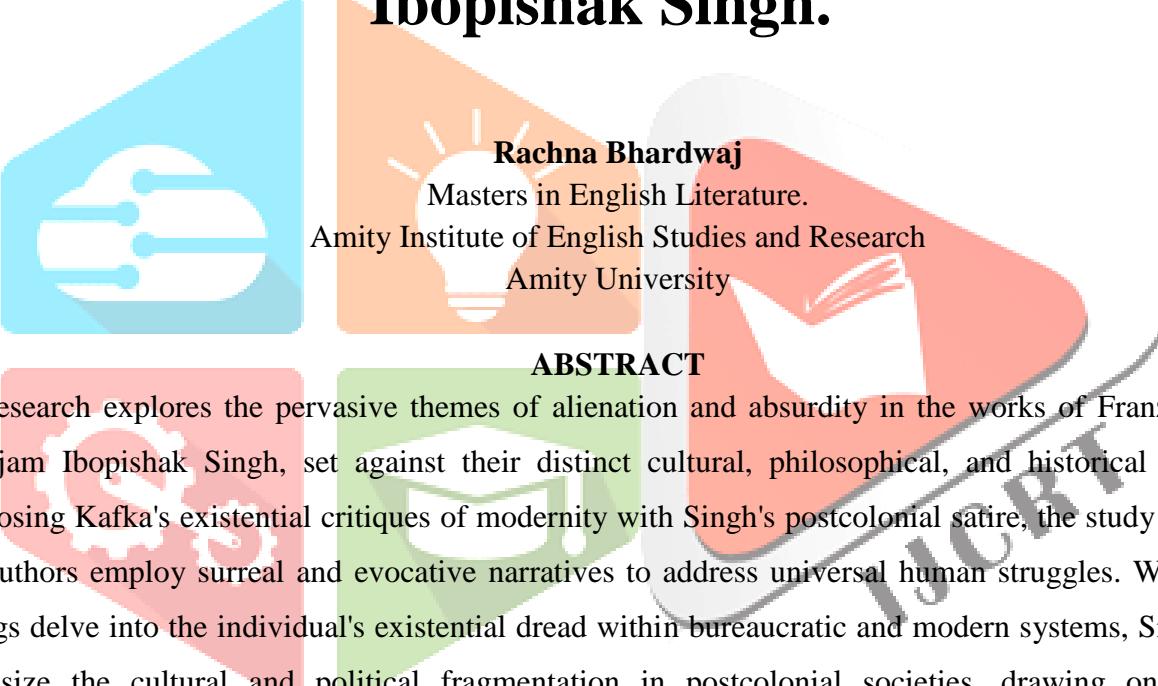




"The Trial, The Metamorphosis and The Half-Humans : A Comparative Study of the Surreal Absurdity and Alienation in Franz Kafka and Ibopishak Singh."



Rachna Bhardwaj

Masters in English Literature.

Amity Institute of English Studies and Research

Amity University

ABSTRACT

This research explores the pervasive themes of alienation and absurdity in the works of Franz Kafka and Thangjam Ibopishak Singh, set against their distinct cultural, philosophical, and historical milieus. By juxtaposing Kafka's existential critiques of modernity with Singh's postcolonial satire, the study reveals how both authors employ surreal and evocative narratives to address universal human struggles. While Kafka's writings delve into the individual's existential dread within bureaucratic and modern systems, Singh's works emphasize the cultural and political fragmentation in postcolonial societies, drawing on indigenous perspectives to highlight unique forms of alienation. Ultimately, this comparative analysis demonstrates the transcendence of alienation and absurdity beyond cultural and temporal boundaries, offering profound insights into the human condition.

Keywords: Alienation, Absurdity, Franz Kafka, Thangjam Ibopishak Singh, Comparative Literature, Existentialism, Postcolonialism, Modernity, Cultural Fragmentation, Political Fragmentation, Human Condition, Surreal Narratives

Introduction

In a world that often defies logic and reason, absurdity and alienation emerge as profound truths of the human condition, weaving together the struggle for meaning in a seemingly indifferent universe. Absurdity reflects the disconnect between humanity's innate desire to find purpose and the universe's silence in response, creating a jarring sense of disorientation. Alienation, in turn, stems from this existential rift, isolating individuals not only from their surroundings but also from themselves, their relationships, and their own sense of identity. These themes resonate across literature, philosophy, and art, from Kafka's surreal tales of helpless protagonists navigating incomprehensible systems to Camus' assertion that "the only way to deal with an unfree world is to become so absolutely free that your very existence is an act of rebellion." Absurdity and alienation force us to confront the uncomfortable truth of existence: that meaning must be forged in the face of chaos.

The 20th century, marked by rapid industrialization, global conflicts, and shifting cultural paradigms, saw absurdity and alienation rise as defining themes of the human experience. The devastating impact of two World Wars, the disillusionment with traditional structures of authority, and the dehumanizing effects of modern technology left individuals grappling with a fractured sense of self and purpose. Philosophers like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre explored absurdity as the clash between humanity's search for meaning and an indifferent, chaotic universe, epitomized in works like *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Alienation became a central motif in literature and art, as seen in Kafka's *The Trial* and Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, where protagonists navigate oppressive systems or barren landscapes, disconnected from others and their own sense of belonging. This era also witnessed the application of alienation to cultural and social contexts, as Simone de Beauvoir examined gender alienation in *The Second Sex*, while Frantz Fanon analyzed racial and colonial alienation in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Literature mirrored these developments, with Kafka's surreal works and Beckett's absurdist dramas capturing the personal and societal disconnection of the age. Together, these ideas cemented alienation as a defining concept for understanding the fractured identities and existential crises of the 20th century. This pervasive sense of existential dislocation reflected broader anxieties of the age, forcing individuals to confront the void left by crumbling traditions and uncertain futures.

Franz Kafka, a seminal figure of 20th-century modernist literature, is renowned for his exploration of alienation, absurdity, and the dehumanizing forces of bureaucratic systems in works like *The Trial* and *The Metamorphosis*. His protagonists often navigate surreal, oppressive worlds, reflecting the existential crises and societal disconnection characteristic of his time. In contrast, Thangjam Ibopishak Singh, a prominent Indian poet and satirist writing in Manipuri, delves into the alienation of postcolonial subjects grappling with fractured identities, cultural disintegration, and the absurdities of modern existence. While Kafka captures the universal estrangement of individuals in industrialized societies, Singh focuses on the cultural and existential alienation born from colonial legacies and rapid modernization in India. Together, their works offer a powerful comparative lens to examine the multifaceted dimensions of alienation and absurdity across vastly different yet interconnected socio-historical contexts.

Building on the exploration of alienation and disconnection in the works of Kafka and Singh, the themes of the surreal and the absurd emerge as crucial frameworks for understanding the fractured realities and existential crises depicted in their narratives. The themes of the surreal and the absurd are deeply interconnected, both addressing the dissonance between human experience and the larger, incomprehensible forces that shape existence. Surrealism, originating as an artistic and literary movement in the early 20th century, seeks to

transcend logic and reason by delving into the unconscious mind, dreams, and irrational juxtapositions. It often presents reality as fragmented, distorted, or dreamlike, emphasizing the strange, the uncanny, and the fantastical. Works such as Salvador Dalí's paintings or Franz Kafka's novels, like *The Metamorphosis*, use surreal elements to reveal hidden truths about human fears, desires, and vulnerabilities.

The absurd, on the other hand, stems from existential philosophy, particularly in the works of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. It explores the tension between humanity's relentless quest for meaning and the universe's indifference to this search. In absurdist narratives, characters often grapple with purposelessness, facing a chaotic or oppressive world that refuses to provide answers—think of the endless bureaucracy in Kafka's *The Trial* or the futility of waiting in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

The connection between the surreal and the absurd lies in their shared preoccupation with the breakdown of conventional reality and the exploration of human alienation. Surrealism achieves this through visual or narrative disorientation, while the absurd highlights the existential disconnection between human aspirations and a meaningless cosmos. Both themes challenge traditional notions of logic, reality, and purpose, forcing readers or viewers to confront the fragility of their understanding of the world. Together, they form a compelling framework to explore existential angst, human vulnerability, and the deeper truths hidden beneath surface realities.

In the context of modernity, the surreal and the absurd create an experience of disorientation and existential unease, reflecting the fragmented realities of a rapidly changing world. The surreal unveils the subconscious and irrational forces beneath the surface of modern life, while the absurd confronts the void left by the collapse of traditional structures of meaning. Together, they mirror the alienation of individuals caught between technological advancement, bureaucratic oppression, and cultural disintegration. This duality, as seen in Kafka's nightmarish systems and Singh's satirical critiques, captures the bewildering tension of modern existence, forcing individuals to navigate a world that defies logic and purpose.

Franz Kafka played a huge role in shaping existential literature by exploring the deep sense of alienation and absurdity that defines the human experience. In works like *The Trial*, *The Metamorphosis*, and *The Castle*, Kafka's characters face oppressive systems, endless confusion, and a constant struggle to find meaning in an indifferent world. His stories capture the fear of isolation and the frustration of being trapped in situations beyond control, reflecting the existential dilemmas of modern life. By weaving surreal elements into these themes, Kafka paved the way for writers like Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre to build on his ideas. Building on his exploration of alienation and absurdity, Kafka uses the theme of bureaucracy to underscore the oppressive structures that amplify the existential struggles faced by his characters. Kafka uses the theme of bureaucracy to highlight the dehumanizing and absurd aspects of modern life, portraying it as an oppressive force that traps individuals in endless cycles of confusion and powerlessness. In *The Trial*, for example, the protagonist, Josef K., is subjected to an incomprehensible legal system, symbolizing the faceless, impenetrable nature of bureaucracy. Similarly, *The Castle* depicts an unending struggle against an elusive authority that refuses clarity or resolution. By presenting bureaucracy as both surreal and suffocating, Kafka critiques the ways in which such systems strip individuals of agency and meaning, reinforcing the existential struggles central to his work.

Thangjam Ibopishak Singh's poem *Land of the Half-Humans* explores a similar sense of disconnection through the lens of postcolonial absurdity. The poem delves into the fragmented identities and cultural alienation experienced in a world shaped by colonial legacies and rapid modernization. By blending satire with surreal imagery, Singh critiques the dehumanizing impact of societal and political structures on individuals, much like

Kafka, but within the specific context of India's postcolonial struggles. His work expands the conversation on alienation, offering a unique perspective on how historical forces distort human identity and meaning.

In *Land of the Half-Humans*, Thangjam Ibopishak Singh masterfully explores postcolonial absurdity and alienation, depicting a fractured world where cultural disintegration and modernity collide. The poem's surreal landscape mirrors the disjointed identities of a postcolonial society, grappling with the lingering effects of colonial rule and the imposition of alien values. Through vivid imagery and biting satire, Singh critiques the dehumanizing consequences of political corruption, societal decay, and the erosion of indigenous traditions. Much like Kafka's portrayal of bureaucratic oppression, Singh reveals a world where individuals are estranged from their roots and humanity, embodying the absurd struggle for identity amidst chaos. Deepening the exploration of alienation and absurdity, the surreal world of *Land of the Half-Humans* unfolds as a dreamlike yet unsettling reflection of a postcolonial society's fractured identity. The surreal world of Thangjam Ibopishak Singh's *Land of the Half-Humans* blurs the lines between reality and fantasy. This world is populated by grotesque, half-human figures that symbolize the cultural disintegration and loss of identity brought about by colonialism and modernization. The surreal imagery amplifies the absurdity of a world where traditional values and modern chaos coexist uneasily, creating a landscape that is both haunting and satirical. Through this surrealism, Singh captures the alienation and confusion of individuals caught in a liminal space between their past and an uncertain, dehumanized future.

While Kafka's work is rooted in the existential and bureaucratic absurdities of a modern Western context, Thangjam Ibopishak Singh's poetry draws on the unique cultural and philosophical dimensions of postcolonial India. Singh's *Land of the Half-Humans* incorporates indigenous perspectives, satire, and a deep awareness of colonial histories, creating a surreal narrative that critiques societal decay and cultural alienation. Unlike Kafka's universal existential dread, Singh's work emphasizes the fragmentation of identity caused by the collision of traditional values with modernity. His poetry captures the philosophical tension between cultural survival and the relentless forces of political and social change.

Despite their cultural and temporal differences, comparing Kafka and Singh is justified by their shared exploration of alienation and absurdity as universal human experiences. Both writers use surreal and unsettling narratives to critique oppressive systems. Their works, though shaped by distinct contexts, converge in their ability to reflect the disorientation and existential crises faced by individuals in worlds that defy logic and meaning. This comparison reveals how such themes transcend boundaries, offering profound insights into the human condition.

Through the shared exploration of alienation and absurdity, Kafka and Singh demonstrate how universal human experiences can be explored across vastly different cultural and historical contexts. The exploration of universal human experiences across different contexts highlights how themes like alienation, absurdity, and the search for identity resonate globally, despite cultural and historical differences. Writers like Kafka and Singh, though shaped by vastly different worlds, tap into shared human struggles—be it the disconnection caused by bureaucratic systems or the fragmentation of identity in postcolonial societies. Their works demonstrate how literature transcends boundaries, providing a lens to understand the common threads of fear, longing, and resilience that define the human condition. By bridging diverse contexts, such narratives emphasize our shared humanity amidst contrasting realities. Their works highlight how literature transcends boundaries, offering insight into shared experiences of identity, disconnection, and the search for purpose.

This research paper explores the themes of alienation and absurdity in Franz Kafka's and Thangjam Ibopishak Singh's works, analyzing their cultural, philosophical, and historical contexts. By comparing Kafka's existential critiques of modernity with Singh's postcolonial satire, it examines how both authors address universal human struggles through surreal and evocative narratives and yet how they differ. Kafka's works focus on the existential dread of individuals trapped in bureaucratic and modern systems, while Singh's writings emphasize the cultural and political fragmentation in postcolonial societies, drawing on indigenous perspectives and historical contexts to highlight distinct forms of alienation. The significance of such a comparative study lies in the revelation of how universal themes like alienation and absurdity transcend cultural and temporal boundaries, offering deeper insights into the human condition. By examining the distinct approaches of Kafka and Singh, this study highlights the diverse ways literature can address common struggles, allowing for a richer understanding of both authors' works and their relevance to different societal contexts.

Dreamscapes of Surreal and Alienated Worlds

Although India's Northeast is a land of diverse cultures, certain issues have paralyzed the land for decades. A lot of turmoil and violence has disturbed the amicable air of the Northeast. As a region afflicted by affairs like militancy and insurgency, the violence inherent in the land is often expressed in the writings.

The socio-political unrest that has plagued Northeast India, particularly Manipur, since the 1980s. The region has witnessed widespread violence, insurgencies, and ethnic tensions, with militant groups forming along ethnic lines to assert their identities and negotiate power. Amidst this chaos, a lack of industrial development, frequent bombings, and protests dominate the narrative of the Northeast, highlighting a deep-rooted sense of conflict and official neglect. The militant groups of this terrain are mostly ethnically based claiming to be working for the protection of their respective communities or ethnic identities. Insurgencies and counter-insurgencies portray the conditions of the state. From outright difference to the comparative difference between one ethnic group to the other everything stimulates violence. So when realities become oppressive, the poets frequently seek refuge in absurdist irony.

While at one level, Northeast writing developed as an opposition to Indian English writing, and this tradition was perpetuated particularly through poetry, some writers and poets however feel that they need to write about conflict because the national media and the mainstream have not spoken about it with empathy. For the Northeast writers, their literature serves as a platform where they can express their trauma and sufferings, either in local languages or in English, to assert their identity and peace in the midst of violence. "Modern poetry in the region is found in the free verse of Bengali, Assamese, Manipuri and those tribal poets of the different states who write in their native languages and in English". (Ngangom and Nongkynrih, "Dancing Earth" xi)

In "*The Strange Affairs of Robin S. Ngangom*", he describes a visit to his native Manipur, ravaged by the conflict between Indian armed forces and the insurgents. Here the poet describes the memory of violence that he was made witness to. The writing also celebrates the "uneasy coexistence of paradoxical worlds such as folk and the westernised, virgin forests and car-choked streets, ethnic cleansers and the parasites of democracy, ancestral values and flagrant corruption, resurgent nativism and the sensitive outsider's predicament..." (Ngangom and Nongkynrih, "Anthology of" ix)

Thangjam Ibopishak Singh's poem *The Land of the Half-Humans* is featured in the *Anthology of Contemporary Poetry from the Northeast* and was translated from Meitei to English by Robin S. Ngangom. In the poem,

Ibopishak presents a symbolic portrayal of Manipur's socio-political turmoil, referring to it as the land of half-humans due to the continuous unrest that shatters its peace. The poet's use of a fairy-tale-like narrative combined with a dystopian vision heightens the irony, making his critique sharper and more impactful.

The poem talks about a fantasy land occupied by humans who live six months with their heads and rest six months as a headless body. The head eats, drinks, and talks for the first six months. In the next six months, the body without a head, works, labours and shits. The women of this land are misused and they give birth through their mouths. According to the poet, this land inhabited by nameless half-humans is always in the news, although he doesn't know the reason for its popularity. To create credibility, he adds "It's not a folktale". (Ibopishak, "The land of" 93-94). He declares that the land mentioned is not just a myth or folklore. It is his native land. Ibopishak speaks of his homeland as the land of the 'half-humans', "...nameless citizens the nameless representatives govern the land/ of the half-humans". (Ibopishak, "The land of" 93-94)

The poem is imbued with dark humor and elements of fantasy, making its interpretation open to multiple meanings. It reflects the violence inflicted by the insurgent groups and also the army in Manipur and the ongoing ethnic conflicts that plague the region. The Indian mainland's indifference to the northeastern states has resulted in slow and minimal development. Through black humor, satire, and fantasy, the poet vividly portrays the violence and turmoil. He emphasizes that the land described is neither a myth or a folklore but his very own homeland. Ibopishak poignantly refers to his native land as the "land of the half-humans."

The surreal narrative of the poem is evident when the speaker encounters these hybrid beings, described as having bizarrely distorted human features merged with animalistic or mechanical traits. "the head of a human and the body of a machine, clanking and jerking through their mechanical routines." These lines from the poem depict a creature, blending human and non-human traits creating a surreal and unsettling atmosphere, challenging the reader's perception of normalcy. The imagery underscores themes of dehumanization, industrialization, and existential alienation, characteristic of Singh's critique of a world losing its humanity.

By establishing a hierarchical relationship within the human physiognomy itself, the poet offers a powerful critique of the land with its naturalised scheme of discrimination. The privileged heads, present for only half the year, exploit the sweat and labor of the headless bodies during the other half, consuming the fruits of their hard work. Through dark satire, the poem ironically alludes to the existence of a "successful" democracy in this land, despite glaring inequalities in life, labor, and wealth, as well as the striking absence of individual identities or names.

"In 'Rabelais and his world', Mikhail Bakhtin presents the theory of "carnivalesque" which refers to the idea that literary authors may employ the mode of writing that uses the techniques of grotesque humor, satire, parody, and other methods as a form of resistance against the established dominant power structures." (Hassan) Bakhtin (1965) was greatly influenced by Kant and Hegel, and according to him, was a literary mode that subverted and liberated the cultural hegemony of the dominant class. "Things that are dirty or gross vs things that are clean. This was because, overall, there was an Emphasis on the Body, on bodily functions – as opposed to the deep spirit or reason of official power, the Carnival emphasized the material reality of the body that defecated, smelled, drank, and died. This emphasized the levelness that we are humans and we all share these characteristics. The body is a positive, not a negative." (McGee).

The dream-like reality in Ibopishak Singh's *"Land of the Half-Humans"* serves to amplify the surreal disconnection between humanity and its environment, reflecting the absurdity and alienation of modern

existence. By distorting reality, the poem forces readers to confront uncomfortable truths about dehumanization, societal decay, and the fractured identity of individuals in a mechanized and impersonal world. By merging the illogical and the fantastical, surrealism disrupts conventional perspectives, exposing the underlying chaos, contradictions, and alienation within modern life highlighting individuals' fractured sense of identity and connection to the world around them.

Alienation is a central theme experienced by the half-human beings, who exist in a liminal space between humanity and otherness. Their grotesque, hybrid forms symbolize their disconnection from both nature and society, rendering them unable to fully belong to either. This alienation is further amplified by the mechanical and dehumanized world they inhabit, which strips them of individuality and emotional depth. The half-humans embody the fragmentation and existential despair that arise in a society driven by industrialization, conformity, and the erosion of authentic human connections. Through this portrayal, the poem critiques the loss of humanity in modern existence. The half-human figures symbolize a liminal existence—neither fully human nor entirely mechanical—highlighting the collapse of boundaries between organic life and artificial constructs, which critiques modernity's erosion of authentic human connections and emotions.

"But for the people in this land there are no names. So for the nameless citizens the nameless deputies govern the land of the half-humans."

This reflects a profound identity crisis, as the inhabitants lack personal identifiers, symbolizing a loss of individuality and selfhood. From a more complex perspective, this absence of names suggests a society where personal identity is deemed irrelevant, highlighting the dehumanizing effects.

The theme, diction and style of Thangjam Ibopishak's poetry aim to depict realism as well as a dystopia through the dark and bleak visualisation. The state of the region, gripped by insurgency, terrorism, ethnic conflict and state brutality, is harsh and merciless. The idea of the colonized voice resisting dominant narratives, cultural reclamation and identity politics and the exploration of power dynamics and the use of language as a tool for resistance are evident in the poem. The text likely portrays a society where hybrid beings, or "half-humans," exist in a liminal space, rejected by dominant groups. This narrative reflects real-world resistance movements, particularly those concerning colonialism, racial oppression, and the politics of exclusion.

Ibopishak Singh's critiques of colonial and postcolonial cultural alienation reflect the disconnection from traditional values and the imposition of foreign systems. The "half-humans" symbolize individuals trapped between inherited cultural roots and imposed modernity, highlighting the erasure of indigenous identity and the existential struggles caused by colonial legacies and post-colonial disillusionment.

Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* describes the psychological alienation of the colonized:

"The colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people."

This resonates with how "half-humans" may be forced into conflict—both within themselves and with society—mirroring the internalized violence Fanon discusses.

Trapped in the Absurd

In a world governed by arbitrary rules and unspoken expectations, the individual often finds themselves estranged from both society and self. Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* is a defining work of existential literature, encapsulating themes of alienation and absurdity. Gregor Samsa's transformation into an insect is a grotesque yet profound metaphor for alienation, symbolizing the dehumanization caused by societal expectations and the erosion of individual identity. His family's growing detachment reflects the absurdity of human relationships, where utility dictates worth. Kafka's nightmarish vision critiques modernity's indifference, portraying existence as an absurd struggle for meaning. Gregor's eventual demise highlights the futility of resistance against an uncaring world. The novella remains a cornerstone of Kafka's oeuvre, illustrating the existential crisis of an individual trapped in an irrational and hostile reality.

Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* opens with an unsettling yet matter-of-fact revelation: Gregor Samsa awakens to find himself transformed into a giant insect. This surreal premise defies logic, yet its acceptance within the narrative reflects Kafka's unique blend of absurdity and existential dread. Unlike traditional tales of metamorphosis, Gregor's transformation lacks a cause, symbolic of the inexplicable and indifferent forces that govern human existence. His immediate concern is not the transformation itself but his inability to fulfill societal and familial obligations, highlighting the deeper theme of alienation. Kafka's surrealism thus serves as a lens through which modern anxieties are explored.

Once the family's sole provider, he is reduced to an unwanted burden, revealing how human worth is often tied to economic utility. His grotesque form externalizes his inner estrangement—he was already emotionally isolated before his metamorphosis. As his family withdraws, Gregor becomes increasingly detached from his own identity, unable to communicate or assert his needs. Kafka's use of absurdity underscores the existential crisis of modern life, where individuals become invisible and disposable once they no longer serve a functional role in society. Kafka presents **alienation** as both a **physical and psychological condition**. Even before his transformation, Gregor is **isolated by his job**, working tirelessly to support his ungrateful family. After his metamorphosis, this alienation becomes literal—his family locks him away, disgusted by his new form.

"He was now hardly able to do anything except crawl about the room, yet this crawling was of a different kind from before, he hardly noticed that a slimy substance coated his body and along with it came thick threads of dust; he dragged himself along, indifferent to everything."

This passage highlights Gregor's physical and psychological decline, mirroring his visible and inescapable alienation. His family's neglect, combined with his own diminishing sense of self, reinforces Kafka's critique of a society that discards individuals once they lose their utility.

Gregor's work life falls apart immediately after his transformation when he is unable to fulfill his role as a traveling salesman. His inability to get out of bed and leave for work causes him to miss an important appointment, which prompts his boss's visit to his home. Upon seeing Gregor's grotesque transformation, the boss reacts with shock and horror, initially expressing concern for Gregor's well-being but quickly turning to anger over his failure to meet professional obligations. The boss, embodying the cold, utilitarian mindset of the capitalist system, focuses solely on Gregor's inability to perform his duties, showing no empathy or understanding for his condition. This reaction underscores the dehumanizing nature of Gregor's work life, where personal suffering is irrelevant compared to productivity and results. His job, once his primary identity,

becomes irrelevant as he loses all agency. Even his physical existence grows meaningless as he withdraws into isolation, mirroring his emotional estrangement. Kafka's surrealism amplifies this detachment, illustrating the absurdity of the world.

Kafka uses this surreal metamorphosis to externalize Gregor's internal disintegration—once defined by his work and familial responsibilities, he is now reduced to a creature without purpose or recognition, reflecting the profound alienation of a person whose identity is tied solely to their social function. Gregor's transformation into an insect symbolizes his complete loss of self-worth and identity. His gradual physical and psychological isolation ends up dehumanizing his existence.

This transformation reveals the deeper disconnect between Gregor's internal thoughts and his physical reality which is stark and tragic. Despite his grotesque transformation, Gregor's mind remains human, filled with concern for his family and anxiety over missing work. Rather than grappling with his new insect form, his first thoughts revolve around missing his train and disappointing his boss. His thoughts are dominated by a desire to resume his duties, but his physical reality—awkward, alien, and unresponsive—traps him in a constant state of frustration and helplessness. His inner humanity becomes irrelevant to those around him, further emphasizing his profound isolation.

At first, Gregor's family reacts with shock and concern, hoping he will recover and return to his role as their provider. His sister, Grete, initially cares for him, bringing food and cleaning his room. However, as time passes and Gregor remains in his insect form, their patience wears thin. His father grows aggressive, injuring him, while Grete shifts from sympathy to resentment, ultimately declaring that they must get rid of him. His mother, though conflicted, becomes increasingly distant. Their transformation from concern to hostility reflects how Gregor's worth was always conditional, utilitarian.

Gregor's condition strips away any illusion of familial love, exposing his family's selfishness and deeply ingrained utilitarian values. His father, once dependent on Gregor's income, quickly reasserts dominance, treating him with hostility. Grete, who first cares for him, ultimately sees him as an obstacle to her own freedom. Even his mother, torn by guilt, does little to defend him.

Despite his grotesque transformation, Gregor remains fixated on his work obligations, highlighting the absurdity of his situation. Rather than grappling with his new insect form, his first thoughts revolve around missing his train and disappointing his boss. Even as his body becomes useless, his mind clings to the belief that he must continue providing for his family. This irrational dedication to duty, despite his complete incapacity, underscores the dehumanizing effects of capitalism, where personal identity is secondary to productivity. Kafka uses this irony to emphasize how deeply Gregor has internalized societal expectations, making his tragedy even more profound.

"The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size. The worker becomes an ever-cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates."

Gregor's transformation and his unwavering commitment to work despite his uselessness reflect Karl Marx's concept of alienation, where laborers become estranged from their own humanity under a capitalist system.

Kafka masterfully blends the surreal with the ordinary by grounding Gregor's bizarre and surreal transformation in mundane, everyday details. The precision with which he describes Gregor's struggles—his

difficulty turning in bed, the texture of his shell, or his concern over missing the train—creates a stark contrast between the grotesque and the routine. This matter-of-fact narration makes the absurd feel eerily natural, heightening the story's unsettling effect. By treating the impossible with quiet normalcy, Kafka underscores the indifference of the world to individual suffering, reinforcing the existential themes of alienation and absurdity.

An insect is a creature often crushed without thought. In *Metamorphosis* it symbolizes Gregor's diminished worth, highlighting the brutal reality that love and acceptance are often conditional, dictated by one's ability to serve others. Gregor's surreal transformed state of an insect is deeply symbolic, representing dehumanization, worthlessness, societal rejection and psychological alienation. Insects are often viewed as pests—insignificant creatures that exist only to toil and are easily discarded when no longer useful. This directly mirrors Gregor's fate. Even before his transformation, he lived a life devoid of personal fulfillment, trapped in a mechanical existence dictated by duty. His metamorphosis makes this alienation visible—his physical form now matches his internal sense of isolation. Moreover, insects lack individuality, reinforcing Gregor's loss of self-identity. He no longer speaks a human language, his needs are disregarded, and his very presence becomes unbearable for his family. The insect, a creature stripped of dignity and emotional connection, ultimately becomes the perfect metaphor for Gregor's invisible suffering and inevitable disposal. Another theme of invisibility and neglect is highlighted. Once he deviates from his role as a provider, he becomes an unseen, unwanted presence, confined to his room and increasingly ignored. His slow starvation and silent suffering symbolize the erasure of those who fail to fit societal expectations and utilitarian demands, highlighting the brutal reality.

Gregor's transformation strips him of his sole purpose—providing for his family—leaving him in a state of existential void. His entire identity was built around his job, and without it, he becomes useless in both his own eyes and those of his family. As they gradually withdraw from him, he retreats further into isolation, no longer eating, moving, or even thinking with clarity.

According to Hanscomb (2010), “*If Gregor's transformation can be understood as a symbol of self-creation, amidst the pressures of an alienating and “leveled” social existence, then his grotesque and unfathomable appearance is an analogue of the fear and confusion of those around him. In his authentic shift, he becomes unclassifiable and threatening, and hence, horrifying.*” (Hanscomb, S.(2010)Existentialism and Art Horror. *Sartre Studies International*, 16(1), 1-23)

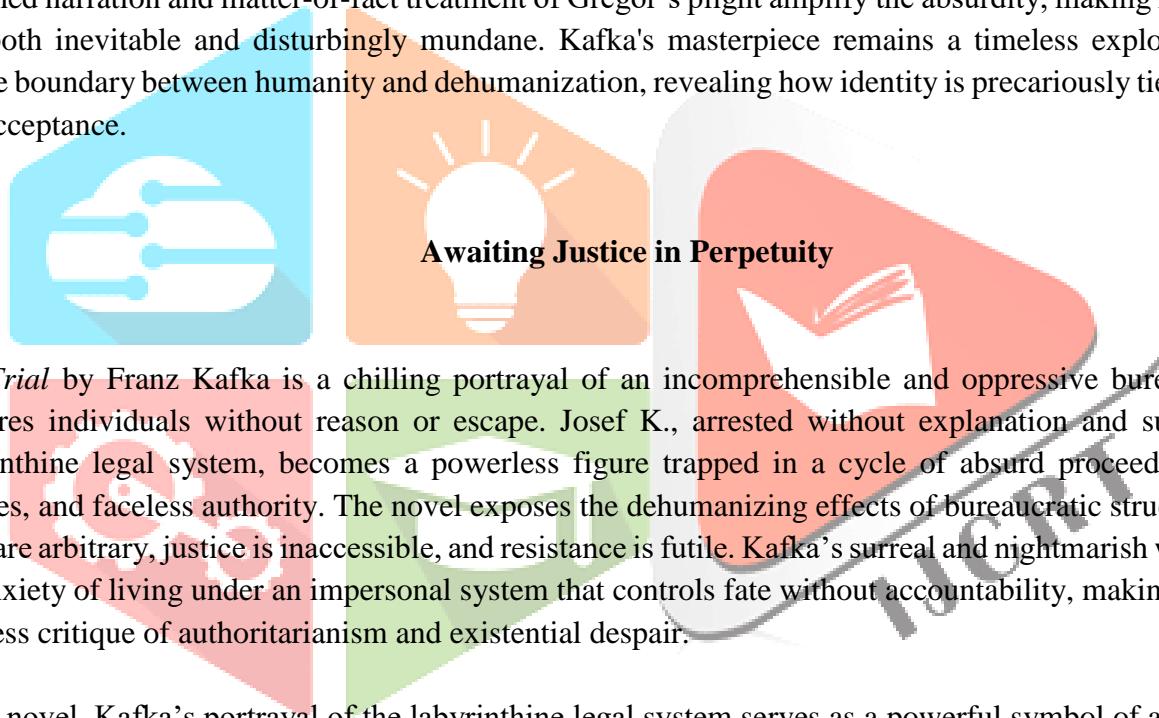
The Metamorphosis captures the deep isolation of modern existence, where individuals are valued only for their productivity and easily discarded when they cease to be useful. His family's gradual detachment mirrors how modern societies isolate the vulnerable—the sick, the unemployed, the different, the Prufrocks and Holden Caulfields. Kafka portrays a world where genuine human connection is secondary to material function, exposing the emptiness of relationships built on obligation rather than empathy.

Kafka's themes of human isolation in modern life resonate with many later authors who explore alienation in contemporary society. In Albert Camus's “*The Stranger*”, Meursault's emotional detachment from society mirrors Gregor's isolation. Like Gregor, Meursault is alienated not through physical transformation but through his indifference to social norms. In George Orwell's “*1984*” Winston Smith's isolation in 1984 reflects Gregor's alienation in a different way—through the oppressive control of a totalitarian regime. Like Gregor, Winston is trapped in a system that sees him as expendable, and as he begins to resist, he becomes more

isolated. Sascha Bru suggests that modernist writers could “depict society in a state of disintegration and dehumanization.”(Bru 111), for questioning the conventions and customs of a society.

Gregor's transformation in *The Metamorphosis* is an unspoken rebellion against the oppressive structures of work, duty, and social expectation. By becoming an insect—a creature incapable of labor or participation in human society—he unconsciously rejects the role imposed upon him as the sole provider for his family. His grotesque condition renders him useless in a system that values individuals only for their productivity, forcing his family to fend for themselves. This passive defiance subverts the very foundations of a society that demands self-sacrifice and conformity, exposing its cruelty when he is discarded the moment he ceases to serve.

Kafka masterfully blends surrealism and absurdity in *The Metamorphosis* to deepen the theme of alienation. Gregor's transformation into an insect—a surreal and inexplicable event—mirrors his psychological estrangement from his family and society. The absurdity of his condition heightens the tragedy of his isolation, as those closest to him gradually reject him, not out of shock or concern, but out of inconvenience. Kafka's detached narration and matter-of-fact treatment of Gregor's plight amplify the absurdity, making his alienation feel both inevitable and disturbingly mundane. Kafka's masterpiece remains a timeless exploration of the fragile boundary between humanity and dehumanization, revealing how identity is precariously tied to function and acceptance.



The Trial by Franz Kafka is a chilling portrayal of an incomprehensible and oppressive bureaucracy that ensnares individuals without reason or escape. Josef K., arrested without explanation and subjected to a labyrinthine legal system, becomes a powerless figure trapped in a cycle of absurd proceedings, unclear charges, and faceless authority. The novel exposes the dehumanizing effects of bureaucratic structures, where rules are arbitrary, justice is inaccessible, and resistance is futile. Kafka's surreal and nightmarish world reflects the anxiety of living under an impersonal system that controls fate without accountability, making *The Trial* a timeless critique of authoritarianism and existential despair.

In the novel, Kafka's portrayal of the labyrinthine legal system serves as a powerful symbol of alienation and absurdity. Kafka's depiction of the bureaucracy in 'The Trial' is a powerful symbol of how modern systems of power operate. The courts, faceless officials, and endless paperwork represent the dehumanizing nature of bureaucracy, where individuals are trapped in a labyrinth of rules and procedures they cannot understand. Kafka uses bureaucracy as a symbol for the alienation and helplessness people feel when confronting large institutions — whether it's the government, the legal system, or even corporations. The endless waiting, the lack of transparency, and the Kafkaesque nature of the legal proceedings are a stark critique of how power can strip away individual identity and autonomy.

The novel begins with Joseph K being “arrested” in his house as he awakens. The quote highlights what follows, which is less of an arrest and more of an exercise in absurdity. The opening scene of *The Trial* immediately immerses the reader in Kafka's world of absurdity and oppression. Josef K.'s arbitrary arrest without explanation establishes the novel's central themes of alienation, powerlessness, and the incomprehensibility of authority. The officials, emotionless and indifferent, enforce a vague yet absolute power, reflecting a bureaucratic system that operates without logic or accountability. K.'s initial reaction—

bewilderment rather than outright resistance—highlights the unsettling normalization of such oppression. This scene sets the tone for the novel's exploration of a world where guilt is presumed, justice is elusive, and individuals are trapped in a system they cannot understand or escape.

The first scene of *The Trial* sets the tone for the novel's surreal and irrational journey by immediately plunging Josef K. into a world of incomprehensible authority. K.'s initial confusion mirrors the reader's own disorientation, emphasizing the absurdity of a system that operates without reason. This unsettling beginning foreshadows the relentless, maze-like struggle that follows, where K. seeks answers in a world that refuses to provide them, reinforcing Kafka's themes of alienation and existential despair.

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Kafka depicts the legal system in *The Trial* as an abstract, faceless machine that operates without logic, transparency, or accountability. The obvious invisibility of a system, order and authority and its omnipresence like an invisible yet looming cloud making its presence felt. The system is a vast, unknowable force, where officials enforce rules they barely understand, and verdicts are handed down without explanation. Josef K.'s futile attempts to defend himself highlight the dehumanizing nature of bureaucracy, where justice is inaccessible, and individuals are reduced to insignificant cogs in an oppressive mechanism. By stripping the system of any clear structure or morality, Kafka exposes its absurdity, making it a symbol of existential dread and the helplessness of the individual against impersonal authority.

As Josef K. encounters officials who offer no clear answers, hearings that lead nowhere, and a process designed to confuse rather than clarify. This lack of structure and endless postponement creates a sense of helplessness, illustrating how authority, when stripped of logic and justice, becomes an instrument of control rather than fairness.

As Josef K. becomes consumed by his trial, he experiences progressive estrangement from society, family, and friends. His obsession with proving his innocence isolates him, as he withdraws from personal relationships and loses his grip on everyday life. Friends and colleagues grow distant, either indifferent or powerless to help, while his family offers no real support. The more he engages with the opaque legal system, the more alienated he becomes, trapped in a world where human connections fade and only the trial remains. Kafka uses this descent to illustrate how an irrational burden of guilt can sever a person from reality, leaving them lost in isolation and paranoia.

Josef K.'s personal relationships, such as those with Mrs. Bürstner and his uncle, fail to provide solace or support, highlighting his growing isolation. Mrs. Bürstner distances herself after K.'s intrusive behavior, while his uncle, initially eager to help, quickly becomes frustrated and abandons him. Friends, colleagues, and even family treat his trial as an inconvenience rather than a grave injustice. Their indifference reflects the dehumanizing effects of bureaucracy, where personal connections crumble under the weight of an incomprehensible system. Kafka uses these failed relationships to emphasize K.'s loneliness and the futility of seeking comfort in a world ruled by absurdity.

Psychologically, the constant uncertainty and imposed guilt erode his sense of self, making him paranoid and disconnected from reality. By severing him from society and forcing him into a state of perpetual anxiety, the legal system becomes a tool of dehumanization, ensuring that those it targets are left utterly alone. This psychological isolation is the system's most insidious weapon—it doesn't just punish the accused but erodes their very sense of identity and reality.

Kafka infuses the legal proceedings with absurd and dreamlike elements, emphasizing their irrationality and oppressive nature. Josef K. navigates a maze of dimly lit offices, chaotic hearings, and contradictory rules, where officials enforce laws they barely understand. The courtrooms are hidden in attics, the judges are unreachable, and verdicts are never clearly stated, creating a surreal atmosphere where logic collapses. Like a fever dream, events unfold with eerie inevitability, trapping K. in a system that operates without reason or justice. The system demands obedience to arbitrary rules while never revealing its true workings, leaving K. in a perpetual state of confusion and helplessness. Through this, Kafka exposes bureaucracy as an oppressive force that thrives on ambiguity, trapping individuals in a cycle of pointless struggle.

Josef K.'s trial serves as a powerful metaphor for existential guilt—the deep, irrational sense of culpability that individuals carry without knowing why. Arrested without explanation, K. is forced to defend himself against an unknowable charge, reflecting the human struggle to justify existence in an indifferent world. His guilt is not tied to a specific crime but to his very being, mirroring the existentialist idea that individuals are burdened with responsibility and judgment without clear purpose. Kafka's portrayal of the trial suggests that guilt is not just imposed by society but is an inescapable condition of human existence, leading to alienation and ultimate doom.

The plot reflects humanity's futile search for meaning and validation in an inherently unjust system. Josef K. desperately seeks answers, believing that logic and reason can prove his innocence, yet he is met with endless bureaucracy, vague accusations, and arbitrary authority. Kafka suggests that the search for meaning in such a system is not just difficult but ultimately impossible, leaving individuals isolated and powerless.

Josef K.'s internalized guilt and the external judgment imposed by the system are deeply interconnected, creating a cycle of psychological torment, blurring the lines between the two until they become indistinguishable.

Through this surreal bureaucracy, Kafka captures the modern condition—where logic fails, answers are elusive, and individuals are left adrift in a world that refuses to explain itself. The legal system, thus, symbolizes the existential uncertainty and absurdity of modern life.

Kafka's use of spaces like courtrooms, attics, and offices symbolizes disorientation and entrapment, reinforcing the novel's sense of absurdity and oppression. The courtrooms are hidden in cramped, airless attics, blending into ordinary buildings as if the law itself is lurking everywhere. The offices are chaotic and labyrinthine, filled with low-ranking officials who offer no real answers. These claustrophobic, confusing spaces reflect Josef K.'s psychological turmoil, trapping him in a world where authority is both omnipresent and inaccessible. By making physical spaces mirror K. 's growing helplessness, Kafka intensifies the feeling that escape—from both the system and existential dread—is impossible.

The parable of Before the Law in *The Trial* serves as a powerful allegory for the futility of seeking justice in an arbitrary and inaccessible system. The story of a The Existence man who waits endlessly for permission to

enter the law, only to realize at death that the gate was meant solely for him, mirrors Josef K.'s futile struggle. It highlights the illusion of justice—always seemingly within reach but forever unattainable. The doorkeeper's vague authority and the man's passive acceptance reflect how individuals are conditioned to obey and wait rather than challenge oppressive structures. Kafka uses this parable to emphasize that the pursuit of justice in an absurd world leads only to endless waiting, self-doubt, and ultimate defeat.

The novel and the trial itself remains open-ended, with no clear charges, resolution, or justification, reflecting the existential struggle of individuals who crave answers but face only ambiguity. This aligns with the themes of existentialism and absurdism, where human beings are condemned to search for meaning in a world that refuses to provide it. Kafka's novel thus becomes a haunting allegory for the perpetual uncertainty and helplessness that define human existence.

Kafka's *The Trial* is a powerful critique of modern society, portraying a bureaucratic system so vast and impersonal that it strips individuals of agency and understanding. Josef K.'s futile struggle against an opaque and irrational legal process reflects the alienation caused by oppressive institutions, where people are reduced to mere case files, lost in a labyrinth of authority they cannot challenge or comprehend. The novel's enduring relevance lies in its depiction of absurdity—how human beings are forced to seek meaning and justice in systems designed to deny both. In an age of increasing surveillance, dehumanizing bureaucracy, and existential uncertainty, *The Trial* remains a chilling reminder of the powerlessness and isolation that define modern existence.

The Law, the Insect, and the Divided

Franz Kafka and Thangjam Ibopishak Singh, though writing in vastly different contexts, both explore themes of alienation, absurdity, and oppression through their works. Kafka's works are both set in the general anxiety of the looming threat of a world war and in the aftermath of World War I (1914-1918), respectively while Ibopishak Singh's poem is set in the aftermath of colonialism. Despite these differences, both writers ultimately highlight the struggle of individuals against incomprehensible forces, making their works powerful reflections on alienation and societal dysfunction.

The settings of *Land of the Half Humans*, *The Metamorphosis*, and *The Trial* each create distinct atmospheres that shape their themes of alienation and absurdity. In *The Trial*, Kafka presents an oppressive, bureaucratic cityscape. The undefined, impersonal environment reflects the dehumanizing nature of an omnipresent invisible power. Similarly, *The Metamorphosis* unfolds within the confines of Gregor Samsa's home, particularly his bedroom, which gradually transforms from a place of security to one of isolation and decay. The setting reinforces his alienation as he is physically and emotionally cut off from his family and the outside world. In contrast, Singh's poem takes place in a surreal and grotesque landscape inhabited by hybrid beings, symbolizing fractured identities and societal oppression. Unlike Kafka's confined and bureaucratic spaces, Ibopishak Singh's setting is more dynamic, using exaggerated imagery to critique political and social conditions. While all three works explore alienation, Kafka's settings emphasize suffocation and inescapable systems, whereas Ibopishak Singh's world is more fluid, satirical, and overtly fantastical in its critique of society. The poem describes a land where inhabitants live "six months just head without body, six months just body without head," reflecting the absurdity and fragmentation of their existence.

The historical contexts of Kafka's works and Ibopishak Singh's *Land of the Half Humans* shape their distinct thematic concerns and narrative styles. Kafka, writing in early 20th-century Europe, was influenced by the rise of bureaucratic states, existentialist thought, and the anxieties of an increasingly impersonal society. His works reflect the alienation of the individual in a world dominated by faceless institutions, as seen in *The Trial*'s oppressive legal system and *The Metamorphosis*'s depiction of familial rejection. In contrast, Ibopishak Singh's poem emerges from a postcolonial and politically charged landscape, reflecting the complex socio-political realities of Northeast India. His surreal and grotesque imagery critiques issues of identity, marginalization, and the lingering effects of colonialism. While Kafka's works explore universal existential dilemmas within a European bureaucratic setting, Ibopishak Singh's poem is deeply rooted in the historical struggles of his region, using satire to address contemporary social and political injustices.

The political contexts of works of both the authors shape their differing approaches to themes of power, control, and alienation. Kafka wrote in early 20th-century Europe, during a time of growing bureaucratic authority and political instability, particularly within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His works reflect the anxieties of individuals lost in oppressive, impersonal systems, where power is abstract and inescapable, as seen in *The Trial*'s nightmarish legal bureaucracy. In contrast, Ibopishak Singh's poem emerges from the politically turbulent landscape of postcolonial India, specifically the Northeast, where issues of identity, state oppression, and marginalization are deeply felt. *Land of the Half Humans* uses satire and grotesque imagery to critique political corruption and societal divisions, reflecting the lived realities of people navigating postcolonial power structures. While Kafka's political critique is more abstract, portraying systemic oppression in a universal sense, Ibopishak Singh's poem is rooted in specific historical and regional struggles, making his political engagement more direct and confrontational.

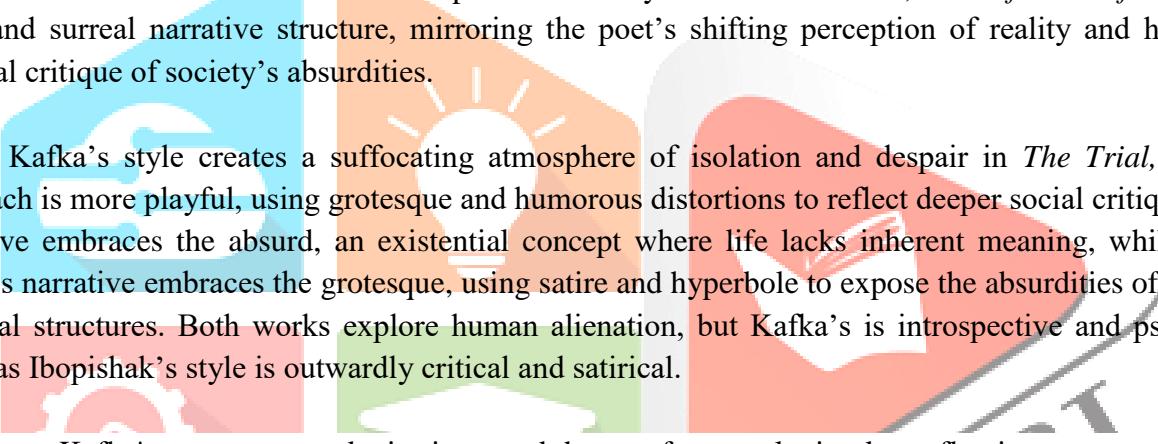
Their socio-cultural contexts contribute to their distinct portrayals of alienation and absurdity. Kafka, writing in early 20th-century Central Europe, was influenced by the fragmented identity of Jews in Prague, the alienation of modern urban life, and the rise of bureaucratic structures that stripped individuals of agency. His works reflect a sense of existential isolation, where characters like Josef K. and Gregor Samsa struggle against an impersonal society that offers no clear answers or solace. In contrast, Ibopishak Singh's poem is rooted in the socio-cultural realities of Northeast India, where ethnic identity, postcolonial struggles, and political marginalization shape everyday life. His work critiques rigid social hierarchies and oppressive power structures through grotesque and surreal imagery, offering a sharp satire of contemporary society. While Kafka's alienation stems from the existential crises of modern European life, Ibopishak Singh's critique is more grounded in postcolonial social struggles, using local myths, folklore, and political satire to expose the absurdities of identity and power in his cultural context.

The tone and atmosphere applied by both the writers differ significantly in how they convey alienation and absurdity. Kafka's tone is often bleak, detached, and unsettling, creating a suffocating atmosphere where characters are trapped in incomprehensible, oppressive systems. In *The Trial* and *The Metamorphosis*, the atmosphere is one of quiet despair, marked by an eerie sense of inevitability and powerlessness. In contrast, *Land of the Half Humans* adopts a more satirical and grotesque tone, using dark humor and surreal imagery to critique societal absurdities. While Kafka's works evoke a slow-burning existential dread, Ibopishak Singh's poem is more direct and confrontational, using exaggeration and irony to expose the chaos and contradictions of political and social life.

Kafka's prose is precise, formal, and often detached, creating a sense of cold rationality that heightens the absurdity of his narratives. His language is deceptively simple yet layered with ambiguity, reinforcing the

inescapable bureaucracy and existential dread in works like *The Trial* and *The Metamorphosis*. In contrast, Ibopishak Singh's poem employs vivid, grotesque, and satirical language, filled with exaggerated imagery and sharp irony. His diction is more dynamic and confrontational, using surreal descriptions to mock and critique social and political realities. While Kafka's restrained and methodical language deepens the sense of isolation and helplessness, Ibopishak Singh's expressive and playful use of words creates a more chaotic and biting commentary on societal absurdities. Thus, showcasing a differing approach to absurdity and critique through distinct language and diction.

Kafka employs a detached, almost clinical third-person narration in *The Metamorphosis*, maintaining an objective, detached and factual tone even as he describes Gregor Samsa's surreal transformation into an insect. His prose is marked by a sense of absurdity, alienation, and psychological depth, reinforcing themes of existential dread and societal rejection. In contrast, Ibopishak Singh's *Land of the Half-Humans*, a prose-poem, is highly satirical and surreal, blending elements of folklore, irony, and exaggerated imagery. His first-person narrative voice engages in a more direct, almost conversational tone, critiquing societal and political absurdities through fantastical elements. The narrative structure, fragmented and episodic, mirrors Gregor's fractured existence and intensifies the emotional impact of the story. On the other hand, *Land of the Half-Humans* has a fluid and surreal narrative structure, mirroring the poet's shifting perception of reality and heightens the satirical critique of society's absurdities.



While Kafka's style creates a suffocating atmosphere of isolation and despair in *The Trial*, Ibopishak's approach is more playful, using grotesque and humorous distortions to reflect deeper social critiques. Kafka's narrative embraces the absurd, an existential concept where life lacks inherent meaning, while Ibopishak Singh's narrative embraces the grotesque, using satire and hyperbole to expose the absurdities of societal and political structures. Both works explore human alienation, but Kafka's is introspective and psychological, whereas Ibopishak's style is outwardly critical and satirical.

Moreover, Kafka's sentences can be intricate and dense, often employing long, flowing structures that mirror the complexity of his characters' thoughts. His use of language can evoke a sense of confusion and entrapment. Whereas, Ibopishak Singh's language is sharp, direct, and often laced with irony, cutting through poetic conventions to create an unsettling, almost anarchic rhythm. Unlike Kafka's intricate and flowing sentences that evoke entrapment, Singh's fragmented, forceful diction mirrors the chaos and violence of his thematic concerns, leaving a raw, visceral impact on the reader.

Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and Thangjam Ibopishak Singh's *Land of the Half-Humans* employ symbolism in distinct ways to explore themes of alienation and societal absurdities. Kafka's writing is rich in symbolism, with objects, settings, and characters often serving as allegories for broader social, political, and psychological issues. Ibopishak Singh's poetry, on the other hand, employs vivid and often grotesque symbolism, where surreal imagery and ironic juxtapositions serve as powerful critiques of political violence, colonial legacies, and the absurdity of power structures. Kafka uses Gregor Samsa's transformation into an insect as a powerful symbol of dehumanization, social rejection, and existential crisis. The insect represents Gregor's loss of identity and worth in a world that values individuals solely for their economic productivity. Kafka's symbols are subtle, embedded in everyday reality, making the absurd feel disturbingly ordinary. In contrast, Ibopishak Singh's poem employs exaggerated and grotesque imagery to symbolize a fractured, corrupt society. The half-humans represent individuals who are neither fully autonomous nor entirely enslaved, caught between oppression and a distorted sense of freedom. His use of symbolism is overtly surreal, blending fantasy with political and social critique, making his message more direct and satirical. While Kafka's

symbolism creates an atmosphere of quiet despair and internal conflict, Singh's symbols generate a chaotic, almost nightmarish world where absurdity is a reflection of harsh societal realities.

While Kafka's symbols often function as abstract, existential metaphors, Singh's are grounded in the corporeal and immediate, drawing on bodily horror, industrial ruins, and mythic inversions to expose systemic brutality. One key difference is their approach to human agency within these symbolic landscapes. Kafka's protagonists are typically powerless, lost in an overwhelming system they cannot understand. In contrast, Singh's poetic voice often exhibits a rebellious, ironic stance, actively confronting the absurdity of power and violence rather than being merely subjected to it. This makes Singh's work more overtly political, whereas Kafka's remains more existential and abstract. Kafka's symbols of oppression are subtle and indirect. In contrast, Singh's symbolism of oppression is explicit and in-the-face. Both writers, however, use symbolism to question authority, fate, and the human condition—whether through the suffocating mechanisms of an unnamed court or the bullets of a colonized nation's history.

In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa's alienation is physically manifested through his transformation into an insect. In *The Trial*, Josef K.'s transformation is social—he starts as a confident man but gradually loses control over his own identity, becoming a passive victim of the court's arbitrary mechanisms. While, in *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa's alienation is physically manifested through his transformation into an insect. However, it is not just his new form but his family's reaction that deepens his isolation—his humanity is ignored, and he is treated as an object of disgust. In *The Trial*, Josef K.'s transformation is social—he starts as a confident man but gradually loses control over his own identity, becoming a passive victim of the court's arbitrary mechanisms.

In *The Trial*, alienation is imposed by an external force—the impersonal and absurd judicial system. Josef K. struggles against an enemy he cannot even identify, highlighting the helplessness of the modern individual in bureaucratic structures. In contrast, *Land of the Half-Humans* suggests that alienation is partially self-inflicted. The grotesque inhabitants of the land are not just victims but also perpetrators of their dehumanization. They exist in a state of passive acceptance, reflecting a critique of societal complacency. The speaker's alienation stems not just from external oppression but from his inability to belong in a society that has willingly embraced its deformed existence.

Spaces in Kafka's works often symbolize entrapment. Gregor's room in *The Metamorphosis* shrinks around him as he becomes increasingly alienated from his family. In *The Trial*, Josef K. moves through various claustrophobic courtrooms and apartments, reinforcing his lack of control over his fate. Whereas, *Land of the Half-Humans* presents an open yet nightmarish landscape, where the entire setting feels estranged from reality. "When the head walks, its two broad, fanlike ears, spread wide and it flies like a bird, beating its wings" encapsulates the surreal atmosphere. Unlike Kafka's confining rooms, Singh's world is vast but distorted, emphasizing how alienation is not just an individual's psychological burden but an inescapable societal condition.

Both Gregor Samsa and Josef K. succumb to their alienation—Gregor dies, and Josef K. is executed, both without any real resolution. Their struggles end in complete submission to the forces isolating them. The speaker in *Land of the Half-Humans* does not submit in the same way. His alienation allows him to critique the world rather than simply be consumed by it. While he does not find belonging, his ability to recognize and expose the absurdity of his surroundings offers a kind of resistance, even if it is futile. Kafka's characters respond to alienation with quiet resignation. The absurdity in Kafka's work comes from how characters accept

their doom without fully understanding it. According to an analysis, Gregor's transformation "creates hopelessness and absurdity which leads to the alienation of his human identity." In contrast, Singh's alienation is loud, the absurd is not just endured but actively confronted through the poem's surreal imagery and exaggerated metaphors.

In *Land of the Half-Humans*, Ibopishak Singh explores the double bind of insurgencies and government armies, illustrating how both forces trap individuals in cycles of violence and dehumanization. The insurgents, though often motivated by ideals of liberation or justice, impose rigid structures that strip individuals of autonomy, demanding absolute allegiance. Conversely, the government's military, in its attempt to maintain order, enforces oppressive measures that alienate citizens and soldiers alike, creating a paradox where neither side truly serves the people they claim to protect. This mirrors the alienation found in Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*, albeit in a different socio-political context. In *Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa's transformation into an insect symbolizes the crushing weight of societal expectations—his worth is tied solely to his utility. This existential alienation arises from the rigid economic structures that define human value. Meanwhile, *The Trial* portrays a faceless, impersonal bureaucracy that systematically alienates individuals. Kafka's protagonist, Josef K., finds himself ensnared in a legal system that refuses to clarify his crime, much like how ordinary people in Singh's world are reduced to pawns, neither insurgents nor loyalists, yet suffering the consequences of both. Thematically, both Kafka and Singh dissect how systems—whether political, legal, or societal—render individuals powerless, reducing them to mere fragments of their former selves. While Singh's work centers on the physical and moral fragmentation of a war-torn land, Kafka delves into psychological and existential disintegration, yet both ultimately underscore the futility of seeking justice or identity in oppressive, absurdist realities.

Moreover, the double bind that Singh talks about is the crushing suffocation of the people of Manipur, trapped between the insurgents and the government. Though the suffering they bring are alike in nature, they come from totally different places and arising from different causes. This makes the two forces coming from different directions binding the innocent citizens in between, taking away their agency. And that is another major reason why the poet uses surrealism through grotesque imagery and also through stark symbols of a disconnect between head and body, quite literally, emphasizing the conflict that is the cause of their misery. On the contrary, Kafka's protagonists in *Metamorphosis* and in *The Trial*, suffer the same trauma and anxiety, the reason for their misery are very different. Though the nature of their misery is the same, each protagonist suffers the blow from various forces arising from one source at a time. It is not a double bind for both Samsa and K. but that does not make it any less miserable.

Ibopishak Singh's poetry, including *Land of the Half-Humans*, is deeply influenced by his lived experiences in post-colonial India, particularly in Manipur, a region fraught with political unrest, insurgency, and military intervention. As a Manipuri poet writing in the aftermath of India's independence, Singh captures the existential crisis of a people caught between warring factions—insurgent groups seeking autonomy and the government's military forces enforcing national integrity. His work is shaped by the socio-political turbulence of Manipur, where ethnic conflicts, AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act), and identity struggles define everyday existence. This personal connection to the region's instability gives his poetry an urgent, visceral quality, reflecting the double bind of living in a militarized zone where one is neither fully free nor fully controlled, leading to a fragmented sense of identity. On the other hand, Franz Kafka's alienation and existential anxieties are profoundly tied to his fraught relationship with his father, Hermann Kafka, whose overbearing and authoritarian presence shaped the themes of guilt, powerlessness, and inadequacy that pervade his works. Kafka, growing up in a Jewish family in Prague under Austro-Hungarian rule, felt an acute sense of

isolation, not only from society but within his own home, where his father's strict expectations and emotional distance left him struggling with self-worth. This personal struggle manifests in *The Trial*, where Josef K. is at the mercy of an inscrutable legal system, mirroring Kafka's own helplessness under paternal authority, and in *Metamorphosis*, where Gregor Samsa's transformation into an insect can be seen as a metaphor for Kafka's deep-seated feelings of worthlessness, particularly in the eyes of his father. While Singh's poetry reflects the broader socio-political alienation of a post-colonial, conflict-ridden region, Kafka's alienation is more intimate, rooted in familial trauma and personal insecurity. Kafka's own experience and the value that it provides to thematic development in his fiction is clearly demonstrated by his short story "A Hunger Artist." Both authors, however, channel their personal struggles into their works, creating powerful narratives of individuals trapped by systems—whether external political forces or internal psychological demons—that render them powerless in the face of an unrelenting world.

The purpose and message in the works of Ibopishak Singh and Franz Kafka diverge significantly due to their distinct historical, cultural, and personal contexts. Singh's poetry, particularly *Land of the Half-Humans*, serves as a socio-political critique of post-colonial India, specifically focusing on the turmoil in Manipur. His work exposes the absurdity and brutality of militarization, insurgency, and the fractured identity of individuals caught between these forces. Through surrealist imagery and dark satire, Singh highlights the helplessness of ordinary people who are forced to navigate the oppressive structures imposed by both state and rebel forces. His message is a call to recognize and question the paradoxes of power, the dehumanization caused by conflict, and the lingering colonial legacies that continue to shape Manipur's socio-political landscape. Kafka, on the other hand, is more concerned with existential and psychological alienation rather than direct political critique. His works, such as *The Trial* and *Metamorphosis*, delve into the individual's struggle against incomprehensible, indifferent systems—whether bureaucratic, societal, or familial. Kafka's message is more abstract and universal, portraying the absurdity of existence, the futility of seeking justice or meaning, and the overwhelming sense of guilt and helplessness that permeates human life. While Singh's work is deeply rooted in regional political realities and aims to challenge oppressive structures through irony and satire, Kafka's writing is introspective, exploring themes of existential dread, isolation, and the inexplicability of fate. Both authors present a bleak vision of the human condition, but while Singh's poetry urges readers to confront and critique socio-political injustices, Kafka's narratives suggest that such struggles are inherent to existence itself, with no clear resolution or escape.

While all three works explore absurdity and alienation, Kafka's novels focus on existential dread within an impersonal system, while Ibopishak Singh's work uses satire and surrealism to critique socio-political oppression with a more regionally specific perspective. This difference in focus—universal existentialism versus socio-political commentary—marks a key distinction in their approaches. In Singh's work the individual has not even gained its individuality and freedom yet in the aftermath of a hasty and bloody independence. While Kafka's modern men are individual in every sense of the word in a seemingly free and democratic nation only to find itself battling the invisible forces trying to take away their autonomy. The purpose and message of both these authors, though suffering the same anxiety, are on very different planes.

Conclusion

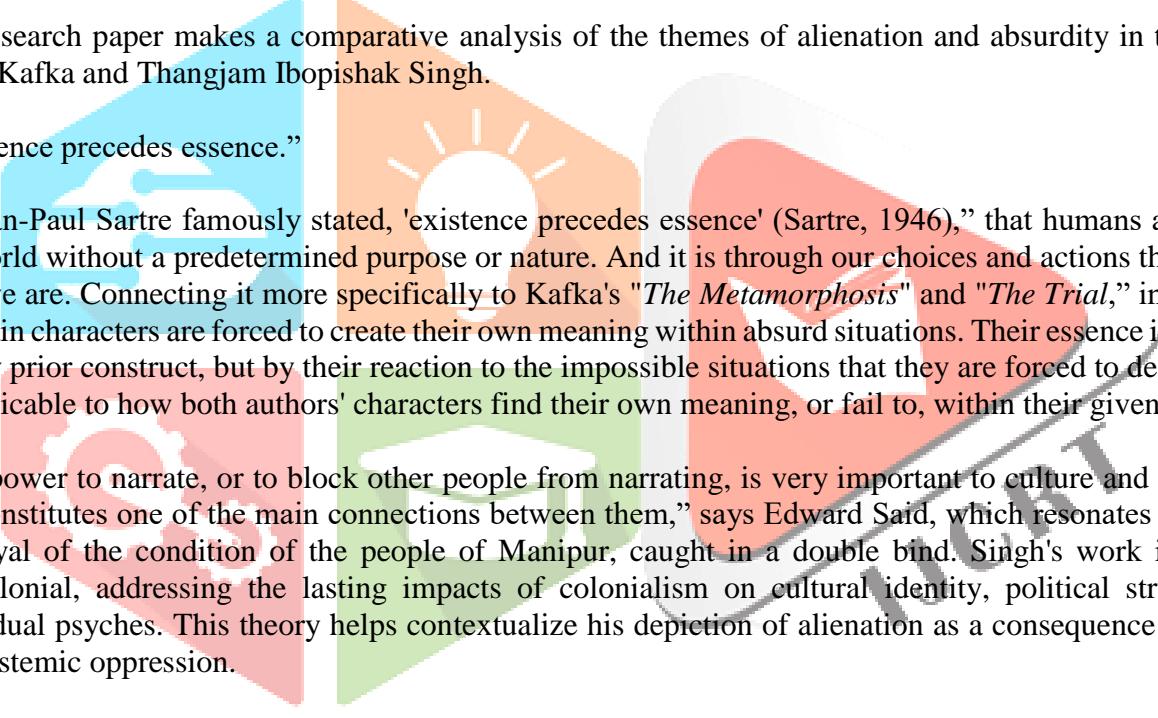
The exploration of alienation and absurdity in literature provides a profound lens through which to examine the complexities of the human condition across diverse cultural and historical contexts. Through the comparative analysis of Franz Kafka's and Thangjam Ibopishak Singh's works, this study has illuminated how

these themes transcend boundaries, reflecting universal struggles for meaning and identity in the face of indifferent or oppressive forces.

Kafka's existential critiques of modernity and bureaucratic systems, exemplified in works like *The Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*, resonate with the anxieties of individuals trapped in dehumanizing structures. In contrast, Singh's postcolonial satire, as seen in *Land of the Half-Humans*, addresses the cultural and political fragmentation in societies grappling with the legacies of colonialism and rapid modernization.

Despite their distinct socio-historical contexts, both authors converge in their exploration of the surreal and the absurd as a means to critique societal ills and explore the human quest for meaning.

This comparative study reveals that while the manifestations of alienation and absurdity may vary, the underlying human experiences of disconnection, disillusionment, and the search for purpose are universal. By examining the diverse approaches of Kafka and Singh, this research contributes to a richer understanding of how literature can address common struggles across cultures, fostering a deeper appreciation of the human condition in its myriad forms.



The research paper makes a comparative analysis of the themes of alienation and absurdity in the works of Franz Kafka and Thangjam Ibopishak Singh.

"Existence precedes essence."

As Jean-Paul Sartre famously stated, 'existence precedes essence' (Sartre, 1946), that humans are born into the world without a predetermined purpose or nature. And it is through our choices and actions that we define who we are. Connecting it more specifically to Kafka's "*The Metamorphosis*" and "*The Trial*," in both novels the main characters are forced to create their own meaning within absurd situations. Their essence is not defined by any prior construct, but by their reaction to the impossible situations that they are forced to deal with. This is applicable to how both authors' characters find their own meaning, or fail to, within their given situations.

"The power to narrate, or to block other people from narrating, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them," says Edward Said, which resonates with Singh's portrayal of the condition of the people of Manipur, caught in a double bind. Singh's work is inherently postcolonial, addressing the lasting impacts of colonialism on cultural identity, political structures, and individual psyches. This theory helps contextualize his depiction of alienation as a consequence of historical and systemic oppression.

The study reveals that despite the authors' different cultural, philosophical, and historical contexts, they both explore universal human struggles through surreal and evocative narratives. Kafka's works focus on the existential dread of individuals trapped in bureaucratic and modern systems. In contrast, Singh's writings emphasize the cultural and political fragmentation in postcolonial societies, drawing on indigenous perspectives and historical contexts to highlight distinct forms of alienation.

The significance of this comparative study lies in demonstrating how themes like alienation and absurdity transcend cultural and temporal boundaries, providing deeper insights into the human condition. Through examining the distinct approaches of Kafka and Singh, the research highlights the diverse ways in which literature can address common struggles, enriching our understanding of both authors' works and their relevance across different societal contexts.