
The Swarming of Hegemonic Masculinity in India: Gen Z's Digital Subversion of the Patriarchal State and Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*

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Abstract: This article presents a comparative critical analysis of the insect as a site of masculine collapse and political resistance, juxtaposing Franz Kafka's modernist masterpiece *The Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*, 1915) with the contemporary digital socio-political uprising of the "Cockroach Janata Party" (CJP) in India. Established in May 2026 by Generation Z activists following derogatory remarks by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant who likened unemployed youth activists to "cockroaches" the CJP has weaponized internet memes, subverted traditional political aesthetics, and reappropriated entomological abjection. By placing Kafka's depiction of Gregor Samsa's somatic mutation alongside the CJP's digitized, anti-establishment revolt, this study investigates how hegemonic masculinity, institutional precarity, and youth disenfranchisement intersect. It explores how the figure of the cockroach shifts from a symbol of patriarchal emasculation and capitalistic displacement into a subversive tool of digital resistance that exposes the fragile infrastructure of the contemporary state.

Keywords: Hegemonic Masculinity, Cockroach Janata Party, Chief Justice of India, Franz Kafka, Generation Z.

Introduction: The Subject Insect and Masculine Disintegration

The intersection of entomological metaphor, state infrastructure, and the fragmentation of hegemonic masculinity offers a compelling theoretical framework for analyzing the vulnerability of patriarchal institutions under systemic socioeconomic stress. The figure of the insect most prominently the cockroach, beetle, or unidentified vermin

(*ungeheures Ungeziefer*) historically occupies the absolute perimeter of the human symbolic order. In her pioneering work on psychoanalytic and literary theory, Julia Kristeva characterizes the abject as that which "disturbs identity, system, order," forcing the human subject to confront the collapse of the boundary between the self and the external world (4). The insect represents the ultimate manifestation of this abjection: a creature associated with filth, domestic invasion, structural decay, and a total absence of political or linguistic agency.

In Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa's sudden corporeal mutation into a giant insect operates as a literal somatic breakdown induced by the crushing mandates of capitalist labor and bourgeois patriarchal responsibility (El Hajj). Gregor's entire masculine identity is tied to his role as the sole economic provider for his family, a position that grants him a precarious authority within the domestic sphere. His sudden transformation strips him of his economic utility, triggering an immediate crisis of masculinity where his physical degradation reflects his complete exclusion from the patriarchal order (Regmi).

A parallel socio-political dynamic has emerged in contemporary India with the meteoric, meme-driven rise of the "Cockroach Janata Party" (CJP) in May 2026. Founded by digital strategist Abhijeet Dipke and mobilized by a highly educated yet severely underemployed Generation Z, the CJP materialised as a satirical response to comments made by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant during a Supreme Court hearing on May 15, 2026. In his remarks, the Chief Justice compared unemployed youth activists who challenge institutional frameworks to "cockroaches" and "parasites of society". Rather than succumbing to the shame of this state-sanctioned dehumanization, Indian youth strategically reappropriated the entomological slur. Within days, the CJP's Instagram handle surpassed the follower counts of India's long-established political giants, including Narendra Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (The Guardian). By reading Kafka's classic domestic tragedy alongside the contemporary political theater of the Cockroach Janata Party, this article explores how the insect serves as a diagnostic tool for examining hegemonic masculinity in crisis. In both narratives, the descent into entomological abjection reveals that patriarchal authority and institutional legitimacy are not immutable biological or structural truths. Instead, they are highly volatile performances dependent on economic stability, youth submission, and the continuous suppression of the marginalized.

Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and the Crisis of Hegemonic Masculinity

To understand Gregor Samsa's transformation as a crisis of masculinity, one must examine the rigid socioeconomic expectations placed upon the early twentieth-century European bourgeois male. Hegemonic masculinity, as theorized by R.W. Connell, demands that the male subject embody absolute physical autonomy, financial independence, and

domestic authority (83). Gregor's life as a traveling salesman is defined entirely by his compliance with these demands. He does not work for personal fulfillment or intellectual growth; rather, he labors under extreme alienation to liquidate his father's business failures, subordinating his own desires to the economic survival of the family (Regmi).

Gregor's somatic breakdown into an *ungeheures Ungeziefer* is a direct, somatic manifestation of his unconscious resistance to this unrelenting capitalist exploitation (El Hajj). The choice of an insect body is crucial; as a vermin, Gregor is rendered physically incapable of performing the basic physical motions required of a capitalist worker. He cannot get out of bed, he cannot grasp his sample case, and he cannot catch the morning train. His voice, once the primary instrument of his professional and masculine transactions, dissolves into an animalistic squeak, marking his sudden exclusion from the symbolic order of language:

"Gregor's voice... was clearly and unmistakably his earlier voice, but in it was intermingled, as if from below, an irrepressible, painful squeaking, which left the words positive clarity only in the first moment and in the extension distorted them."
(Kafka 3)

This dissolution of speech represents the loss of what Judith Butler calls the "performative speech act" the capacity of the male subject to assert power and dictate reality through language (12). By losing his human form, Gregor enters a state of domestic containment that mirrors the historical marginalization of women within the private sphere. He is locked in his bedroom, his physical boundaries are monitored, and his environment is systematically stripped of its cultural markers, such as the furniture his sister and mother remove under the guise of giving him room to crawl.

As Heather Merle Benbow observes, Gregor's confinement to the home represents a profound form of feminization or de-masculinization, transforming his bedroom into a "refuge from masculinity" that shields him from the demanding expectations of the paternal role (349). His retreat from a meat-based diet to a preference for decaying, rotting garbage further underscores this decline, symbolizing his withdrawal from the aggressive, consumptive practices associated with hegemonic male power (Benbow 349).

The Paternal Reversal: Reasserting the Patriarchal Order

The collapse of Gregor's masculinity facilitates a dramatic redistribution of power within the Samsa household, most notably embodied by his father, Mr. Samsa. Prior to Gregor's transformation, the father is depicted as an infirm, retired man who spent his days wrapped in blankets, completely dependent on his son's labor (Joshi). This initial state represents an inversion of traditional patriarchal authority, where the father has been effectively emasculated by his financial failure, forcing Gregor to assume the provider role

(Benbow 349). However, once Gregor is incapacitated, Mr. Samsa undergoes a sudden, aggressive masculine rehabilitation (Benbow 349). He discards his invalid status, secures employment as a bank messenger, and adopts a rigid, institutional uniform that symbolizes his reassumption of social and domestic authority. Kafka describes the revitalized father in terrifyingly potent terms:

"[He] was standing up straight enough now; clad in a smart blue uniform with gold buttons... from under his bushy eyebrows his dark eyes flashed with a piercing look."
(Kafka 32)

This paternal resurgence is achieved directly through the violent subjugation of the insect son. The famous scene where Mr. Samsa bombards Gregor with apples a fruit loaded with biblical overtones of judgment and original sin serves as a literal and symbolic assault on Gregor's remaining bodily autonomy. One apple becomes embedded in Gregor's back, rotting over time and causing a severe infection that hastens his physical decline (Dagamseh and Rawashdeh). This act of violence is a disciplinary mechanism designed to re-establish the traditional domestic hierarchy. The father reclaims his position as the supreme patriarch by reducing his son to a completely powerless object, demonstrating that within the bourgeois family, male authority requires the absolute submission of those who cannot produce capital.

The Cockroach Janata Party: Gen Z, Unemployment, and the Demystification of the State

While Kafka uses the insect to depict the tragic, internal collapse of an individual bourgeois male, India's contemporary Gen Z political movement uses the exact same metaphor as an externalized weapon of digital mass mobilization. The origins of the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) lie in a deep-seated structural crisis of employment and youth precarity in 2020s India. Despite glowing macroeconomic indicators celebrated by the ruling administration, India's graduate youth unemployment rate has soared to an alarming 29.1 percent nearly nine times higher than the unemployment rate for uneducated citizens. The state produces over 8 million graduates annually, yet the economic apparatus fails to generate the professional positions necessary to absorb them, producing an entire generation of over-educated, disenfranchised, and underemployed citizens.

When Chief Justice Surya Kant delivered his "cockroach" and "parasite" remarks on May 15, 2026, he voiced a long-standing institutional bias: the view that the unemployed young man who spends his time online or engaging in grassroots activism is a systemic defect rather than a product of structural failure. In the traditional Indian patriarchal imaginary, an adult male's worth is tied directly to his ability to secure a stable job, marry, and sustain a family unit. By failing to secure employment in a hyper-competitive market plagued by systemic corruption including the high-profile leaks of the NEET-UG national examination

papers the contemporary Indian youth is effectively castrated, stripped of the traditional markers of masculine maturity (Philly Sheriff).

The creation of the Cockroach Janata Party on May 16, 2026, inverted this dynamic through what cultural theorist Achille Mbembe defines as the "aesthetics of vulgarity" the process by which the dominated reappropriate the obscene or derogatory language of the ruling class to strip the state of its majestic aura (103). Rather than defensive posturing or conventional street protests, the CJP embraced the slur. They launched an official website defining the movement as "a political front of the youth, by the youth, for the youth: Secular, Socialist, Democratic, and Lazy". By establishing satirical membership criteria that require applicants to be "unemployed (by force, by choice, or by principle)" and "chronically online (at least 11 hours daily)," the CJP subverted the traditional patriarchal demands of industriousness, utility, and state-sanctioned masculinity.

Meme Politics, Digital Subversion, and the Castration of Traditional Political Parties

The rapid growth of the CJP surpassing 19.5 million Instagram followers within a week of its launch demonstrates a fundamental shift in political communication, moving away from old-school patriarchal structures toward decentralized "meme politics" (The Guardian). Traditional Indian politics relies heavily on hyper-masculine, personalized leadership cults, where male politicians present themselves as strongmen, protectors, and infallible patriarchs. The ruling BJP's digital ecosystem has long maintained dominance by projecting an image of muscular nationalism and administrative efficiency.

The CJP completely disrupted this dynamic by weaponizing absurdist, self-deprecating humor. Instead of countering the ruling party with an alternative strongman figure, the CJP populated social media feeds with images of literal cockroaches wearing traditional Indian political attire, mock campaign slogans, and satirical anthems celebrating the "art of professional ranting" (Philly Sheriff). As media scholar Henry Jenkins notes, participatory digital culture allows marginalized groups to engage in "spoofing" and "culture jamming," turning the tools of dominant mass communication against the institutions that created them (210).

This digital strategy functions as an ideological castration of mainstream political parties. When the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, acting on inputs from the Intelligence Bureau, directed X to withhold the official CJP account under Section 69(A) of the Information Technology Act on grounds of "national security," the movement's response exposed the state's anxiety (Indian Express). Within minutes of the ban, the group launched a new handle with the defiant, laughing caption: "You thought you can get rid of us? Lol. Cockroach is back" (The Guardian). By treating state censorship as a minor inconvenience rather than an existential threat, the CJP stripped the state's security apparatus

of its ability to inspire terror. The cockroach historically reviled for its evolutionary resilience and ability to survive nuclear fallout became the perfect symbol for a generation that views itself as completely immune to the traditional threats of an authoritarian state.

Reclaiming the Scum: From Domestic Isolation to Mass Political Swarm

A profound divergence between Kafka's text and the contemporary Indian phenomenon lies in the trajectory of the insect subject from isolation to collective action. Gregor Samsa's tragedy is rooted in his absolute loneliness. He is confined within the four walls of his bedroom, unable to communicate with other mutant subjects or organize any form of resistance against his family's exploitation. His transformation isolates him, forcing him to view his own insect body through the disgusted gaze of his father and sister (Kaur). His ultimate death is a quiet disappearance; he expires alone on his floor, and his body is casually swept away by the charwoman, allowing the bourgeois family to step outside into the fresh air and resume their search for a suitable husband for Grete (Kafka 45).

Conversely, the Gen Z Cockroach Janata Party transforms the insect from an isolated domestic anomaly into a massive, highly connected digital swarm. The individual Indian youth, sitting in their room facing the isolation of unemployment, discovers through the CJP meme ecosystem that they are part of a vast, collective class of millions. The slur meant to isolate them becomes the very foundation of their solidarity. Furthermore, as documented by international press agencies, this movement has broken past the boundaries of the digital world. CJP volunteers have organized offline protests, public clean-up drives, and satirical election campaigns while wearing cockroach costumes. Reports indicate that supporters are even planning to field an independent candidate in the Bankipur Assembly by-election in Bihar to challenge both the ruling BJP and the opposition coalitions.

The Metamorphosis of Female Agency and the Resurgence of Institutional Control

A critical element of this comparative analysis is the role of female agency in response to the collapse of male authority. In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor's decline directly enables the evolution of his sister, Grete. Initially depicted as a dependent, sentimental girl who spends her time playing the violin, Grete undergoes her own profound metamorphosis as the narrative progresses (Rahman). As Gregor loses his capacity to work, Grete enters the public workforce as a salesgirl, stepping into the economic vacuum left by her brother (Rahman). This shift alters the power balance within the home; Grete transitions from a compassionate caregiver to the primary decision-maker regarding Gregor's fate (Kaur). It is Grete who ultimately voices the family's collective rejection, explicitly severing Gregor's human identity from his insect form:

"We must try to get rid of it... It's killing you both, I can see it coming. When one has to work as hard as we do, all of us, one can't endure this perpetual torment at home." (Kafka 41)

By labeling Gregor an "it," Grete completes his exclusion from the human family, illustrating how female empowerment in this oppressive environment is achieved by adopting the cold, utilitarian logic of the patriarchal capitalist system (Ali).

In the contemporary Indian political context, the gender dynamics play out across a complex field of digital visibility. Traditional political spaces in India remain heavily male-dominated, built on paternalistic networks and physical political rallies. The CJP, by operating primarily within the decentralized, anonymous space of social media, provides an alternative arena that challenges these traditional gender dynamics. However, the movement's self-proclaimed identity as a "front of the lazy and unemployed" directly parodies the traditional masculine expectation of the male breadwinner. By celebrating the figure of the unemployed youth, the CJP rejects the state's attempt to tie citizenship and masculine dignity entirely to economic productivity. This move subverts the state's efforts to treat those outside the formal labor market as useless, subhuman pests.

Conclusion: The Permanent Resilience of the Vermin Form

Ultimately, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* and the contemporary rise of the Gen Z Cockroach Janata Party demonstrate the deep connection between entomological imagery, masculine anxiety, and institutional power. Whether confined to an early twentieth-century bourgeois apartment or navigating the volatile digital landscape of twenty-first-century India, the insect serves as a powerful symbol for the failure of hegemonic patriarchal structures. For Gregor Samsa, the transformation remains an internal, tragic defeat an inability to bear the exhausting demands of capitalist labor, resulting in his domestic erasure.

For the contemporary youth of India, however, the cockroach has been transformed into a potent symbol of collective political defiance. By reappropriating an elitist institutional slur, Generation Z has exposed the deep anxieties of a state apparatus that struggles to handle structural unemployment and digital dissent. The rapid rise of the Cockroach Janata Party proves that the abject vermin cannot be easily silenced or swept away by state censorship. In the modern digital age, the cockroach has evolved from a tragic symbol of masculine collapse into an unstoppable, meme-armed swarm a permanent, laughing challenge to the foundations of institutional authority.

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