

**EXPLORING REDEMPTION IN DOSTOYEVSKY'S CRIME AND PUNISHMENT:  
A PSYCHO-ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE**

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***Abstract***

Dostoyevsky's life was full of sufferings, hardships and mental agony which had a direct bearing on his mind and psychology. True to the meaning of his name, duality in Raskolnikov's nature and psychology exactly matches and in consonance with the meanings of his name. The author makes use of Raskolnikov's dreams to highlight his disturbed psyche. In Raskolnikov, Dostoyevsky depicts a clash between reason and conscience. The purpose of this research paper is to explore the concept of redemption in Dostoyevsky's novel Crime and Punishment in the light of psycho-analytical perspective. The concept of redemption through sufferings finds a conspicuous place in Dostoyevsky's works, particularly, Crime and Punishment. Dostoyevsky depicts several perspectives in the novel Crime and Punishment.

**Keywords:** Agony, Duality, Consonance, Conscience, Redemption

The purpose of this research paper is to explore the concept of redemption in Dostoyevsky's novel Crime and Punishment in the light of psycho-analytical perspective. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, an eminent Russian psychologist, novelist, existentialist and philosopher, considered one of the greatest psychologists in the history of literature. The depiction of human state of mind and its psychological framework, leading to crime followed by guilt and redemption had a profound impact on 20th century fiction. Dostoyevsky's philosophical and psychological insights enabled him to portray the thematic concerns of crime, guilt and redemption in emotionally and spiritually downtrodden characters of his works.

The concept of redemption through sufferings finds a conspicuous place in Dostoyevsky's works, particularly, Crime and Punishment. Dostoyevsky's life was full of sufferings, hardships and mental agony which had a direct bearing on his mind and psychology. The contrasting nature of his parents, sudden and tragic death of his father and later experiences in labour camps and exile had direct bearing on his writings and got portrayed through various characters of his works.

Dostoyevsky's insight into the multilayered psychological traits of the protagonists of his

works reflects on the plight and inner psychology of the tormented 19th century Russian Society. Nineteenth century witnessed the rise of British

imperialism and counter movements of democracy. It shook the foundations of feudalism and monarchy. In 19th century, Russia went through numerous transitions due to remarkable scientific discoveries, industrial revolution and implementation of Judicial Reforms Act of 1864 etc. Religious beliefs (Christianity) came under interrogation and reconsideration with Charles Darwin's Origin of the Species (1859). This transitional period was marked by several reforms and development of revolutionary ideas. These changes, in one way or the other, tended to shape the thematic concerns of the works of Dostoyevsky. His ideology got influenced not only by the multiple conflicts and contradictions of his times, but also by his biographical events as well.

Dostoyevsky is considered one of the greatest writers of the modern capitalist metropolis. He exposes the mental deformation occurring in capitalist society. He relates the psychology of his characters and their growth of moral ideas to the social misery of modern metropolis. He has brilliantly reflected the metropolitan problematics in the characters of his works. In this context, Georg Lukacs, an eminent Hungarian philosopher remarks: "He created men whose destiny and inner life, whose conflicts and interrelations with other characters, whose attraction and rejection of men and ideas illuminated all the deepest questions of that age." (Lukacs, 147). The characters of Dostoyevsky reflect the extreme despair of his age. According

to Lukacs, the despair becomes a principle of excess. His characters are rebellious, they break rules and shatter the accepted norms. Their explosivity leads to their emancipation and, in this way, they become breakthrough characters. The unique ability of Dostoyevsky to negotiate the multiple voices of his times makes him a great craftsman. His works are replete with the juxtaposition of these plural consciousnesses simultaneously.

Dostoyevsky, in *Crime and Punishment* brings together the multiple voices, as is evident in *Raskolnikov*. As Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, a great Russian philosopher and semiotician, believes that there is a co-existence of multiple voices in the novels of Dostoyevsky. Bakhtin, in his work *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* emphasizes that Dostoyevsky has developed a new genre of "polyphonic novel" (Nietzsche, 3), a novel of multiple voices, where several consciousnesses run parallel.

The depiction of human state of mind leading to crime and murder and the exploration of the themes of self-destruction, guilt and salvation had a profound influence on Dostoyevsky's writings. Friedrich Nietzsche, a German philosopher, considers Dostoyevsky as "the only psychologist from whom he had anything to learn about the psychology of the criminal, the slave mentality, and the nature of resentment." (Bakhtin, 8). The depiction of redemption through suffering is evident in the novel *Crime and Punishment* (1866), one of the greatest accomplishments of Dostoyevsky.

The traumatic events and happenings in the life of Dostoyevsky in 1849, i.e. his arrest along with other group members for subversive activities, pronouncement of death sentence and then sudden and unexpected change of death penalty into four years of rigorous imprisonment in Siberia followed by six years' forced military service, prompted him to write *Crime and Punishment*. After his release from imprisonment in 1854 and subsequent appointment in military service, he wrote to his brother Mikhail Semipalatinsk stating that he had undergone a spiritual and psychological transformation: "No outside events, no disturbances in my life, no mishaps. But what is happening in soul, heart and mind, what has sprung up, ripened or been blighted... that cannot be told and written down on a scrap of paper .... On the whole, prison has

destroyed many things in me and created new." (Gide, 71).

The novel is an authentic presentation of emotional trauma and psychological anguish of *Raskolnikov*. He is portrayed as a frail but handsome man who is introvert, proud and intelligent. He is awfully short of money but curiously doesn't even wish to take up any work or job to earn his livelihood. He hasn't enough money even to pay monthly rent. That's why he owes lots of money to his landlady who constantly demands rent every now and then. *Raskolnikov* always tries to avoid her by telling concocted stories. He is absolutely clueless as to how he should acquire enough money to pay off his debts and lead a decent life. The next day, he receives a letter from his mother, Pulcheria Alexandrovna that his sister Dunya has got engaged to Luzhin, a government official, and will be married soon. They are coming to St. Petersburg to perform the wedding ceremony.

Confronted with such problems he is always busy talking to himself and contemplating some plan to fulfill his desires. He gets highly perturbed as to how he will be able to manage the situation: "He could find neither words nor exclamations with which to give voice to his disturbed state of mind." (Dostoyevsky, 13)

*Raskolnikov*, in the midst of his thought process, thinks of an immoral and wicked plan of killing the old pawnbroker to rob her money. The following day, he goes to some other tavern, where he observes a student talking about the meaninglessness of the life of old pawnbroker, who has stacked large sum of money with her, which can be used for the benefit of a fairly large number of poor people and the society will be purged off such a wicked creature. He even says: "If one were to kill her and take her money, in order with its help to devote oneself to the service of all mankind and the common cause: what do you think – wouldn't one petty little crime like that be atoned for by all those thousands of good deeds? Instead of one life – thousands of lives rescued from corruption and decay" (Dostoyevsky, 80)

On his way back home, *Raskolnikov* hears that Alyona, the pawnbroker will be all alone in her apartment the next day. He spends sleepless night, being in the state of utter excitement and restlessness.

The following day, eventually, he arms himself

with an axe and goes to the apartment of old pawnbroker to carry out his plan to commit a horrible crime of killing her. On reaching her apartment, he meets the old pawnbroker and brutally kills her. After the terrible crime, while Raskolnikov hastily moves across her bedroom, searches her belongings, looking for her money and valuables, he sees Alyona's sister Lizaveta walking in. He is taken aback and due to sudden rush of blood, Raskolnikov bounces upon and kills her as well.

Terror stricken, Raskolnikov washes the axe, his blood strained hands and also shoes, which he notices, had some strains. He is not in his proper senses and is utterly confused by now." 'Oh my God! I must flee, flee!' he muttered to himself, and he rushed into the entrance hall. But here there awaited him a shock of horror the like of which he had never once yet experienced." (Dostoyevsky, 99) He quickly slips away from that place and reaches his apartment. He is so frightened with the scene of twin murders, he desperately searches his clothes to find out any trace of blood and safely restores back the weapon used for the crime to its original place, behind yard keeper's room. Like any other criminal, he does not want to leave behind any clue for anybody. He feels that he has lost all his thinking ability. He enters his room and falls on the sofa, without taking off his clothes. "He did not sleep, but lay in a kind of oblivion." (Dostoyevsky, 106)

During the period before and after committing the heinous crime by Raskolnikov, Dostoyevsky portrays the unstable, unbalanced and unpredictable mindset of his central character very brilliantly. The author depicts several perspectives in the novel *Crime and Punishment*. This is symbolised through his portrayal of various symbolic characters, which makes him a novelist of "indeterminacy" (Rahv, 21).

This indeterminacy is exhibited in the psyche of Raskolnikov in the novel that reflects the life and culture of Russian society. Dostoyevsky is considered to be the first novelist who has very skillfully expressed this human characteristic of indeterminacy or indefiniteness through his protagonists in his novels. Raskolnikov is the brilliant example of such a character who "had begun to fall into a kind of absentminded, even reflective condition; at some moments he seemed to forget himself, or and cling to trivial things

instead" (Dostoyevsky, 98) He is always in the process of thinking, talking to himself, inventing plans to do something extraordinary but finds it very difficult to arrive at definite conclusion which he may implement without an iota of doubt.

The novelist illustrates a psychoanalytical exploration of the main character, Raskolnikov and other characters as well in his popular work *Crime and Punishment*. He presents the mindset of a criminal and other persons who are closely associated with him. In *Raskolnikov*, Dostoyevsky depicts a clash between reason and conscience. He portrays Raskolnikov as a very confused character by citing his efforts and preparations to commit the murder and then, his act of cleaning the weapon and keeping it at the original place and thereafter, dumping the robbed money in a secluded area and then forgetting that place. It suggests that Raskolnikov himself does not know exactly as to why he killed the pawnbroker or what was the real intention behind such a cruel act. Even while he is constantly haunted by the feeling of guilt, he cannot muster enough courage to face anybody and starts behaving in an eccentric manner merely at the reference of murders and at the very sight of investigation officer, Porfiry Petrovich. It is after very prolonged conversations and continuous counselling by Sonya that he barely prepares his mind to confess his crime.

In *Crime and Punishment*, Dostoyevsky successfully presents a thorough psychological analysis of principal characters by exhibiting their inner conflicts, emotional turmoil and consciousness. As Bakhtin aptly remarks, "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is, in fact, the chief characteristic of Dostoyevsky's novels." (Bakhtin, 6). The psychological struggle and disruption of Raskolnikov's psyche shapes the entire novel. The whole plot centres around the psychic turbulence of the central protagonist.

Dostoyevsky, in his specific ways, makes Raskolnikov a centre of several ideas. The psychological self-examining tendency of Raskolnikov is so powerful in the novel that it leads to his alienation and downfall. In order to make his psychological struggle more dense and meaningful, Dostoyevsky presents numerous images, particularly the dream imagery. The

author makes use of Raskolnikov's dreams to highlight his disturbed psyche. According to Sigmund Freud, a great neurologist and psychoanalyst, "Every dream will show itself to be a senseful psychological structure which may be introduced into an assignable place in the psychic activity of the waking state." (Freud, 1). Dreams, as defined by Freud, are the reflections of hidden fears and desires in the subconscious mind of a person.

Dostoyevsky, through the character portrayal of Raskolnikov rejects metropolitan capitalist society that was causing alienation. In this regard, Raskolnikov becomes a representative character of the problematic life of the modernist metropolitan Russia. As prominent sociologist Richard Quinney also argues that crime is a sociological process, which can be considered as a reflection of a situation in a social and cultural set up. He elaborates the situation wherein an individual thinks of committing a crime and how the society forms its perception about it. Likewise, the then prevailing socio-economic, political and cultural scenario of the Russian society had a direct bearing on Raskolnikov's psychology and mental turbulence leading to crime.

Dostoyevsky has also brought into play another aspect of schism in his pioneer novel *Crime and Punishment*. It is not just coincidence, but Dostoyevsky has deliberately and purposefully chosen the name of the central protagonist as Raskolnikov. His name derives its origin in the Russian word 'raskolnik' which means 'schism' or split between two opposing notions. True to the meaning of his name, duality in Raskolnikov's nature and psychology exactly matches and in consonance with the meanings of his name.

Dostoyevsky himself lived a very turbulent and uneasy life, full of bitter and horrible experiences. It appears that he has mirrored his own biographical sketch through excellent portrayal of the character of principal protagonist, Raskolnikov in his tremendously philosophical masterpiece *Crime and Punishment*. He has also dealt with quite exquisitely and magnificently various psychological issues and concepts like crime, guilt, redemption and punishment etc. in their different perspectives and in the context of the then prevailing socio-economic, socio-political and cultural environment and challenges through his characters.

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