

**“The Death of a Government Clerk” by Anton Chekhov:A thematic analysis**

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**Aswathy J B**, Psychologist, Fariya Counseling Centre, Ernakulam, Kerala

Address: Jonandharath House, Cherai PO, Ernakulam, PIN 683514, Kerala

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**Abstract**

Become aware of how your thoughts are impacting your emotions and behaviors. Observe your thoughts. Ask yourself if this thought is helpful? What purpose is the thought serving you? How does the thought make you feel? (RACHEL GOLDMAN) “Anton Chekhov a Russian short story death of a government clerk” is a story of Ivan Dmitritch Tchervyakov and his unexpected behavior and these irrational thoughts to apologize to a general finally lead to unexpected and unbelievable death of Tchervyakov. Here we analyze the story plot in terms of certain themes. The name Tchervyakov, Negative thoughts, rumination, perfectionism, attitude towards authority and biopsychosocial of death.

**Keywords:** Negative thoughts, rumination, perfectionism, authority and biopsychosocial Model

**Introduction**

Anton Chekhov, also known as Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, is a Russian playwright and master of modern short story writers. He was a literary artist who could accurately weave stories mysteriously with short words. He was interested in creating a special kind of atmosphere in his writings, filling them with mystery through his simple narrative style. His characters were always alive and familiar to the world. The characters we saw, heard and experienced were born out of that pen. All of his characters are Heros and heroines who can relate to man in one way or another. He is also regarded as one of the finest representatives of the late Russian realist school of the 19th century. Chekhov considered life to be atheistic, chaotic, and absurd. That view can also be seen in his story "The Death of a Government Clerk".

"The Death of a Government Clerk" is one of Anton Chekhov's first published stories. The Death of a Government Clerk”by Chekhov was first published in Fragments in 1883 with the subtitle “The case”. It was included in the stories collection Motley Stories (1886). This short story has a very simple storyline. But the narrator has given an even more wonderful ending to the story which is progressing wonderfully. For a moment, even the breath of the audience stops with the breath of the protagonist. The story goes that a simple act like sneezing develops into a big event in a government clerk. “He comes to his sneezing victim in the evening and the next

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day and tries to apologize several times, only to make him angry with Ivan rather than apologize. Dissatisfied with his work, Chervyakov returned home and lay there dead". The little man in this story is seems to be both comic and pathetic.

### **Story summary**

"The Death of a Government Clerk", a minor government clerk, Ivan Dmitritch Tchervyakov, sneezes while seeing a show and to his horror discovers that the bald head in front of him was a high ranking official, the Privy General Brizzhalov. Tchervyakov apologizes so profusely and so insistently that the general, wearied with forgiving him, at last tells him to go to devil. Tchervyakov crawls home, takes to his bed, and soon dies from sheer fright. The inciting incident of "The Death of a Government Clerk" is a lowly clerk's sneeze on the head of a higher official during an opera. The clerk, Ivan Dmitritch Tchervyakov, is petrified of the consequences of him sneezing upon the head of the official, the Privy General Brizzhalov. Tchervyakov apologizes to the official, thinking that though "he is not the head of my department, but still it is awkward" (Chekhov 21). He feels that he "must apologies". When Brizzhalov dismisses him, asking Tchervyakov to let him listen to the opera, the clerk grows uneasy. Chekhov describes that "he was no longer feeling bliss. He began to be troubled by uneasiness".

Tchervyakov's reactions to the general's continuous dismissals evoke laughter. When the official tells him that he has forgotten about the incident, the clerk's thoughts go as such, "He has forgotten, but there is a fiendish light in his eye... And he doesn't want to talk. I ought to explain to him . . . that I really didn't intend . . . that it is the law of nature". He even goes to the general's office to apologies. The official ignores him and his yearning to please his higher official is revealed through his thought processes. He keeps on pestering the official for an apology till the official, evidently irked and "turning suddenly purple and shaking all over", yells at him to "Be off!". He even repeats his warning, stamping the floor for emphasis. The clerk's reaction is one of horror. "Something seemed to give way in Tchervyakov's stomach. Seeing nothing and hearing nothing he reeled to the door, went out into the street, and went staggering along...Reaching home mechanically, without taking off his uniform, he lay down on the sofa and died.

### **Method**

This article is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data have been collected from the original works of Anton Chekhov, and Secondary data have been collected from different books, articles, research journals, internet, etc.

### **Themes**

#### **1.The name "Tchervyakov"**

The central character in this story is Ivan Dmitritch Tchervyakov, a government official, a Clerk. "Tchervyakov" is one of the most commonly given sir names in Russia. The Russian word "Chervyak" means "worm". The worm is considered to be the guardian of the soil. The use of the metaphor of worm means that one nourishes one's body, mind and soul by interacting with the world around one. Soil refers to the base of one. Tchervyakov is a clerk who represents the basic class of society, as the worm is said to be the guardian of the soil. The worm's representation means that even the smallest, gentlest, and shy person has the ability to express his or her inner self. This is a good example of how their size does not matter. The above facts should be taken

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into account in the case of Tchervyakov as well. He belongs to the basic class of the society and is a gentle and shy person. Only an innocent person can possibly think deeply about how displeasing such an act can be to another.

The worm symbolism encourages one to get down to the basics. We can see where Tchervyakov behaves more humbly than he can. If a person's spiritual animal is a worm, he is considered to be a deep thinker, but the self – realization will always be difficult for him. He is a person who shows kindness and generosity but also finds him becoming a weakness, because it is often frustrating. We can be seen as a person who shows kindness and generosity but also turns out to be a weakness, because it often ends in despair and heartache. All of the above is literally true of Tchervyakov. He thinks of need and more. He tries to understand all the possible aspects of his act, the sneezing. He shares his discomfort with his wife. He is not satisfied even though he has been forgiven many times. He was kind. He looks forward to that kind loan .His kindness and generosity is what makes him weak. This plunges Tchervyakov into despair. He is in severe pain. The only thing that unfortunately ends up being in the death.

## **2) Negative thoughts**

Negative thinking can contribute to problems such as social Embarrassment, fear, anxiety, worry, insecurity, etc. "Our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are all linked, so our thoughts impact how we feel and act. So, although we all have unhelpful thoughts from time to time, it's important to know what to do when they appear so we don't let them change the course of our day," explains Rachel Goldman, PhD, a psychologist and clinical assistant professor at the NYU School of Medicine. From the story it can be seen that Tchervyakov holding unwanted intrusive thoughts. They are stuck thoughts that cause great distress. They seem to come from out of nowhere, arrive with a whoosh, and cause a great deal of anxiety.

The main reason for him to think like that is that Brizhalov, a civilian general serving in the Department of Transport, is a higher official of the same. Dmitritch Tchervyakov worries about what he will do with himself. Tchervyakov must have feared that he would take some negative measures. We can see that Tchervyakov is completely confused. That negative thinking is not cured from him, that's why he apologizes for the opera. It repeats itself the next day, and then once again. Tchervyakov is unable to understand that his thoughts are extremely negative and unnecessary. It ends in a great disaster

## **3) Rumination**

Rumination involves repetitive thinking or dwelling on negative feelings and distress and their causes and consequences. The repetitive, negative aspect of rumination can contribute to the development of depression or anxiety and can worsen existing conditions

( American Psychiatric association,2020).Commonly rumination is associate with depression. The preoccupation with problems also makes it difficult to move beyond to allow for a focus on problem solving.

In this story, we can understand that Tchervyakov is carrying a ruminating mind. Tchervyakov becomes upset and ruminates when he learns that his spit fell on the head of higher official Brizhalov when he sneezed. Tchervyakov apologizes to his official or even victim at the same moment without remembering that everyone is watching the opera. Every time Tchervyakov apologizes in turn, Brizhalov's reply never satisfies Tchervyakov. Analyzing Brizhalov's words again and again, he gets lost in thought. When Brizhalov loses patience with

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Tchervyakov's words, "Oh, please, sit down! Let me listen!" saying that out loudly. Tchervyakov was embarrassed then. He still blames his actions and shame again and again. Brizzalov's reply, "Oh, that's enough," leaves Tchervyakov reeling when he believes his apology is not the right way. Even there, he does not give up his ruminative thoughts. His rumination reaches rock bottom when his wife says to apologize once more. His ruminating mind was not contained. He felt that he had done such a bad thing. You can see him humbly apologizing again and again. He is trying to prove his innocence everywhere. But Tchervyakov fails to understand that it is part of his ruminating thought.

#### **4) Perfectionism**

Perfectionism is the drive to appear, feel, and be perfect. Although society generally views perfectionism as a positive attribute, it also can have negative effects. A perfectionist has "excessively high personal standards and overly critical self-evaluations (Scott,2023). This is what we seen in the case of Tchervyakov. He try to wanted to get an answer which he hide in his mind. That is why he again and again apologies for a relatively small mistake allot of time which is to the extent to capable of irritating the victim

Someone with a perfectionist personality is more critical of themselves and others than a high achiever. High achievers take pride in their accomplishments and tend to be probative of others, yet perfectionists frequently spot miscalculations and defects. The personality of Tchervyakov is more critical than others. He continually self-evaluate and blame him again even though he appropriately apologizes for his sudden unacceptable behavior. He can be an under achiever. Even though a government Clark cannot consider as inferior he may think so. But he is very much obedient. He is findings out that there are defects in his behavior and the way he apologize.

High achievers are frequently pulled toward their pretensions by a desire to achieve them. They're also happy with any way made in the right direction. Perfectionists, on the other hand, tend to be pushed by a fear of anything lower than an impeccably met thing. Tchervyakov is actually fear of that incident. He never understands that he properly apologies and that is enough for this misbehavior "He saw that an old gentleman sitting in front of him in the first row of the stalls was carefully wiping his bald head and his neck with his glove and muttering something to himself. In the old gentleman, Tchervyakov recognized Brizzhalov, a civilian general serving in the Department of Transport." These sentences are example for his fear and anxiety. Because of his fear he literally explains the incident to his wife. Later he tries to apologies he started to use the word "your Excellency". It shows how disturbed he is.

Setting objectives that might not be reasonable is another indication of being a perfectionist. High achievers can set challenging objectives and relish the thrill of pushing themselves a bit farther once they've accomplished them. Perfectionists frequently make their initial objectives unattainable. It is also applicable to him. When he says sorry to the officer he expect a replay that satisfies him and that man will completely understood the circumstances he done that misbehavior. It shows his perfectionist mind. Unfortunately it did not happen. So to satisfy himself he tries to convene the officer again and again. Finally lead him to a tragedy.

When their lofty standards aren't satisfied, perfectionists frequently blame themselves and wallow in regret. When things don't turn out the way they had hoped, they find it difficult to go on. Like the same way Tchervyakov set a high standard in response from the officer which

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might be like soothing or completely understanding as Tchervyakov wish. Tchervyakov cont undertake this incident as normal or something which we do not need to give much importance. Because things happen the way he hoped it irritated him and makes him anxious and feared. He find it too difficult to manage his thoughts.

### **5) Attitude towards authority**

At that time it assumes that in Russia the class division on job was prominent. We can see that Tchervyakov was becoming so scared and insecure that his accidently spit on the head of an officer. But when he realizes that that man is not from the department of he belongs to he feel calm. There is some truth to the criticism that Tchervyakov is being overly suspicious because Brizzhalov did not appear to be offended by the sneezing episode. The reader must also take into account that Tchervyakov is acting rationally given the organisation of the government at the time and his clear worries of losing his position. He was rational in the sense that he knew how the governmet operated at the time. At the time the story was written, a clerk's job security might not have been very high. With the ability to quickly replace each employee. The reader would be forced to think about Tchervyakov's paranoia if this were the case. Even his wife believes he ought to offer Brizzhalov an apology. Considering that if he doesn't, Brizzhalov could assume Tchervyakov lacks social graces. This would emphasise how important beauty may be to certain people.

### **6) Biopsychosocial mode and death**

The biopsychosocial approach was developed at Rochester decades ago by Drs. George Engel and John Romano in 1977. It suggesting that to understand a person's medical condition it is not simply the biological factors to consider, but also the psychological and social factors (Gatchel and etal,2007) The biopsychosocial approach systematically considers biological, psychological, and social factors and their complex interactions in understanding health, illness, and health care delivery Bio (physiological pathology),Psycho (thoughts emotions and behaviours such as psychological distress, fear/avoidance beliefs, current coping methods and attribution) and Social (socio-economical, socio-environmental, and cultural factors suchs as work issues, family circumstances and benefits/economics)

In the story death of a government Clark at last we can see that the central character Tchervyakov death. When the general yelled “Be off!” to Tchervyakov, he turning suddenly purple, and shaking all over. Then Something seemed to give way in Tchervyakov’s stomach. Seeing nothing and hearing nothing he reeled to the door, went out into the street, and went staggering along... Reaching home mechanically, without taking off his uniform, he lay down on the sofa and died.

This is the way he died. We can assume that it is a heart failure even though the writer mentions it. Actually there is a combination of biological psychological and social circumstances acted to gather. Because of the harsh words from general it can be seen that Tchervyakov’s stomach felt something his face turn purple and start shivering. It denotes his biological condition. His thoughts are unnatural and unnecessary .At the end portion of the story he believe he did not get the satisfactory response and he failed to make understand the actual circumstances to the general. His thoughts emotions and behaviours such as psychological distress, fear/avoidance beliefs, current coping methods and attribution are seeing to be falling at that moment. Here cultural factors and job circumstances as social factors crucial. In Russia job

hierarchy was their prominent. So anything that cause to conflict the order may cause serious job issues. That is why even though the general is not from his department he apologies at the maximum. His wife also supports to say that. A clerk is comparatively low job position .so if something unnatural happen it will threaten the job of him. Combination of bio –psycho-social condition together make him in danger and responsible for Tchervyakov’s death.

**Conclusion**

The nonchalant way in which Chekhov describes the titular death of the government clerk is a testament to the author’s brilliant use of the absurdity. It is as if the author is indifferent towards the ridiculous motivations of his protagonist. However, Chekhov is instead using the irrational fear of the character as a mirror to the pathetic situation of the middle and lower classes in the 19th century Russian society. It explains how biological psychological social circumstances together lead to one man ending.

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