themes such as, the analysis of human existence and the centrality of human choice. Both Kafka and Mohi-u-din are writers who write beyond existentialism. Kafka ends "Metamorphoses" with a note of despair and Akhtar ends his story "Weed" with a note of hope.

The paper aims to prove that Kaka and Akhtar portray something beyond Angst, absurdity and death, beyond good and evil, angst, irrational world. Thus the paper shall explore their existential journey from "Umwelt to Uberwelt": the two important dimensions of existential philosophy.

Key Words: Existentialism, Free will, Angst, Absurdity, Fiction, Despair, Hope. Etc.

Introduction:

The origin of Existentialist philosophy goes back to ancient times when Socrates said, “know thyself”, self-understanding and self-analysis are the most important elements of man. This is to show that the idea of existentialism is indirectly touched by him in 400 BC. Even Plato, his disciple, spoke about the essence of life i.e. the alpha and omega of a man and its emergence. Many philosophers talked about human existence, but during 19th century philosopher Kierkegaard (1813-1855), is strongly considered as the father of Existentialism. He originally gave the authentic theory of existentialism and how it imposes on human beings. Through this theory he stimulates the question to an individual such as (1) what is the purpose of life? (2) How does the life create meaning to an individual? (3) What is the role of a man towards life? These questions seem to be irrational but it goes beyond the materialistic satisfaction of human life. Kierkegaard's What it means to be a Christian? Training in Christianity are the popular works based on the exponential themes in the Bible. The man is responsible for his own life; identifying the self and living towards passion. The subjectivity of man's life is visible in the theory of Kierkegaard. The man is free to choose his decision and work with passion. The theory of existentialism not only became popular in philosophy but also in the field of arts, psychology, literature, theology and drama.

The first and the most basic characteristic is that existentialism begins from man rather than from nature. This philosophy treats man as an existent rather than man as thinking subject. As Sartre says, “—We mean that man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world, and defines himself afterwards”(7). In Sartre's way of putting it, man's existence precedes his essence. In our life, essence is shaped by existence, not the other way round. We live our lives and that in turn defines what we truly are, not any set of features. There is no-predefined pattern that we can fit into. Existentialism became more relevant after the Second World War. Some thinkers who constituted the exception to 19th century Romanticism became the acknowledged masters of existentialism. Six key themes of existentialism are: The Absurd, Facticity, Authenticity, The other and the look, Angst and dread, Despair.

“The absurd” is the idea that there is no meaning in the world beyond what meaning we give it. This meaninglessness also encompasses the “unfairness” of the world. This contrasts with the notion that “bad things don't happen to good people” To the world, metaphorically speaking, there is no such thing as a good person or a bad person; what happens, and it may just as well happen to a “good” person as to a “bad”.

“Facticity” is both a limitation and a condition of freedom. It is a limitation in that a large part of one's facticity consists of things one couldn't have chosen (birthplace, etc.), but a condition in the sense that one's values most likely depend on it. However, even though one's facticity is “set in stone” (as being past, for instance), it cannot determine a person. As an example, consider two men, one of whom has no memory of his past and the other remembers everything. They have both committed many crimes, but the first man, knowing nothing about this, leads a rather normal life while the second man, feeling trapped by his own past, continues a life of crime, blaming his own past for “trapping” him in this life. There is nothing

essential about his committing crimes, but he ascribes this meaning to his life. The focus on freedom in existentialism is related to the limits of the responsibility one bears as a result of one's freedom: the relationship between freedom and responsibility is one of inter dependency.

‘Authenticity’ : Authentic existence involves the idea that one has to "create oneself" and then live in accordance with this self. The authentic act is one that is in accordance with one's freedom. Of course, as a condition of freedom is facticity, this includes one's facticity, but not to the degree that this facticity can in any way determine one's choices (in the sense that one could then blame one's background for making the choice one made). The role of facticity in relation to authenticity involves letting one's actual values come into play when one makes a choice (instead of, like Kierkegaard's Aesthete, "choosing" randomly), so that one also takes responsibility for the act instead of choosing either-or without allowing the options to have different values.

“The Other and the look”: the experience of the Other is the experience of another free subject who inhabits the same world as a person does. In existentialism, it also acts as a kind of limitation of freedom.

"Existential angst", sometimes called dread, anxiety, or anguish, is a term that is common to many existentialist thinkers. It is generally held to be a negative feeling arising from the experience of human freedom and responsibility.

“Despair” : Despair, in existentialism, is generally defined as a loss of hope. More specifically, it is a loss of hope in reaction to a breakdown in one or more of the defining qualities of one's self or identity.

There are four dimensions of human existence according to existential philosophy: the physical, the social, the psychological, and the spiritual. On each of these dimensions, people encounter the world and shape their attitude out of their particular take on their experience. The four dimensions are obviously interwoven and provide a complex four-dimensional force field for their existence. Physical dimension : the Umwelt where Individuals relate to their environment and to the givens of the natural world around them. Social dimension (Mitwelt) , Individuals relate to others as they interact with the world around them. This dimension includes their response to the culture they live in, as well as to the class and race they belong to (and also those they do not belong to).

Psychological dimension (Eigenwelt), individuals relate to themselves and in this way create a personal world. This dimension includes views about their own character, their past experience, and their future possibilities.

Spiritual dimension (überwelt), individuals relate to the unknown and thus create a sense of an ideal world, an ideology, and a philosophical outlook. It is here that they find meaning by putting all the pieces of the puzzle together for themselves. For some people, this is done by adhering to a religion or other prescriptive world view; for others, it is about discovering or attributing meaning in a more secular or personal way. The contradictions that must be faced on this dimension are often related to the tension between purpose and absurdity, hope and despair. People create their values in search of something that

matters enough to live or die for, something that may even have ultimate and universal validity. Usually the aim is the conquest of a soul, or something that will substantially surpass mortality (as for instance in having contributed something valuable to humankind). Facing the void and the possibility of nothingness are the indispensable counterparts of this quest for the eternal.

Discussion:

The 20th century was a period when two world wars took place leaving a great disillusionment behind, which was caused by the Holocaust, death of millions of people in vain, invention of the atom bomb and many more terrorizing events. Therefore, man became intensely concerned with his condition in the world. Being a mortal entity he felt the urge to question the meaning of his existence, for which reason and religion failed to provide a satisfying explanation. Without the meaning he was looking for man became desperate, alienated and lost.

Man lost his faith in God as religion couldn't provide a logical explanation as to why there was so much pain and suffering. When Nietzsche claimed "God is dead", he left man with the responsibility of deciding for himself and the task of becoming who he is and achieving dignity as a human being. Since modern man was disillusioned, filled with anxiety and desperately in search of a meaning for his existence, many philosophers, writers and playwrights dealt with the condition of man in an absurd world in their works. The struggle of man to exist and the problems he faces in this exertion are reflected in the works of the existentialist writer Franz Kafka and Harold Pinter, and the British Absurd Dramatist.

Both Kafka and Akhtar in their respective stories portray the struggle for existence of an individual. Franz Kafka's novella "The Metamorphosis" is a seminal work of literature that explores themes of alienation, identity, and existentialism, published in 1915, has Gregor Samsa, a committed salesman, as the central figure. Having to provide for his family consisting of a father whose business has failed, a loving mother and a sister, Gregor works continuously until one morning he wakes up and finds himself "transformed in his bed into a gigantic insect." (23). Being a commercial traveller, Gregor experiences the "trouble of constant travelling, of worrying about train connections, the bed and irregular meals, casual acquaintances that are always new and never become intimate friends." (26). He leads a mechanical, inauthentic life dedicated to work and family but at the same time, free from the responsibility of being an individual. He does what the system requires hence, he is alienated from himself. As Franz Kuna suggests, Gregor's self-estrangement stems from "the 'unnatural' enslavement to an economic system." (63). Although Gregor is firmly tied to the system that he works for, he is not satisfied with the conditions of his job. If he didn't have debts to pay, he would have quitted this exhausting job a long time ago. However, being a commercial traveler provides him with a sense of self. "I will put on my clothes on at once, pack up my samples and start off. Will you only let me go? You see sir I am not obstinate, and I am willing to work; travelling is a hard life, but I couldn't live without it." (40) Gregor and his family lead a satisfying life owing to his hard work which he takes pride in. As long as he earns money to pay for his family's debts and expenses, he gets respect. Moreover, he experiences the satisfaction of making them happy, all of which

contribute to his self-estrangement. Kafka presents an extreme form of self alienation in Gregor's entrapment in a completely unfamiliar body. Greenberg suggests that Gregor's "metamorphosis is a judgement on himself by his defeated humanity. Gregor's humanity has been defeated in his private life as much as in his working life." (72). Gregor is so estranged from himself that his metamorphosis which is an unexpected, peculiar event does not create a shocking effect on him. In his huge insect body his only concern seems to be whether he would be able to go to work or not. What bothers him is his inability to control his new body, not the fact that it is not human. Gregor is so much preoccupied with the thought of his respectability and reputation, he fails to realize the situation he is in. He accepts it almost as normal. He has the illusion that if he could manage to command his body he would be able to go back to his normal routine.

One of the most striking features of Kafka's writing is his masterful use of symbolism to convey deeper layers of meaning and evoke powerful emotional responses from readers. In this exploration, we delve into the use of symbolism in "The Metamorphosis," examining how Kafka employs symbols to illuminate the psychological and existential struggles of the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, and to offer insights into the human condition. Another prominent symbol in "The Metamorphosis" is Gregor's room, which serves as a microcosm of his inner world and a reflection of his psychological state. Before his transformation, Gregor's room is depicted as a safe haven, a sanctuary where he can retreat from the pressures and demands of the outside world. However, as the story progresses and Gregor's condition deteriorates, his room becomes a prison, symbolizing his increasing isolation and alienation from his family and society. The symbolism of Gregor's room also extends to the motif of confinement and imprisonment, reflecting the oppressive nature of Gregor's existence and the barriers that prevent him from fully realizing his true self. Like the insect trapped within its cocoon, Gregor is ensnared by the expectations and obligations imposed upon him, unable to break free from the constraints of his own identity. In addition to Gregor himself, Kafka employs symbolism to illuminate the dynamics of Gregor's dysfunctional family and their responses to his transformation. Each member of Gregor's family represents different aspects of society's attitudes towards the "other" and serves as a mirror reflecting Gregor's own sense of alienation and estrangement. Gregor toiled tirelessly to clear his father's debts and to gain his acceptance. Yet, he became a debt his father sought to shed. Upon realising that his mere existence torments others, Gregor yearned to vanish into nothingness; a poignant critique of society's dehumanization. As he remained in a state of empty, peaceful reflection, his body became lighter and his last breath faintly streamed. Albert Camus says, "I see many people die because they judge that life is not worth living...paradoxically some get killed for the ideas that give them reason for living." Gregor's reason to live and die was his family.

The primal sin in the scripture is the fall of humanity from *Imago Dei* (God's image) to a distorted one, from perfection to imperfection, fullness to incompleteness, and perfect fellowship to alienation. Gregor's fall was from a human to an insect-like human, exhibiting both insect-like and humane natures. He shows empathy and love. Yet, he crawls the ceiling, and ate rotten food, showing the co-existence of animalistic elements in human nature. Humans, as inherently created as image bearers of God, possess a sense of worth and dignity regardless of the outward circumstances. Gregor's family's sin lay in their failure to

acknowledge his inherent dignity, contributing to his dehumanization. His metamorphosis reflects the spiritual and psychological alienation of people. The goal is to recognize the divine in all, regardless of differences. Despite this, Gregor clung to hope for restoration of his human form. His death was his redemption from dehumanisation. The restoration of humanity's divine image is through God's transformative grace—a costly gift of reconciliation with God, made possible by Christ's love. Ludwig Binswanger (1881–1966) describes three dimensions to which human existence relates to: *Umwelt*, *Mitwelt* and *Eigenwelt*. Emmy van Deurzen (1951) adds the fourth dimension, the *Überwelt*, because this is where the transcendent side of existence is revealed. With the existential dimensions, we have an important model to better understand people in their existence. Man is a being in search of meaning of life, says Viktor E Frankl in reference to Plato. In a sense, (self-)transcendence arises in reference to the *Überwelt*, human beings refer in their existence and focus something that is principally not again their selves or even more goes beyond their-self. This reference is expressed in intuition, convictions, values, love, and the meaning that a person is able to give to his or her life and actions. In order to avoid a purely futile pursuit of desirable goals, the human being has to give his or her own answers to the questions of life. He or she alone is able to give meaning to his or her life. In 'The Metamorphosis' we come across situations where Gregor finds life as absurd because his expectations are not fulfilled by the world. The world remains indifference to him. The human condition, for Kafka, is well beyond tragic or depressed. Kafka believed that the whole human race is the product of one of God's bad days.

For Gregor's needs world becomes silent. "Gregor would think to himself that maybe it would be better if his mother came in, not every day of course, but one day a week, perhaps; she could understand everything"[46]. His mother does visit him but rarely, however, she doesn't understand his needs. It is not only after his metamorphosis but even before, he was like an insect doing routine work in spite of his dislike, because he found no meaning in it. There are two groups of characters which reveal absurd in the novella. That was something his parents did not understand very well;" They thought Gregor was trying to harm the chief clerk. There was another incident where Gregor comes to appreciate her sister playing violin when the Guest had come to his house but they misunderstand his intention of coming out of his room. So we find a wider gap between Gregor and the rest of his world in terms of understanding the needs of Gregor. So eventually Gregor finds his life absurd, because others won't understand him and they want to get rid of him. "If it is possible, he felt that he must go away even more strongly than his sister. He remained on this state of empty and peaceful rumination...." [46]. Finally his absurdity ends with his death.

Kafka's 'The Metamorphosis' has made a significant contribution to the development of existentialist philosophy. The novella explores key existentialist concepts such as alienation, free will, and the search for meaning in life. By examining the human condition through the lens of the absurd, Kafka highlights the existentialist idea that life has no inherent meaning or purpose, and that individuals must create their own meaning in an indifferent universe. 'The Metamorphosis' remains a powerful example of the influence of existentialist thought on literature.

Similarly, Akhtar's story "Growth" is a fine example of allegory talking about alienation, absurdity and angst. A weed is the narrator of the story and the narrator is hopeless and alienated. It is living a monotonous life, a hapless creature on earth. The fear of death and alienation is seen as the narrator narrates it:

In spring I would sprout from mud towards some negligible corner and look around in fear If I had some luck, I would stealthily bask in the available ray of sun. Everyday I tremble in fear lest the small mud wall should collapse and bury me under its rubble. I am sacred lest some black cow should get hold of my head with her curling tongue and crush me in the darkness of her mouth. (68)

Akhtar very effectively portrays the plight of a weed and its existential crises. Akhtar weed as a symbol of human despair and hopelessness. Akhtar discusses the crisis of self, problems of identity and pursuit for fulfillment at great length. He has carried his exploration of consciousness of hapless and rootless people a stage further, and has revealed to our gaze new gas-chambers of self-forged misery. The story revolves around the protagonist of the novel "The Weed", as a symbol of modern man who, suffers from a sense of estrangement and alienated from the modern civilized society. The absurd" is the idea that there is no meaning in the world beyond what meaning we give it. This meaninglessness also encompasses the "unfairness" of the world." The Weed feels that its existence is absurd as its leaves had never enjoyed the colour of full bloom. Even its stalk is not able to stand erect. Akhtar portrays the condition of Weed as:

In summer I would experience some degree of growth, not because I enjoyed basking in the sun immensely, but because of the warmth exuded by other creatures around me. I would automatically get some nourishment, like a beggar who survives on the dry crumbs of bread left over by others. I was always in a state of funk as I felt threatened by other living organisms. (69)

"Facticity" is both a limitation and a condition of freedom. It is a limitation in that a large part of one's facticity consists of things one couldn't have chosen (birthplace, etc.), but a condition in the sense that one's values most likely depend on it. one can feel the "Despair,, which is generally defined as a loss of hope. More specifically, it is a loss of hope in reaction to a breakdown in one or more of the defining qualities of one's self or identity. "The Weed" narrates his story of facticity and despair further and makes it clear that it lacks freedom to live, the cow, the hen and the snakes would defer its freedom to live a fear free life. It further narrates:

Besides the cow and hen, I was scared of snakes in the grass, what if they should clip my leaves, eradicate my roots or snap me midway ruthlessly. I had such an abject lowly existence that sometimes a dog unaware of my being would urinate on me and I would be drenched in warm urine. Or a gale would blow and thrash down my leaves. (69)

"Existential angst", sometimes called dread, anxiety, or anguish, is a term that is common to many existentialist thinkers. It is generally held to be a negative feeling arising from the experience of human freedom and responsibility. The Weed is a sufferer and its existence has created a burden on its shoulders. It feels insecure as well as hapless. It narrates as, " I am such a hapless creature that there was no other creature lower than me in the order of creation"(68).

Unlike Kafka Akhtar believes in existential spiritualism. The weed is not completely dejected. In summer the cows, the hens the ants all busy in their life would bring a sweet pain in its chest, but for no reason. The Weed tried to decode this sweet pain, the source of this sweet pain lies in a hope that something pleasant would happen to it:

I would experience a sweet pain for no obvious reason. Paradoxically, instead of dampening me, it would brighten me up and raise my spirits. Who knows why I would forget the fear of my enemies. I would feel liberated in that ecstatic state of intoxication. Some sort of hope would be born somewhere and I would experience an inkling that something very sweet and pleasant would happen to me now, right now. Then I would feel the mud wall and the cow exist because of me. I would feel that the blowing of the air and the onset of warmth are the manifestations of my process of growing.(69)

Emmy van Deurzen has postulated that 'there is: in addition to the well-established categories of the Umwelt, the Mitwelt and the Eigenwelt she has urged that we should also consider the Überwelt – the spiritual world.' the spiritual thinking emerges when we admit that we are spiritual beings, familiar with the subtle level of spiritual development. This is the level where we encounter gods, goddesses, angels, devils, archetypes, fairies– the whole range of symbolic beings explored so well by Jung and his followers. It is the realm of the collective unconscious. Formally we call this the level of concrete representations of the divine. It is the level of soul, and also the level of dreams. We all have some acquaintance with this level of consciousness, because we all dream. In mysticism, this is the area where we get dramatic experiences, some of which make us wonder if we are going mad. At this level we cannot ask the question 'Is it true?'– we instead have to ask the question 'What effect did that have on you?' This is anathema to most scientific investigators and makes this class of phenomena tricky to study. Akhtar too believes in such a phenomenon. He believes that man is caught in the debate of his existence, but he can free his conscious from the chains of existence in believing that his soul is divine and there is a hope and positivity in life.

The weed further explores his self by relying in dreaming, in the sweet and melodious dream its leaves would grow thicker and broad.. its stalk would grow stronger and " all of a sudden a small colourless flower-like something would grow on my head"(70). When a fly would come forward and rest a while on its flower, " I would experience the zenith of being. I would like to eternalise this intoxicating moment"(70).

Emmy van Deurzen is well known for having insisted that there is a place for spirituality in existentialism. To the well-known trio of *Umwelt*, *Mitwelt* and *Eigenwelt* she added a fourth member – the *Uberwelt*. The truth of main importance was to be found in the individual's relationship with himself, in taking responsibility for one's actions. In Kierkegaard's opinion, alienation in its 'deeper form' is "rooted in spiritual factors" and requires a "change from within,"(45, and any change must take form and emerge from within oneself, and this is probable by comprehending oneself. Humans have become dependent on others and subordinated their relationships, thoughts, and actions to the needs of modern society; thus, they are alienated from their own nature. This solution lies in becoming an individual and in searching and finding selfless priorities. In other words, this will happen by focusing on human inwardness and a passionate determination to seek a positive association with others and God. Kierkegaard uses subjectivity to explain that a human being's identity is within three areas of existence: aesthetically, ethically, and religiously. The most civilized aesthetically human being's way of life is despair itself. However, the religious stage is where someone encounters true satisfaction and becomes truly authentic. Akhtar too believes in becoming an individual and to seek positive association with others and with the creator. In the story there is a transformation from despair, alienation the weed moves to positivity. The trees were basking in the golden sun and the season was so bright and the breeze would coaxingly goad every creature to play. At the end a golden winged sweet smelling bee brought sunshine with her wings. The weed felt exalted. It narrates:

A golden winged bee came and stood erect on her own delicate balance and then sat for a while on my temple borne flower. For a while or so I don't know whether she did touch me but something happened. whatever happened, happened at once. It as ephemeral like lightening. This was a miracle! It awakened my fortune ---- the bee,s golden winged breeze had becalmed the varied mixture of fountain of my being. She had carved out her abode within me in a manner that God does in the soul of a believer, I was liberated from fear.(71)

Akhtar's point of view, is that both religion and existentialism have the capacity to develop meaning in life. In sum, the overall assumption behind all of the narratives is that feeling alienated – whether from one's personal or communal identity, one's creations, or the human species as a whole – was a reason for profound despair. Alienation could offer, among other things, the domination of the subject by the object, the self by the other, the organic by the mechanical, and the living by the dead. It was understood psychologically, socially, religiously, or philosophically; it was a painful obstacle to feeling whole or at one with the world. Being settled in identity and comfortable in one's skin were considered preferable to being rootless, dispossessed, or self-fractured.

Conclusion:

In an existential sense the spiritual dimension is referred to as *Überwelt*, literally over-world, which is the way we relate to whatever idea we have to make sense of our existence. This can be the dichotomy between: meaning and meaninglessness. Does our existence have a meaning? However we want to engage with that thought, we are considering our spiritual dimension. Both Kafka and Akhtar believe that human life is a mixture of good and evil, of love and the ugliness, of despair and hopefulness, but Kafka feels that derives hope from this very imperfection of life. Gregor's transformation into a lesser form along with his limitless love are not the most compelling signs that Gregor is a Christ figure; rather, in the universe Kafka presents, it is his twisted sacrifice of his life for his family that reveals his Christ-like function. Gregor gives up his life, so his family can begin to truly live, just as Christ dies for humanity to free them from the damning burden of sin. Obviously, there is an element of suicide in this sacrifice; at the same time, God in Christ knew that on earth staying and speaking the Word was a death sentence, yet he elects to undergo the sacrifice. Some cynical people view this knowing death as a form of suicide, but since the sacrifice is meant to liberate humanity from a cursed afterlife, it has been and can be understood as a heroic act. In consideration of the author's on-going grappling with faith in an imperfect world, readers might accept that Kafka's exploration of the Christ concept is of twisted dimensions. As Walter Strauss explains, "On the one hand, he [Kafka] regards the physical world as evil, as did Schopenhauer; but on the other hand, he knows that the way to the Law must somehow go through the world of necessity and of falsehood" (218). Gregor as Christ figure presents the exact paradox Kafka explored in so many of his aphorisms and diary entries. When the divine enters the earthly, He enters a plane that is spiritual but which exhibits evil almost as a reaction to its own constraint or perhaps distance, and when in physical form, the resplendence of higher spiritual manifestation is obscured; the lower forms of earth stand as but shadows of the exalted states of being.

Akhtar's optimism was founded on imperfections of man and is based on his theory of evolution that life is constantly progressing to higher and higher levels. One must note that while a remarkable degree of existential alienation is presented, it also differs from its common European counterpart. Akhtar's "Weed" is alienated but it is not completely rootless and is never left in a void of meaninglessness. It manages to make some meaning of its life. For him alienation and estrangement seem to be natural consequences of man's existence and do not rule the possibility of finding meaning in life. We find that the meaning is often found in small things and not in momentous happenings. Akhtar envisions and proposes a milieu where his "Weed" uses the freedom to choose and make its life happy, joyful and meaningful.

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