

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**Failure of Communication: A Comparative Study of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* and Kafka's *Metamorphosis***

**A Thesis submitted to**

**The Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University**

**in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in**

**English**

**By**

**Khyam Bahadur B.K.**

**Central Department of English**

**Kirtipur, Kathmandu**

**July, 2006**

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**  
**Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences**

The thesis entitled "Failure of Communication: A Comparative Study of Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* and Kafka's *Metamorphosis*" by Khyam Bahadur B.K. has been submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University. It has been approved by the undersigned members of the Thesis Committee.

Research Committee Members

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

\_\_\_\_\_

Internal Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

External Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_

Head

\_\_\_\_\_

Central Department of English

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Acknowledgements**

The present study could never have come into its present form without the scholarly guidance and encouragement from Mr. Hem Sharma Paudel, Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University. He has provided me his valuable suggestion and scholarly guidance for the completion of my thesis.

I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Chandra Prakash Sharma, Head of the Central Department of English, Kirtipur for granting me an opportunity to carry out this research work. Similarly, I am highly indebted to my respected teacher Mr. Nagendra Bhattarai for suggesting me the essential books to carry out this thesis. My words fail to express my gratitude for his constant encouragement.

I am also thankful to my respected teacher Mr. Devi Gautam at the Central Department of English for his continuous encouragement.

I would like to thank my senior colleague Rajendra Poudel and my friend Harka Bahadur Thapa at Tribhuvan University and my beloved Anu for their unflagging support in the course of preparing this thesis.

Date:

**Khyam Bahadur B. K.**

## Abstract

Dostoevsky and Kafka examine the failure of communication as an existential predicament of human being in their novellas *Notes from Underground* and *Metamorphosis* respectively. The protagonists of both of these novellas fail to communicate as soon as they realize the "Self" in an existential crisis.

Underground man is an ex-civil servant of lower class. Given his low status, the society treats him ill. However, he doesn't accept the status given by the society. So he strives to have his social identity. In course of social transaction, he comes to realize that his identity is captured by the "others". His "self" is defined by the society. He loiters around his world to maintain his identity, but all of his efforts end in failure. The husky- six footer-officer, Zverkov, Lisa and Apollian stand for the "Others" who define the underground man. He rejects their projection but can't make his own. He finds himself at the verge of existential crises, which cause him failure of communication.

Like the underground man, Gregor, the protagonist of *Metamorphosis*, also undergoes a similar destiny. Gregor is a salesman. Because of the unfavourable situation of the business he is doing, he is afraid of being sacked out from the job. Since he is the only support for his family, he has to maintain his job at any cost. His existence depends upon the job. But the sense of being kicked away from the job generates dread into him. While undergoing into subjectivity, he finds himself being metamorphosed into a bug. The bug symbolically represents his being a social misfit. As a social misfit, his plead is not heard by the "others". In this way he is secluded from the society and he becomes a victim of failure of communication.

## Contents

Acknowledgements iii

Abstract iv

1. Introduction 1-11

2. Existentialism 12-28

    Background 12

    Some Existential Philosophers 15

        Kierkegaard: "Subjectivity" 15

        Karl Jaspers: "Encompassing" 17

        Martin Buber: "I – Thou" 18

        Nietzsche: Subjective Will and Objective Truth 19

        Heidegger: "Da-Sein" 20

        Sartre: Multiplicity of Choices 21

        Camus: Absurd Freedom 22

    Existential Crisis 23

        Anxiety, Dread and Nothingness 23

        Absurdity 24

        Alienation and Masochism 26

3. Exploring Failure of Communication: A Textual Analysis of *Notes from*

*Underground* and *Metamorphosis* 29-45

    Pangs of Consciousness 29

    Underground Mentality: An Exploration of "Self" 30

    Dread: The Hunting Terror 34

    Alienation of Self 37

    Masochism: The Failure Principle 43

4. Conclusion 46-49

Works Cited