



The Fragmented Self: An Analysis of Raskolnikov's Dualistic Nature in *Crime and Punishment*

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Abstract— In Dostoevsky's masterpiece *Crime and Punishment*, the character of Raskolnikov stands out as one of the most complex and enigmatic figures in all of literature. A brooding, intelligent, and deeply troubled young man, Raskolnikov embodies a range of contradictory impulses and emotions that make him both fascinating and disturbing. At the heart of Raskolnikov's character is his belief in his own superiority. He sees himself as a man of great intelligence and talent, one who is destined to make his mark on the world. This sense of superiority leads him to believe in his own right to commit murder, and it is this belief that ultimately drives the plot of the novel. Yet at the same time, Raskolnikov is also haunted by a sense of guilt and self-doubt. He cannot fully justify his actions to himself and is plagued by the fear of being caught and punished for his crime. This internal conflict leads him to a state of near-madness, and he becomes increasingly erratic and unpredictable as the novel progresses. This paper attempts to make a psychological study of the character of Raskolnikov by focusing on the element of dualism, mental anguish, alienation or monomania, morality, crime, suffering, and redemption.

Keywords— Anguish, Crime, Dualism, Punishment, Redemption, Suffering

Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* is one of the "quintessential" Russian novels which was serialized in the year 1866 in *The Russian Messenger* and published a year later as a single book format in 1867. A close inspection of the literary practice of Russian writers during this period shows that the Russian writers in the later half of the 19th century were the chief practitioners of realism. Their preoccupation with realism starkly contrasts with the principles of the Romantics who were sort of idealistic dreamers, harbouring utopian dreams for the future. Russian literature received enormous popularity and reached its zenith during this time. There is hardly any decade in the cultural scenario of world literature which saw the production of three great classic masterpieces of all time in a single decade- Ivan Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons* (1862), Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1867) and Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* (1866). Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* thus appear as a representative Russian novel. Michael R Katz also mentions this novel: "*Crime and Punishment* (1866) has long been

considered the quintessential Russian novel. When it was translated into English in 1886, the critical reaction to it was mixed: on the one hand, it was greeted as a "work of extraordinary excellence, as a novel of a hitherto unknown stirring realism"; on the other hand, the book was condemned as "incoherent and inartistic" (p. 8).

If we make critical scrutiny of the period in which *Crime and Punishment* were written, we can see that the period witnessed many social upheavals. The ethnic and cultural history of Russia showcases a long history of serfdom. The ascension to the throne of Alexander II in 1855 and his 'great reforms' in providing emancipation to the slaves made major changes in society. The rapid changes in judiciary, administrative, and economic policies saw unprecedented changes in society, rapid urbanization, and migration of people from villages to cities. Moscow and St. Petersburg became the prominent hub of human beings, influencing almost every sphere of human life. The rise and growing popularity of print media, magazines, journals, and pamphlets were instrumental in dissipating the information

and news of society. Although the 'great reforms' aimed at the societal progress of Russian society, hidden underneath were the malice and the problems of Russia, the most prominent of which is the reflection of the large-scale unemployment and sheer amount of poverty, prostitution, and alcoholism in urban Russia. The dilemma of envisioning a developed Russian society and the precarious condition of the poverty-stricken Russian societal and cultural milieu is the source for the writers to deal with the realism of this period. Dostoevsky, in particular, is an ardent advocate of this conflict, and his central protagonist of *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov is a mouthpiece of this social dilemma.

Responses to Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* after 150 Years of its publication are so heterogeneous and diametrically opposite to each other that it startles the readers preliminarily, but on a deeper note, it also helps in enhancing the beauty and popularity of this novel. On the one hand, writers like Arthur Miller and Philip Roth are intensely intrigued by and greatly influenced by this novel; for Vladimir Novokov, and Maxim Gorki, Dostoyevsky is an 'evil genius' whom one should not read. This enigmatic dualism in Dostoevsky that is later manifested precisely in his masterpiece *Crime and Punishment* might have a biographical root. Dostoevsky's close involvement with the Petrashevsky Circle and his intense heed to the progressive liberal ideas of this circle at a very young age resulted in his imprisonment. His stay at the Siberian prison for five long years provided him the opportunity to read the Bible and follow its teachings for the remaining period of his life, which changed him completely. This metamorphosis from a progressive in the dilemma of the characters of his novels.

Dostoevsky's first novel *Poor Folk* deals with the issue of poverty of an impoverished office clerk, who is full of ambition to serve the entire world. It also reflects his problematic relationship with a woman. Dostoevsky's other novel *Double* describes the timidity of the schizophrenic protagonist falling in love with a woman who is above his status. Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, however, is a summation of these two novels, in terms of presenting an impoverished protagonist who somehow suffers from a schizophrenic denouement and psychic conflicts in his character. It is through his character that society gets reflected in the novel. The external society is reflected through the inner psychological turmoil of the central protagonist, Rodion Raskolnikov.

In Dostoevsky's masterpiece *Crime and Punishment*, the character of Raskolnikov stands out as one of the most complex and enigmatic figures in all of literature. A brooding, intelligent, and deeply troubled

young man, Raskolnikov embodies a range of contradictory impulses and emotions that make him both fascinating and disturbing. At the heart of Raskolnikov's character is his belief in his own superiority. He sees himself as a man of great intelligence and talent, destined to make his mark on the world. This sense of superiority leads him to believe in his own right to commit murder, and it is this belief that ultimately drives the plot of the novel. Yet at the same time, Raskolnikov is also haunted by a sense of guilt and self-doubt. He cannot fully justify his actions to himself and is plagued by the fear of being caught and punished for his crime. This internal conflict leads him to a state of near-madness, and he becomes increasingly erratic and unpredictable as the novel progresses.

Through the portrayal of Raskolnikov, the central protagonist of the novel, Dostoevsky brings home many complex psychological and religious issues like that - alienation or monomania, crime, suffering, morality, traditional orthodox Christian morality based on faith, suffering, and redemption. Rodyan Raskolnikov is intelligent but egotistical and obsessive and can swing between two extremes startling and confusing others. In the novel, we look at the ideas and actions of this intelligent impatient student in the Russian imperial capital, St. Petersburg. Raskolnikov's deep faith in how extraordinary men are allowed to transgress moral boundaries without punishment makes him wish to become 'Superman', 'Urbemensch', like Napoleon and Hitler, thus validating his future course of murdering an individual with a mission to benefit the society and get rid of poverty. In his words: "Extraordinary men have a right to commit any crime and to transgress the law in any way, just because they are extraordinary" (p. 247). The original Russian title of the novel- *Prestupléniye i nakazániye* indicates this point of 'stepping a cross' or 'traversing the legal and moral boundaries' to murder a pawnbroker. The novel acts as a sort of camera lens for projecting the psychopathological mindscape of the character. Raskolnikov generally focuses on something i.e. committing murder, or stealing money for bettering humankind that normal human beings generally tend to hide. Unlike most crime thrillers and detective fiction which generally focuses on the idea of 'whodunnit', Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* puts forward the idea of 'whydunnit' as Raskolnikov, prior to committing the murder and even after killing Ivanovna in Part -I, rationalizes his murder for the next sections in the novel.

Raskolnikov's firm conviction of his apparent superiority in spite of his being an ill-fed, poverty-stricken, drop-out monomaniac, isolated young fellow, that prompts him to rob and kill an elderly pawn-broker Alyona Ivanovna, gets thwarted when he shrinks away from his decision to kill Ivanovna. Again, a moment later, he

becomes resolved to kill her. This kind of dualism in the character of Raskolnikov is evident throughout the course of the novel. He initially believes that the world would not be unhappy if the pawnbroker is eliminated from the world. But once he commits the murder, all his high hopes and 'superman' visions are transformed into utter frustration, and paranoia, resulting in a complete nervous breakdown. After committing the murder in the first part of the novel, he spends the rest of the five parts of the novel justifying his actions of murdering Ivanovna on the one hand, and on the other, he searches for the means of redemption.

The oscillation in the character of Raskolnikov is pertinent throughout the novel. This is perhaps the most important guiding force that runs through the overall structure of the novel. For example, in the first part of the novel, on two separate occasions, he engages himself in an act, and then immediately withdraws from it and regrets his own action. Thus, when Raskolnikov encounters the drunkard Mermeledov at the tavern and learns the miseries of his family that his daughter Sonya is driven into prostitution to make the ends meet of the family, he feels sorry for the wife and daughter of Mermeledov. Later when Raskolnikov fetches the drunken Mermeledov to his family and meets the inmates of the family, and experiences dire poverty at the house, he leaves some money for them. But upon returning, he immediately repents his action of giving money to the Mermeledov family when he himself is suffering poverty. Next, at another event, he intervenes with a couple and attempts to help a seduced girl, but he immediately shrinks away from it, thinking that it is not his business to intercede in the personal life of someone. Thus his dualism creates two different behavioural patterns and split personality within the character of Raskolnikov. At times, he is kind, amiable, compassionate, and loving, helping the poor, and at other times, he is lonely, arrogant, proud, cold, and anti-social.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Raskolnikov's character is his relationship with women. On the one hand, he is deeply attracted to and fascinated by women, particularly the beautiful and enigmatic Sonia. Yet on the other hand, he is also deeply distrustful of women, and he sees them as weak and helpless creatures who are easily manipulated and controlled. This contradiction is perhaps best exemplified in his relationship with his own sister, Dunya, whom he both loves and despises.

Despite his many contradictions, Raskolnikov is also a deeply sympathetic character. He is driven by a desire to make a difference in the world, and his struggle to reconcile his own desires with the demands of society is a universal one. His sense of isolation and alienation is something that many readers can relate to, and his ultimate

redemption is a powerful testament to the human capacity for change. In many ways, Raskolnikov is a study of the contradictions that exist within all of us. He embodies the conflict between our desire for power and control and our need for connection and community. His story is a powerful reminder of the importance of empathy and compassion, and of the potential for redemption that lies within us all. Raskolnikov is a complex and multifaceted character whose contradictions and struggles continue to captivate readers to this day. His journey from arrogance and violence to humility and selflessness is a powerful testament to the human capacity for change, and his story is a timeless reminder of the importance of empathy, compassion, and understanding.

Raskolnikov, the protagonist of Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel *Crime and Punishment*, is a complex character who provokes both admiration and contempt. The novel is a psychological study of a man who commits a murder, and it explores the motives behind his actions and the consequences of his crime. Raskolnikov is a man of contradictions, and his behavior can be seen as both admirable and deplorable. One of the most striking features of Raskolnikov's character is his intellectual arrogance. He believes that he is a superior being and that he has the right to act according to his own morality. He sees himself as a Napoleon-like figure, who can break the rules in order to achieve a higher goal. This intellectual arrogance leads him to commit the murder of an old pawnbroker, who he sees as a parasite in society. Sarah J. Young in her book on *Crime and Punishment* has also mentioned that: "The murder has indeed been interpreted as an attempt not to "help his family but to free himself of the emotional burden placed on him by his mother through the proxy of his debt to the moneylender" (p. xvii).

However, Raskolnikov's intellectual arrogance is also his downfall. He is unable to cope with the guilt that comes with his crime, and his mental state deteriorates rapidly. He becomes paranoid and delusional, and he is haunted by the fear of being caught. His inner turmoil is intensified by the presence of the police inspector, Porfiry Petrovich, who suspects him of the crime and tries to manipulate him into confessing.

Raskolnikov's redemption comes through his relationships with other people. He is initially unable to form meaningful connections with others, and he sees them as means to an end. However, he begins to change when he meets Sonia, a young woman who is forced into prostitution to support her family. Sonia is the only person who sees the good in Raskolnikov, and she encourages him to confess his crime and accept the consequences of his actions. Raskolnikov's transformation is gradual, and it is not until

the end of the novel that he is truly redeemed. He confesses to the murder, and he is sentenced to hard labor in Siberia. However, he accepts his punishment willingly, and he begins to see the value of human life. He becomes a more empathetic and compassionate person, and he is able to form genuine connections with others.

One of the key themes of *Crime and Punishment* is the idea that there is no such thing as a "superman." Raskolnikov believes that he is a superior being, a Napoleon-like messiah for human beings, who can traverse moral boundaries of committing murder if it is done for the well-being of society. This idea routes back to Nietzsche's idea of 'Übermensch' or 'superman' in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* who can break the rules in order to achieve a higher goal, but the novel ultimately shows that this belief is flawed. Raskolnikov's crime is not a heroic act, but a cowardly one, and he is only able to achieve redemption by accepting his guilt and facing the consequences of his actions.

Another important psychological aspect of Raskolnikov's character is the idea that poverty and desperation can drive people to commit crimes. Raskolnikov's motives for the murder are complex, but they are rooted in his disgust at the poverty and suffering that he sees around him. The novel is set in St. Petersburg, a city that is characterized by poverty and squalor, and it shows how this environment can push people to the brink of desperation. Dostoevsky's use of symbolism is also notable in the novel to understand the psychological makeup of Raskolnikov. The most prominent symbol is the pawnbroker's apartment, which is described in detail and serves as a metaphor for the inner workings of Raskolnikov's mind. The apartment is described as a "stifling, evil place," and it represents the darkness and chaos of Raskolnikov's psyche. The bloodstained axe that he uses to commit the murder is another important symbol, representing the violence and brutality of his act.

Raskolnikov's ambivalence and dilemma have their resonance with many of the characters from Western literature who suffers from a similar kind of schizophrenia. This contradiction in the character of Raskolnikov and his mode-swinging nature is much in line with Macbeth, Hamlet, Prufrock, and other literary characters in Western literature. Starting from Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* which represents the two contrary aspects of human life—the physical prowess of Achilles and the intellectual cunningness of Odysseus gives birth to this concept of binary. William Blake's dictum on binarism can also be quoted here from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790) to validate this point: "Without contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love, and

Hate are necessary to Human existence." Harold Bloom also comments that: "What seems to me strongest in Dostoevsky is the control of visionary horror he shares with Blake, an imaginative prophet with whom he has absolutely nothing else in common" (p. 3). Again, apart from this British Canonical literature, if we examine American literature, we can see also find similar thoughts coming from one of the most celebrated American writers, Walt Whitman, who in his poem 'Song of Myself, 5' mentions:

Do I contradict myself?

Very well then I contradict myself,

(I am large, I contain multitudes.) (6-8)

Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov suffers from a similar kind of contradiction in this novel. But his condition is more precarious which makes him different from his Western counterparts. Dostoevsky presents the route source of this duality in the character of Raskolnikov which stems from his disassociation with religious church services. The English rendering of the Russian name of Raskolnikov hints at that point. Raskolnikov comes from the Russian root word 'raskonik' which means 'schismatic' or someone who lost his connection to that church. Dostoevsky's own transformation from dissent to a religious figure after the phase of imprisonment is reflected in the character of Raskolnikov as well, who also undergoes a similar kind of transformation after committing murder and undergoing mental anguish and suffering and thereby getting religious redemption after imprisonment. For Raskolnikov, this psychological suffering results in religious expiation. Although this religious overtone of the novel is aimed at Dostoevsky at the heart of the novel, it is more important to note that this dilemma and contradictory nature make him a more loveable and immortal character of the novel.

Overall, *Crime and Punishment* is a masterpiece of Russian literature, and Raskolnikov is a character who fascinates readers today. His journey from intellectual arrogance to humility and compassion is a powerful reminder of the importance of human connection and the value of human life. The novel is a critique of both the nihilism and the utopianism of the 19th century, and it presents a nuanced and complex portrayal of the human condition.

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