



The Traces of Max Weber's Iron Cage in "Catcher in the Rye" by J.D. Salinger

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Abstract

The Catcher in the Rye is a novel by J.D. Salinger. In this novel Salinger depicts the tale of Holden Caulfield a seventeen-year-old teenager. Holden the narrator and the novel's protagonist during the three days tries to find his real identity and the safe place in a modern industrial society of the United States of America. The present study aims at investigating the traces of Iron cage which coined by Max Weber a German sociologist who focuses on the negative elements of a modern world on human's life. To him, the world is an Iron Cage where nobody can escape. To Weber the system of capitalism remains in every social system and become central to shape social life, that is why modern man can not find any way to escape, moreover, he/she loses his/ her true identity in this system. Weber argues that the technological, industrial, and economic relationship become fundamental forces in the society. He claims if you are born into this kind of system, so you can not change the system. Holden the novel main character, as Weber believes live in an Iron Cage. He lives in the capitalist system which is around him. Holden can not escape from this system because the system shapes his life, so he can not change anything.



Keywords: Society, Sociology, Modernism, Weber, Iron Cage, Capitalism system, Identity.

INTRODUCTION

Jerome David Salinger is an American author. He is a celebrated writer who well-known for his 1951 novel "The Catcher in the Rye". He raises in Manhattan; Salinger from his secondary school begins writing the short story and publishes his works in 1940 before second world war. *The Catcher in the Rye* is his another work which he publishes in 1951 is an immediate popular success. Scrutinising this novel, the researcher finds Holden the novel's protagonist carries the Weberian conception, *The Iron Cage*. Max Weber is a German sociologist who his most famous book is *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In this book Weber claims, the capitalism system is as an iron cage model where shapes everyone's lifestyle. In fact, Weber did not invent the iron cage conception. It was Talcott Parson who created this image in his first translation of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. In an iron cage model, Weber claims that "The domination of bureaucracies calls forth a cast of functionaries and civil servants who monopolize power. To the extent that this takes place, a fettering of every individual to his job...his class...and maybe to his occupation occurs, as well as the imposition upon the ruled of a status order tide to the bureaucracy" (Kalberg 180). According to Weber's notion, the capitalism system controls all parts of social life and nobody can escape from this organization and everyone should adapt him/herself to this system by rational principles.



I. Weberian Iron Cage Society

Max Weber is famous for his description of the modern world as an iron cage. To Weber, the modern world is moving nonstop and nobody can separate him/ herself from the rational and intellectual system. Weber believes that technology complete controls our manner of life in an iron cage. To Weber, this is the spirit of capitalism which is everywhere and creates the iron cage system for everyone. He argues that,

This iron cage society becomes more and more dominated by the impersonal and cautious values of the functionary on the one hand- duty, punctuality, reliability, respect for hierarchy, and so on- and instrumental calculations of interests and advantage on the other. A retreat into the private realm of intimacy where emotion and person - oriented values are still pulsating - and the cultivation of this private realm- is viewed as the single means of survival with a measure of dignity intact. Home and hearth become the refuge; here alone warmth and deep bonds are found. (Weber 1930)

As a matter of fact, the iron cage is Weber's complex view of the modern world. To him, this conception is a nightmare on the twentieth- century horizon which covers all parts of the life. Accordingly Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* claims that," The rationalist spirit ushered in by asceticism had achieved a momentum of its own and that under capitalism, the rationalist order had become an iron cage in which humanity was, save for the possibility of prophetic revival, imprisoned perhaps until the last ton of fossilized coal in



burnt'' (Weber 1952). In this regard, the modern man should adapt him/ herself to this mechanical world in order to save him/ herself otherwise he / she gets mad. Accordingly, Weber argues that,

People who practice practical rationality accept given realities and merely calculate the most expedient ways of dealing with the difficulties that they present. This type of rationality arose with the severing of the bonds of primitive magic, and it exists trans-civilizational and trans – historically; that is, it is not restricted to the modern Occident. This type of rationality stands in opposition to anything that threatens everyday routine. (Ritzer 136)

In fact, Weber believes that the destiny of modern man depends on rationalisation and intellectualization; because these two principles help them in order to accept the current situation to find the proper solution for their problems. To him , if the modern man rejects the rule of the system he becomes mad . As a matter of fact, his / her madness depends on the inability to adaptability.

II. Textual Analysis

Holden, *The Cather in the Rye*'s protagonist. A young man who narrates the events of the novel and his life story from a mental hospital. From the beginning part of the novel Holden introduces the novel's characters to the reader one by one and depicts them by his own catchphrase. Holden as a modern teenager carries the Weberian conception, the iron cage. He is a symbol of all modern teenagers. A young group who are on the border between childhood and maturity and can not understand and tolerate the mutability of the situation because of lack of knowledge. Regarding



this point, from Holden point of view, some of the things are crumbly and some of the people are phony. Hence Holden tries to save everyone and especially children by his own irrational reasons. That is why during his three days journey decides to change the current situation and persons even by his judgment. As a matter of fact, Holden can not adapt himself to the mechanical modern world, so all the times he tries to find a haven of tranquillity in this modern world which plunges into economic chaos.

Holden narrates his story from the mental hospital the place where Weber believes that, if the modern man can not tolerate the mechanical world he / she should go there. To Weber, the modern world is as an iron cage with rational principles which if everyone cannot adapt him/herself to the situation should find the home and hearth to the refuge (Weber 1930). Holden is the character who lives in the period of time which the mechanical living shapes his life cannot join himself to the modern rational principles that are why all the times judges the situation and people based only on the way something looks not in the way of realities. All the times he describes all the places and person based on something which he sees,

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth. In the first place, that stuff bores me, and in the second place, my parents would have about two hemorrhages apiece if I told anything pretty personal about them. They're quite touchy about anything like that, especially my



father. They're nice and all - I'm not saying that – but they're also touchy as hell. (Salinger

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Salinger depicts a teenager's tale in 1950 who lives in the modern mechanical living that he can not adapt himself to the life cycle that is why he tries to illustrate his revolt against the situation and all the rational principles. To mention a few, he wears his hat backward and uses a wide range of slang such as crumby, and phony. In fact, Holden cannot modify his behaviour towards the modern society. To him, all people who live in this situation are phony, because they adapt themselves to routine mechanical living plan as rules of the game. For this reason, when he goes to Spencer's house narrates,

He started going into this nodding routine. You never saw anybody nod as much in your life as old Spenser did. You never knew if he was nodding a lot because he was thinking and all, or just because he was a nice old guy that didn't know his ass from his elbow.

'What did Dr. Thurmer say to you, boy? I understand you had quite a little chat.'

'Yes, we did. We really did. I was in his office for around two hours, I guess.'

'What'd he say to you?'

'Oh ...well, about life being a game and all. And how you should play it according to the rules. He was pretty nice about it. ...'

'Life is a game, boy. Life is a game that one plays according to the rules.'

'Yes, sir. I know it is. I know it.'

The game, my ass. Some game. (Salinger 7)

Holden as a modernism teenager carries weber's notion about the modern world. Since Weber claims that, modern world as an iron cage which is around each person and controls all



parts of his/ her life. The rules of this iron cage are based on rational principles which lead each person to adapt him / herself to the current situation, so everyone who cannot tolerate the situation gets mad; because he /she does not want to obey the rules of the mechanical world which are based on rationality. In other words, rationalism in the modern world leads the human being to the iron cage. The rationality leading of the human being to obey the rules otherwise escape to haven tranquillity. Holden the modernism teenager during the three days tries to find the proper place in mechanical chaos world. He goes to the different places, sees the different persons in order to find the proper place in the iron cage where does not control and shape whole life, but he cannot; because he wanted to live out of the iron cage principles. He does not want to obey the rules. He leaves the school because to him all the teachers who work there are phony. As he narrated the school kicked he out because he was not hard working student and failed in four of his lessons.

As a matter of fact, Holden wanted to control the world by his principles as if he wanted to change the manner of life by a revolt against the rules but he could not. He has a day dreaming of saving the innocent children from the evil. To him, the modern world took all his advantages that he had. He depicted he went to private school with his sister and they went home every day and meet their parents. Unfortunately, Holden can not tolerate the current situation and face the realities that are why the only place where he finds as a haven tranquillity is a mental house as Weber believes that is the only place for a person who cannot adapt himself to the iron cage .

Conclusion



Although *Catcher in the Rye* was written in 1950, it is a relevant text which describes the living manner in twentieth - century. Holden Caulfield not only as a typical teenager but also as a modern man who carries the problems which capitalism system brings to human beings. There is no denying that the modern world is an iron cage as a Weberian notion. In this modern world which, all the principles are based on the rationalities and mechanical manners, nobody can change the rules. Holden during his three days journey depicts this machinery living. In fact, he illustrates how people in the different situation are as a puppet who capitalist system controls them. Accordingly, this is the rules of an iron cage which prepare the principles for people and all the social members should obey the rules. Holden as a modern man could not change the rules even when he left the school as he believed all of them were phony. Finally, for this reason, he decided to return to school because he accepted the rules of an iron cage.

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