

# **Perpetration of Crime in Dostoevsky's *Crime and punishment*: Revealing Interior Conflict of Criminal mind and Punishment as Salvation**

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## **Abstract**

Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* has embodied the psychological delusion of crime which has been a greater integration in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Russia under the Tsar's regime. The novel has shown an intricate interplay of criminal psychology and literature. The protagonist, Raskolnikov has suffered from the delusional incapability of an ordinary man which justifies his crime on ethical and rational grounds of retribution. The paper attempts to reveal the psychological account of a crime. The paper explores the dual sides of Raskolnikov's character- his manner and attitude towards crime after successful perpetration. Secondly, Dostoevsky is trying to convey the message of salvation which could only possible to bring appeasement in criminals psyche through criminal justice system. The article has explored a new dimension of critique which is better comprehension of artistic narration of criminal psychology and positive retribution for the restoration of civilized social character.

**Keywords:** Criminal Psychology, Criminal justice system, social character, psychological delusion,

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## 1. Introduction

*Crime and Punishment* embodies formidable experience of the novelist in setting prevailing conditions of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia. Dostoevsky is critical of repressive policy of Tsarist regime in slop of serfdom and other organizational system. The country needs social reforms; however, no proper steps have been taken to reduce the cruel practice of Tsar's despotic power.

Crime was uncontrollable in Russia at that time. The murder tale of two old women in Moscow in 1885 had relieved unusual coverage from press. The event had struck Dostoevsky's mind for the formulation of a novel. Moreover, the cities of Russia demonstrated dingy living conditions. Prostitutions and intoxication had been sprawled on the street in broad daylight, mendacity of women for money, child-labor insistence and congested filthy apartments are all wrapped in the chaos and disorder of repressive Russian system. The country by itself reflected social detachment between middle and lower class. The society at large held the state of inequalities and deficits. So the novel is the social documentation of 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia and a social protest-from the delineation of Raskolnikov's Character.

The paper attempts to explore the behavioral patterns of criminal mind which shows the broadening introspection of crime. Afterwards, the perpetration of crime caused vacillation for self-preservation and urge for salvation.

## 2. Criminology and Literature

*Crime and Punishment* apparently basis its main concern on the interior conflict of Raskolinkov's mind. His criminal act is undoubtedly motivated from social inequalities which has a greater effect on his personality and his reaction concerning precise circumstances. In assessing the situation by where a criminal value adopted by an individual, Sutherland (1937) says:

Criminal behavior is learned and it is learned in interaction with others who have already incorporated criminal values and illegitimate opportunities including conditions favorable to the learning of such a role.

The history of crime is as old as human. The first murder in human history according to the Standard Version of Bible (Genesis 4:8) expressed that Cain murdered his brother Abel. Cain's act of transgression is the first homicide in criminal law. The preceding customary law regarding the killing was inarguably solemn which had been scarcely inexcusable. (Okankow, 1980). Moreover, ancient literatures and folklores of Greece, Rome and Medieval Europe have a visible reflection of man's crime.

Nevertheless, a regular comprehension of crime and criminology gets its vibrant attention after the Enlightenment in Europe. The problems of crime during this era have prompted the study of criminology. The age was witnessed of fallible penal laws in Europe.

From the act of trivial crime, people were enumerated as demons and witches whose punishment were execution on public square and burnt them alive. It steered promptly to the growth of various institutions for understanding of crime and criminal mind. (Oloruntimehin, 1995). These institutions have been classified as classical, biological and sociological.

Much has been discussed about the nature of criminal mind. Based on Rational and Empirical propositions, some scholars believed that criminal behavior is innate, on the other hand, others have conditioned to environment. Certain human traits are genetically

transformed to its offspring and present a fixed nature. From the other perspective, human beings are viewed as complete formation of environment. The doctrine determines that crime caused from inequalities, poverty and economic disparities which lie profoundly on social structure.

Since certain crimes are not arguably in conscience of reasons why they commit crimes? These types of criminals are the examples of passions offenders, hate-criminals and Kleptomaniacs. In order to know the reasons for incidents and actions happened, it is essential first to understand the distinct factors which caused those crimes. Repression, sublimation, instinctual eruptions, unfulfilled desires and other forms of frustration can lead to a commission of crime. (Marx, 1984).

In the exploratory study of Crime and Punishment, the notions of interior conflict are the basis of criminal mind. Dostoevsky sees punishment as a cure for creating mental balance in personality. He considers it as a form of therapy which none other than a salvation for Raskolnikov.

### **3. The Structure of *Crime and Punishment***

The novel is accounted for an intricate interplay of criminology and literature. The protagonist- Raskolnikov is somber, recluse and intellectual who studies law at St. Petersburg University. He is well-accomplished law student but his stingy need and lack of money compelled him to abandon his studies. He finds in ways to earn money, thus imprisoned himself in a "tiny tomb-like room" which vent to neurotic disorder of thoughts. Further he takes shelter in recluse; the more he alienates from social attachments, the more he adds fuel to his interior conflict. His feelings of dissatisfaction and seclusion from humanity urge him to espouse superficial ideals. He forms his own ethical codes and wishes to aspire superior individual such as Napoleon who allows himself to transgress legal and moral boundaries. Raskolnikov finds himself as Nietzschean superman and decided to kill sixty years old woman, Alena Ivanovna for the purpose to use her money for the support of poor.

I wanted to become a Napoleon, that is why I killed her  
... I ... murdered her, following his example ... I ...  
resolved ... to build up a completely new career and  
enter upon a new life of independence. (406)

The act of crime reveals to him a failure in becoming "Superman". He utterly discovered that his mind is polarized in feelings for guilt and pride in transgressions. It caused nervous breakdown and dysfunction him to carry out the simplest social gestures. That is why Raskolnikov suffers from illness for few days and being nervous at the presence of people. Hackle (1968) remarked that "there is a tension within him; and his confession, expiation, and – rather tentatively suggested - regeneration are the way out of this tension". (p. 194). After incessant torture from his mind, he surrenders to police. He finds his life intolerable and subsequently confession frees him from the haunting memory of his past. He eventually discovers that his mind will set free by seeking punishment as salvation.

The structure of the novel is subjected to the rich flow of various mental states. The plot expounds easily the manipulation of internal forces motivated in many characters like Raskolnikov, Marmeladoff, Svidrigailoff, Sonia and more. The characters' traits appear indiscriminately and inconsistently in behaviours. The dual nature of their inner mind has affected the physical condition and idiosyncrasies. Raskolnikov is experiencing Schizophrenia and tormented by dementia. Svidrigailoff is a Byronic legend and Gothic scalawag. Sonia is caring and kind-hearted, however push to whoredom.

#### 4. Interior Conflict of Raskolinkov

James Robert has rightly observed that Raskolinkov is best seen as two characters. He sometimes acts in one manner and then suddenly in a manner completely contradictory. His psychological dilemmas actually motivate his actions unconsciously. Sometimes these inner dilemmas confront him in physical form i-e to other characters. Hence, the various aspects of his personality in the novel are due to inner confrontations. Maurice Beebe narrates the technique in this way:

Dostoevsky novel is expressed in terms of a conflict between opposite poles of sensibility and intelligence, spirit and mind, passiveness and aggressiveness, self-sacrifice and self-assertion...or, sometimes, "good" and "bad." (1955, p. 151)

One can see the rise of conflict with regard to his intellectual alienation and hostile social environment. The murder that he commits corresponds to these dual facets of Raskolinkov's personality. Alena is portrayed as the cold and vicious side of his nature while Lizaveta represents humane and submissive side. In killing of these two women symbolically demonstrate his inner dualism. The manner in which Raskolinkov commits murder, suggest the two sides of his characters. He kills Alena with the blunt side of the axe; on the other hand, he strikes Lizaveta with a sharp blade. This act of murdering is the example of his interior fight between submissive elements and viciousness in his nature.

His meeting with two characters- Sonia and Svidrigailov who have enlighten the polar aspects of his personality. Raskolinkov clearly sees the conflict of choice before him. The one side of his mind compels him towards crime which would lead him saving a child from a fire and give last money to Marmeladovs which propose to become like Sonia. On looking to these two characters, Raskolinkov consciously confronts the unconscious part of his personality. The inner dilemma of Raskolinkov has been represented by Svidrigailov and Sonia. He is struggling from the inside to free his feelings of remorse either by successful repression of conscience or by confession of crime. Thus encountering with inner peace, Wasiolek (1959, p.132) argues that "Sonia and Svidrigailov stand in antithetical relationship and that both are probably objectifications of the opposing moral principles that Raskolnikov carries within him". It is later personified paths make easy for him to see the implications of both and disguised by Svidrigailov and drawn to the chosen path of Sonia for redemption and salvation.

#### 5. A Desire for Salvation

*Crime and Punishment* deals with the problem of choice imposed upon man. The novel provides us the clash of free-will exercised by man and at the same time an attempt to find ways to restrain free-will. The drama of unleashing free-will on society has terrible consequences that follow to seek salvation in punishment. The novel reveals that a protagonist has been suffered from psychological conflict and leads to commit a crime but subsequent act force him to confess his sin. Raskolinkov's mind is haunting from his guilt of free-will. Since he does not feel free in his tomb like room; his poverty and lack of meaningful occupation made a decision to free his mind from the trauma of seeking punishment as salvation.

The desire for salvation has been recognized by Raskolinkov consciously. In fact, it emerges in his dreams. In the novel, he had four dreams. The first three are described by the narrator and the fourth by himself. Mortimer (1956, p.108) upholds in her article that "the succession of dreams forms a psychic pattern of motivation as valid as the course of

external episodes". The 'psychic pattern of motivation' is a significant aspect that finally compels Raskolnikov to espouse punishment. The first dream predicts to seek salvation after committing crime. In the dream, he sees a sadistic man kills an old horse. Raskolnikov points out that Raskolnikov is a compassionate little boy who is naturally a child and his childhood still exists in him. (qtd. Marchant 8). It is the presence of pathos which foreshadows the feeling of guilt and eventually confesses his crimes which would lead him for salvation.

Thus, in his entire dream, a psychological motivation creates in him an unconscious desire to be caught. The manifestation of this desire evokes his actions. The event of revisiting the crime scene, disturbed around the city. He saw himself helpless revealing an unconscious desire. It is this desire which instigates him to confess and accept punishment. Even Inspector Petovici who is an expert in criminal psychology, understands the mental position of Raskolnikov and tries to deliver him from darkness. Therefore, Petrovici concerns not only to convict the culprit but also to save him. "Petrovici knows that Raskolnikov needs the punishment and suffering to such an extent that, even if he ran away, he would return of his own accord" (Simon, 1967, p.169).

The path of Sonia which Raskolnikov chooses, leads him eventually to the desire of punishment and salvation. According to Rudicina (1972, p.1065) "the novel signifies archetypal scheme of rebirth through transgression followed by suffering, or expiation, which informs the central myth of Christianity, the Fall of Man and his salvation". The relationship between Sonia and Raskolnikov is important in this regard. Although Sonia is a prostitute in the novel; she has been portrayed as a saintly figure. Raskolnikov is attracted towards her by virtue of fellow transgressor who thinks that she can understand him. In the course of this relationship, Sonia has shown herself as loving, compassionate and altruistic towards him which is a redeeming aspect of her character. When Raskolnikov first visits her apartment he requests Sonia to read the story of Lazarus from the New Testament. The story foreshadows him and decided to confess his crimes to Sonia for eventual rebirth. Sonia not only brings about his spiritual salvation but also helps him in social and psychological redemption. "It is Sonia who understands Raskolnikov and points the way to salvation. He must go and stand at the crossroads, bow down, kiss the earth which he has defiled, and then bow down to all the world and say that he is a murderer" (Simons, 1967, p. 169). In this way, Sonia proposes salvation to make peace spiritually, psychologically and socially. The spirit demands the annihilation of his pride who conceded the rights of killing humans on the basis of interpreting as worthless. He needs to ask forgiveness from the earth. Secondly, he requires confronting himself and accepting his wrong-doings who psychologically relieved himself from the burden of guilt socially; he needs to break the walls of emotional loneliness by accepting punishment. Thus, Raskolnikov achieves his salvation by confessing spiritually to Sonia, socially surrenders to police and refusing his trial to accept punishment psychologically.

## 6. Conclusion

The story of *Crime and Punishment* suggests the inner battle of protagonist who has mistaken himself as an *Übermensch* and not bound by society's rules or moral law. In fact, he is an ordinary man with conscience and compassion. He confused himself from a false idol and spiritually, psychologically and socially confronted with himself. His inner conflict arises due to ostracism from university, engrossed in poverty from hand to mouth and self-imposed isolation which leads to the formation of criminal mind.

Dostoevsky has used the technique of interior monologue for the psychological exploration of protagonist. This technique is better for the understanding of characters and



reveals the split personality and mental disorder. Most of criminal mind faces the same dilemma and the technique attempts to explore the dark corners of the soul. It is easy way to bring forth the repressed desire into consciousness which need to be redress in order to have balance personality in society.

Finally, Raskolnikov's act of transgression and his punishment has brought an enormous change in subject. The transformation of his character from pride to penitent happens in the atmosphere of prison camp. He finds a new meaning of life which he could not discover it in freeing acts. So the author's resolution is not seeking poetic justice rather his purpose is the theme of salvation.

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