

# Understanding The Mental Landscape Of The Protagonist Of Crime And Punishment

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*Abstract: To certain extent man's mental condition and changing pattern of psyche is extensively influenced by his socio-economic milieu which formulates his mental landscape. Fyodor Dostoevsky is the writer who projects perfect panorama of man's tormented soul and unending dilemma of existential significance at it best. His protagonist in the novel has been delineated primarily as a psychological being whose conscience suffers pangs of agony. Intelligently, Dostoevsky has put forward his concern for redefining the issues of crime and punishment. Undoubtedly, this novel is highly imbued in Nietzschean colour though it challenges the state apparatus with religious connotation. Through literary devices like monologues the novelist has dissected the inner feelings of his protagonist whose entity and identity changes after 'that' crime. My paper is an attempt to study and analyze the mental landscape of the protagonist of the novel influenced by his surroundings and conflict in his soul. This is what makes this novel a classic in world literature. Dostoevsky's aim has been to expose the autocratic elements, rooted in the deeper layers of the society, which remove all the unique as well as creative features from a human being and reduces him to a mere social animal.*

*Keywords: mental, landscape, psyche, society, understanding, dilemma, existential.*

*Crime and Punishment* is a brilliant work by the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky. It penetrates deeply in to human psyche which is embroiled in the social and economic state apparatus and eventually, is left with a tortured soul and haunted mental condition of agonized conscience where he is entirely caught in a delirium and suffers pangs of remorse. Actually, this masterpiece projects man's extreme desire to rule the world influenced by thinkers like Nietzsche and Pushkin and on the other hand he is unable to cope with his tormented soul and unable to suppress the voice of his conscience where his sense of guilt penalizes him for his crime with bitter inner conflict and chaos. It flaunts perfect panorama of modern world where man is facing existential dilemma of meaninglessness and emptiness of life in this universe where society causes violence against man's entity and identity as well.

Fyodor Dostoevsky was not only a renowned Russian novelist but he was a philosopher and thinker too. He is usually considered as a pioneer of Existentialism in literature. He started writing in the prime of his life and produced several

novels, novellas and short-fiction. Fyodor Dostoevsky wears many caps on his head when it comes to themes and narrative style of his story-telling. He infused his stories quite imbued with his social, economic and religious milieu of his contemporary time but his focus is always on the inner human psyche and human conscience. He is regarded as an exquisite observer of human psyche. His well-known works are *Poor Folks*, *Demons*, *Crime and Punishment*, *The Idiots* and many more. He is the writer who gave religious wave a spiritual direction- the very foundation of human values. His works are true reflection of his own autobiographical hardships which he experienced during his sentence to death, exile and compulsory military service. Probably, his authentic tormented human psyche oozed in inky words in his works which make him a celebrated writer across the globe.

Understanding itself is mental condition that demands empathy to comprehend an abstract and physical idea. In fact, it is moreover a meticulous psychological process to grasp and think sensitively about some situation or message or idea. Considerably, it is a relationship between the knower and the

object of understanding. It shows intelligent way to probe in to an object whether physical or abstract.

“Understanding is often, though not always, related to learning concepts, and sometimes also the theory or theories associated with those concepts. However, a person may have a good ability to predict the behaviour of an object, animal or system — and therefore may, in some sense, understand it — without necessarily being familiar with the concepts or theories associated with that object, animal or system in their culture. They may, indeed, have developed their own distinct concepts and theories, which may be equivalent, better or worse than the recognized standard concepts and theories of their culture.” (Wikipedia)

Again, when it comes to mental-landscape I would like to define it as an overall milieu of an individual comprising social, economic, political, religious and natural and cultural aspects. It is not only limited to environmental dimensions but it's also depend on perspectives of their own to them. These cultural and social aspects keep on changing so as their perception as well. Actually, this is an important fact behind converting the milieu in to mental landscape. Mental landscape implies human as key element. Human are surrounded by some space and the life living in to certain cultural and socio-political scape forms and formulates mental landscape of an individual particularly.

Protagonist is a character in stories, novels, dramas and film as well (physical or mental or abstract) usually as a leading persona or principal personality around whom the entire story and its actions revolve. Opposite to every protagonist there is an antagonist projects conflict, complications and obstacles. Therefore, I would like to study particularly the protagonist in the novel who seems to me a central character as well as in contrast with antagonist to get a better picture of the research issue, thus revealing the strengths and weaknesses of the protagonist. Sometimes, deuteragonist and tritagonist also act as the instigator or cause of the sufferings and turbulence of the protagonist. Protagonist is a person who is supposed to get audience's sympathy and pity as Aristotle has expounded in his *The Poetics*.

When it comes to Crime and criminals usually, it is related to legal system of a territory. Crime is being punished brutally by legal system as devils and barbarians. Most of the crimes happen due to lack of accountability and due to violation of norms and rules which are erected for preserving the good of entire society. But when it comes to relationship of crime with three various levels that crime concerning the whole society, crime in relation to our peers and crime to our own self. This is indeed the micro level analysis of crime. In examining a criminal, one could use Sigmund Freud's personality analysis which says that traumatic experiences, which have occurred during infancy and childhood, could affect an adult personality (Freud, 1933)

Sometimes criminals are arguably not aware of the reasons why they commit crimes. Examples of this type of criminals are Kleptomaniacs, hate-criminals, passion offenders and insane offenders. To explain why an incident happened or why a deed was done one has to understand that people's actions are caused by different factors. Economic hardships, family problems, situational conditions, the person's psyche or psychological make-up, unfulfilled desire, and other forms of

frustration can lead to a commission of crime (Marx, 1984). A good example of a man who kills his wife in a blind rage is Othello in Shakespeare's play, Othello. As has been earlier mentioned, crimes are committed for assorted reasons. Some kill for personal reasons as a reaction to societal pressures. For instance, in the case of Raskolnikov, he revolts against the crushing socio-economic conditions in which he lives. Members of his class were not only alienated from the products of their labour but also suffered in the hands of a callous minority bent on exploiting the majority. Society, according to sociologists, not only controls our development, but also shapes our identity, our thoughts, and our emotions as the works of scholars like Herbert Mead, Charles H. Cooley; Emile Durkheim have shown. The structure of society becomes the structure of our consciousness and creates our mental landscape.

When Raskolnikov goes to the police station where Porphyrius (the Magistrate), torments him with self-incriminating questions and ironic statements he himself is trapped by his tormented mental condition. Later, Raskolnikov confesses his crime to Sonia and admits that in killing the two women – Alena Ivanovna and her servant and sister, Elizabeth - he truly committed murder of himself that is actually a crime against his own self of which he becomes very well aware of. Svidrigailoff overhears the confession and discloses his knowledge of it to Raskolnikov. Under the impression that Porphyrius suspects him of the murders, and realizing that Svidrigailoff knows the crime done by him, Raskolnikov finds life unbearable and all the more torturous. Raskolnikov turns himself over to the Police and is sentenced to eight years in Siberia. Sonia follows him to the prison yard and with her help, he begins his regeneration.

The protagonist of *Crime and Punishment* seems influenced by Nietzschean thoughts who does crime to solve his monetary problem and tries to be a super human and disregard humanity. But he suffers a mental agony and undergoes to a psychological trauma. Raskolnikov becomes a metaphysical rebel and suffers terrible consequences. He challenges existential significance and questions morality, faith, injustice, hope and human values as well. Dostoyevsky's writing style is a logical outcome of various influences which he had both from the literary world, and from his life experiences. *Crime and Punishment*, the first of Dostoyevsky's great long novels reveals the author's mastery of psychological observation and analysis.

Dostoyevsky is a master of portraying mental landscape of his protagonist through marvelous delineation of his subconscious where most of our action and thoughts reside. Intensely and intimately he has delineated the minute layers of his subconscious mind. According to Freud (1932) dreams occupy a special place in Psychoanalysis: they are indispensable. It is the dream in part which symbolically directs our attention to the meaning of the story.

Dostoyevsky as a brilliant novelist uses the literary device of monologue which can best mirror his protagonist inner picture of mind. In monologues, his central characters speak a lot and flaunts an authentic reflection of his subconscious mind which is really more important than conscious mind. In fact, through this device he explores and unfolds his mental landscape how it has been formulated through his perception

and his milieu. This gives a better understanding of the characters and why they do all that they do. The use of interior monologue also reveals the soul that is divided and a split personality. It is a process where one talks to himself and peep through his soul as well. It shows the dilemma of good and bad. We notice a deliberate attempt by Dostoyevsky in this novel to accentuate the unexpected in his characters' behaviours so that they disrupt the lives of others around them. Svidrigailoff kills himself by pulling the trigger against his body. Dounia is willing to sacrifice herself to Loosing for her brother, Raskolnikov. Sonia is ready to give herself to several men to satisfy her economic needs and those of her family.

This novel interrogates the meaning of life and significance of existence of human beings. It questions the meaningless social and survival struggle projected through the protagonist life. The bitter suffering and mental agony can be felt through the protagonist life shown during his prison time. He is the person whose identity is getting crushed under the heavy wheels of social apparatus where there is no hope of his freedom and no voice for individual solace.

*Crime and Punishment* is a story which narrates the mental agony and moral dilemmas of Rodion Raskolnikov, an impoverished ex-student in Saint Petersburg who formulates and executes a plan to kill an unscrupulous pawnbroker for her cash to solve his monetary problem. As we open the first chapter of the novel we also get disturb by the troubled life of the protagonist. Gradually, we are involved with mental landscape wonderfully observed by the novelist and articulated through intricate pattern of conscious and subconscious mind uttered out in monologues. At the end of the chapter even it is not clear what exactly is disturbing the protagonist but his troubled soul and upset peace of mind is very much clear. Dostoevsky's detailed description immerses the reader into a world of bleak poverty. It does not take long to determine that Raskolnikov is poor; but when we are led through the burning, stinking streets, among drunks and prostitutes, we see that his environment is just as poor as he is. His clothes are described as "rags" and he has not eaten enough in two days. The setting reinforces the young man's near-destitution. Raskolnikov's mental condition is stuck with something 'that' which interferes his thought s and involves him with bitter and acute psychological trouble and leads him towards a trauma.

A theme of mistrust runs through this chapter, setting the stage for things to come while giving a sense of the hostility of Raskolnikov's surroundings. The pawnbroker mistrusts Raskolnikov even though she has seen him before; one gets the sense that she mistrusts everyone, clients or otherwise. The tradesman in the tavern mistrusts his drunken friend, who keeps bursting into song; this suspicion of happiness suggests the downtrodden of life in St. Petersburg, where everyone is so gloomy that any instance of joy is looked upon with narrowed eyes. Dostoevsky became convinced that Western social models and theories could not successfully be applied to Russian society, which required its own special spiritual and practical methods.

Fyodor Dostoevsky as a profound writer focuses the reader to an amalgamation of the both the concepts of the Apollonian and the Dionysian concepts. The protagonist Raskolnikov is a projection of the amalgam. He commits the

murder of an old but rich pawn broker and robs her shop, while doing so he kills her poor humble sister, accidentally. Thereafter he is continuously conflicted by two extremely opposite feeling. Later, near the end of the first part of the novel he literally slashes the old pawn broker to death with an axe, but what comes next is his unquenchable urge to find redemption for the horrible sin that he has committed out of his free will. Here we observe the tendency where a man is torn between remorse and his ecstatic joy of liberty.

The protagonist is struggling to break free from the conventional structures of an autocratic society. Raskolnikov has a problem with the discrimination in the society which is originated in the fundamental structure of the civilization. He wants to justify his violent action through the vicious examples of the history. He often argues with himself that if Napoleon can kill thousands of innocents, then as a poor but extraordinary young man with high knowledge like Raskolnikov himself can break the laws and can act according to his will. There is a pattern in his ideology. The protagonist of *Crime and Punishment* wants to establish that human beings cannot be limited to physical definitions alone. They are much more than that. In other words, Raskolnikov wishes to fly away from the ordinary pleasures of life.

Ironically, Raskolnikov's own conscience would not allow him to escape the regulations of the social order. The ethical voice inside him keeps getting stronger every time he tries to hold it back consequently Raskolnikov ends up in the prison after confessing his crime. His mind itself is subjected to all the culturally constructed principles such as righteousness, honesty, moral codes; for that reason, he has to abide those dogmas whether he truly accepts them or not. In other words, Raskolnikov's tragedy lies in failing to alter his mind set which is totally accustomed to the civilized models. Dostoevsky's intention is not to show the crime and the redemption as reflexive tendencies. He has an intensive vision of a society which completely conditions the mind of an individual so subtly that he would not even know the course of that process. Raskolnikov indeed is gifted with high potential to be a superhuman, but unfortunately his mind or conscience itself has not come to his aid. The reason for this failure is lying deep beneath the structure which can be defined as the evolutionary influence of the social norms over human mind.

Therefore, when we analyze the mental landscape of the protagonist of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* we are exposed to a world where a human soul is pendulating between remorse and free -will. His sense of guilt itself is a long-lasting auto-crime to him. He is a mere social animal living in society devoid of any significant existence and identity. His individuality is often determined by socio-economic and political structure. Man is just a product of his or her superstructure chained in the shackles of prerequisite milieu reduced to be a creature not a human. Indeed, perusal of Raskolnikov's mental landscape is dry and disturbing and leaves its visitors with an excruciating note. Don't dare, aware and beware is the inner scene of Raskolnikov's mental landscape which affects his psyche in his course of life and makes his suffering indispensable.

*He looked at his own Soul  
With a Telescope. What seemed  
all irregular, he saw and*

*shewed to be beautiful  
Constellations; and he added  
to the Consciousness hidden  
worlds within worlds.*

-----Coleridge, Notebooks

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