

The Paradoxical Character of Raskolnikov in Fyodor Dostoevsky's 'Crime and Punishment'

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ABSTRACT: *Fyodor Dostoevsky in his novel Crime and Punishment, the role of the main character Raskolnikov is found to be topical and paradoxical. The character has two sides to his personality and often hinders the readers to interpret or deduce from one perspective. The introspective nature of Raskolnikov from Crime and Punishment, allows delving into the existential rationales that influence the courses of action that he carries out. It is crucial to explore the workings of Raskolnikov's mind, to understand the motives by which he is compelled by to perform the heinous murder of the pawnbroker.*

This paper aims at providing an insight into the psychology of Raskolnikov's character. The duality and paradoxical nature of Raskolnikov's character is shown from various instances from the text. The paper would establish him as a lunatic as well as a poet and a lover.

Key words- *Paradoxical, fluctuation, money, lunacy, poverty, Intellectual*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky was born in Moscow in 1821, the second in a family of seven children. Dostoevsky's first teacher was his mother. At a later stage two teachers — a priest and a French undertook his teaching.

Dostoevsky's early education was in an army engineering school, where he was apparently bored with the regimented routine and the uncreative student life. Therefore, he spent most of his time dabbling in literary matters and in reading the latest authors; his penchant for literature was obsessed.

After spending two years in the army, Dostoevsky launched his epistolary novel named Poor Folk, and the critical opinion was that 'a new Gogol had appeared'.

Perhaps the most significant years of Dostoevsky's melodramatic life occurred soon after the publication of Poor Folk. These years included some of the most active, changing phases in all of Russian history, and Dostoevsky had an unusually active role in this era of change. Using influences acquired with his literary achievements, he became involved in political intrigues of a questionable nature. He deeply influenced and inspired by new radical ideas that became famous in Russia influenced from the west. Soon Dostoevsky became associated with those who came forward to revolutionize Russia with myriads of Western reforms. During this time he started publishing different articles that concerned various political questions even though they were illegal along with printing that was controlled and censored by the government.

Physically and psychologically Dostoevsky was never what one may call normal. He showed symptoms of irregular pulse and nervous disorder and headaches. He was, since his boyhood, a hypochondriac. A victim of frequent depression, he had hardly any playmates. Needless to say, the year 1866 is a significant year in Dostoevsky's life. He started writing Crime and Punishment, his magnum opus, and met his future wife, Anna Grigorievna Sanitkina. He had creditors galore, and, therefore, he fled from Petersburg.

After finishing Crime and Punishment, Dostoevsky married again and went abroad, hoping to find peace from numerous creditors and also hoping to begin a new novel. The peace of mind Dostoevsky longed for he never found; instead, he accumulated even more guilt in addition to his ever-mounting debts from gambling. Dostoevsky composed a novel The Idiot while he was abroad. The plot of the novel was about a beautiful soul called 'Prince Christ' as he hoped to create a man who could never hate and who was incapable of base sensuality. This novel can be truly termed as one of his masterpieces, a fascinating and intense story describing about the destructive power of good.

Dostoevsky's last novel, The Brothers Karamazov, was his great masterwork and is today considered a masterpiece of Western literature. Only a year after its publication, Dostoevsky was dead, but already he was acknowledged to be one of Russia's greatest writers. Crime and Punishment is the first of the five long novels of Dostoevsky's maturity. In this novel, he seeks to prove that crime is always followed by Nemesis or Punishment. The novel's central theme is based upon great psychological trauma and physical tension which was fuelled by Dostoevsky's sinister evocation of Petersburg.

Overview of the Novel 'Crime and Punishment'

The novel is about an impoverished student named Raskolnikov who believes that he is an extraordinary man. He then formulates a theory where he suggests that the extraordinary men of the world must have a right to commit any crime if they have something of worth to offer humanity. In a process to prove his theory, he first murders an old, then a despicable pawnbroker and later her half-sister because she happened to see him suddenly. After committing the crimes, he becomes ill and lies in his room semi-conscious for several days. During his recovering state, he is also visited by Luzhin, who is engaged to Raskolnikov's sister, Dunya. Raskolnikov is somewhat not fond of him so he insults Luzhin and sends him away because he resents Luzhin's domineering attitude toward Dunya.

Raskolnikov slowly recovers and one day goes out and reads about the crime in all the newspapers of the last few days. On the way meets a police official and almost confesses the crimes he has committed. He loses his mind and starts ranting so much so that the official becomes suspicious. Later, he finds Marmeladov dying, a minor government official, who was struck by a carriage as he lurch across the street in a drunken state. Raskolnikov goes and assists the man and later he leaves all his money to the destitute widow. After returning to his room, he finds his mother and sister who have just arrived to prepare for the wedding with Luzhin. Raskolnikov at once denounces Luzhin and refuses to allow his sister to marry such a mean and nasty man. In the mean time, Dunya's former employer, Svidrigailov, arrives in town and looks up Raskolnikov and asks for a meeting with Dunya. Earlier Svidrigailov once attempted to seduce Dunya and when Raskolnikov had heard of he got infuriated developing a violent dislike for the man.

Raskolnikov then hears that Porfiry a police inspector is out on streets secretly interviewing all people had any business with the old pawnbroker was his acquaintance.. Raskolnikov meets Sonya Marmeladov, the daughter of the dead man that he had helped and asks her to read to him from the Bible the story of 'Lazarus. He sympathises with Sonya who was forced into prostitution in order to support her family financially while her father drank constantly. Thus in her suffering, she becomes a universal symbol for Raskolnikov. Therefore he promises to tell her who murdered the old pawnbroker.

During an interrogation with Porfiry, Raskolnikov decides to confess everything to Sonya. During the confession, Svidrigailov was listening to everything through the adjoining door. He uses this information to blackmail and try to force Dunya to sleep with him who refuses and he kills himself later in the night.

Later the police inspector reveals to Raskolnikov that he knew who the murderer was. Raskolnikov fully confesses to the murder after talking to Sonya and is sentenced to eight years in a Siberian prison. Sonya follows him and with her help, Raskolnikov begins his regeneration and repent.

Raskolnikov as a paradoxical character

"The lunatic, the lover and the poet are of imagination all compact" -A Midsummer Night's Dream

Apparently, the above given quotation is very much in sync with the nuance and trait of the lunatic or abnormal nature is quite pristine. Needless to say, Raskolnikov is an intellectual student of St. Petersburg. Unfortunately, even if he is an intellectually rich but financially poor every so often he fails to meet his two ends. His last name is 'Raskol' which means to split, and this name is used in order to show the split in the personality of Raskolnikov. Therefore, this economic problem is one reason of his divided nature because it can be seen that Raskolnikov is warm and kind at one point of time but the next moment he appears to be cold, callous, indifferent and unconcerned. Hence, due to this bipolarity of actions his personality seems to be strange and contradictory. He refuses to believe at first that the murders of Alyona Ivanovna, the old Pawnbroker and Moneylender are a crime since he considers himself to be of a high moral standard.

The novel also brings forth his assumption upon himself as a philanthropic, a lover and poet because unlike the average run of criminals, Raskolnikov has a feeling heart and aesthetic sense. He was profoundly shocked at the appalling poverty, destitution, alcoholism, prostitution and the stunning atmosphere of St. Petersburg. He was wondering why in all great cities men are not just impelled by necessity but are peculiarly inclined to live and settle in just those parts of the city where there are no gardens or fountains but dirt and stretch and all sorts of filth. Raskolnikov told a stranger that he would love to hear singing to a street organ on a cold, dark, damp Autumn evening — it must be damp- when all the passerby have pale green sickly faces, or better still when wet snow is falling straight down, when there's no wind and the street lamps are shining through it. Moreover, the attachment of Raskolnikov with Sonia who lead him a new lease of life and letter from his mother excites him with devoted feeling for her, emphasizing his compassionate nature.

The plot of the novel presents a double conflict in the mind and psychology of the main protagonist. Raskolnikov is seen to have two sides-one external and one internal: the one conflict is between the estranged individual and his own hostile universe. The other is the clash between his isolated soul and his aesthetic consciousness. There are several ways of seeing the duality of his personality in the novel. If we see through a wider perspective one can find that Raskolnikov fluctuates between the ideas of his self will power and self-submissiveness. He can be deduced as both lunatic and a lover due to this fluctuating behavior instilled in him.

Actions in the novel that seem to be contradictory are due to Raskolnikov's fluctuation between these two extremes of his personality. The first section of the novel starts with a crime committed by this intellectual. The crime done due to his belief that some men have abilities which make them extraordinary while other possesses no abilities. It was this intellectual aspect of his character that causes him to execute his crime to see if he possessed the capacity to transcend conscience. His punishment comes due to the result of the predominance of conscience. Therefore, one aspect of his character is a cold, inhumane. The other aspect is the warm, compassionate side, revealed in his charitable acts. By examining Raskolnikov's inner psyche and decision making processes it can be understood how the portrayal of existentialist ideals as represented by Raskolnikov, evolve through the plot of the novel. This changing attitude of Raskolnikov and his distorted relations influence and form the existential tendencies that Raskolnikov personifies.

So from the above discussion it can be concluded that the very tone of lunacy, lover and poetic nature is very much associated with Raskolnikov because from very first phase of the novel it is seen that Raskolnikov is a man of divided nature and the same time saturated with subtle feelings of love and poetic predilection. The problem in the novel lies in the process of bringing these two opposing parts of Raskolnikov's personality combining into a single functioning person. To do this, Dostoevsky opens with the crime, which is handled rather quickly so as to get to the punishment.

II. CONCLUSION

The novel Crime and Punishment's main protagonist Raskolnikov's divided nature can be seen from two standpoints i.e., a lunatic and a poet and lover. This is due to fact that the immoral acts and convictions of Raskolnikov is beyond humanity. It's important to stress on the fact that he shouldn't have to take the law into his hand. Moreover, Raskolnikov would not have killed the pawnbroker if he was not hamstrung by the frustration and financial problem. On the other side, he is a true lover and a poet and loved his mother and sister very dearly. Hence his poetic cult is also reflected in his dreams and words- that he would love to hear singing to a street organ on a cold, dark, damp Autumn evening — it must be damp- when all the passerby have pale green sickly faces, or better still when wet snow is falling straight down, when there's no wind and the street lamps are shining through it. Raskolnikov justifies his crime through a philosophy he has come up with: the man with power is the man to rule over all others. But this power is given only to those who dare take it and Raskolnikov wanted to know he possessed the courage to take that power. He also had to battle with his rationalization of the murders. Raskolnikov's dual personality causes him to act differently. He does all acts that he thinks to be virtuous according to him but in the long run those prove to be abysmal. Unfortunate childhood events, poverty, and isolation lead him to draw up a theory that ends up being his demise. Dostoevsky's description of Raskolnikov fits that of Russia in the 19th century very well. He uses Raskolnikov's fate as a model to predict the undesirable future if Russia has to come if it continues its nihilistic, inconsiderate ways.

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