

**'crime and
punishment' and
'siddhartha' essay**



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The notion of dissatisfaction is echoed in the lives of Raskolnikov and Siddhartha, the protagonists of 'Crime and Punishment' and 'Siddhartha'. An impoverished student, Raskolnikov thought he was part of some elite Superman echelon². He thought he could revolutionize society but poverty constrained his goals. This led to discontent. Ultimately, he vented his frustrations by murdering Alyona Ivanovna, the old pawnbroker.

On the other hand, Siddhartha was dissatisfied because he felt that he was leading a transient life and he wanted to find something permanent—a state of Nirvana³. This paper will examine the reasons for discontent and its different manifestations using the lives of Raskolnikov and Siddhartha. The setting in both novels breeds discontent in the two protagonists. 'Crime and Punishment' is set in Russia in the 1860s when Russia was undergoing industrialization. People seemed to be earning more money and leading materially comfortable lives.

While this was only true for a small minority, the majority—people like Raskolnikov—led lives of dire poverty. Characteristic of a country undergoing industrialization, rural population migrated to cities in search of comfortable lives. This resulted in the formation of slums and fetid neighbourhoods. Raskolnikov lived in one such neighbourhood. The reader is told that “The heat in the streets was stifling..

. The reeking fumes of the dram-shops... and the tipsy men to be seen at every point..

. , completed the repulsive character of the scene”⁴ Dostoyevsky's diction gives the reader an insight into Raskolnikov's poverty. By describing

Raskolnikov's surroundings, Dostoyevsky creates a mood, which reeks of frustration. An extremely brilliant and egoistical man, Raskolnikov's pride could not accept his poor life and this led to his discontent.

Raskolnikov was materially dissatisfied. In contrast, 'Siddhartha' is set in Mystic India, parallel to Buddha's life (around 625 B. C). Set in a rural background, Siddhartha was materially satisfied.

A handsome boy loved by teachers, parents and friends, he was leading an idyllic existence. Despite this perfect existence, his discontent sprang from the thought that he was leading a transient life. He wanted to find something permanent in his transient world, the Atman⁵, which would lead him to Nirvana. The reader is told that "Siddhartha had begun to feel the seeds of discontent within him. He had begun to feel that the love of his father and mother, and also the love of his friend Govinda, would not always make him happy, give him peace, satisfy and suffice him. .

.. To whom else should one offer sacrifice, to whom else should one pay honor, but to Him, Atman, the Only One? " ⁶ Herman Hesse's diction reflects Siddhartha's spiritual discontent and his desire to seek Atman. Hesse creates a simple yet mystical atmosphere amplifying Siddhartha's spiritual discontent. Both protagonists' belief in certain philosophies augmented their discontent.

A man of high intelligence, Raskolnikov soon became a Marxist⁷ when he realized that he could not succeed because of capitalists. Raskolnikov perceived the old pawnbroker to be a symbol of capitalism, a symbol which blocked his path to success by exploiting underprivileged people like himself

for selfish gains. Dostoyevsky's words " The person without a million is not the one who does anything he wants to but the one with whom others do anything they want. " 8 reflect Raskolnikov's vulnerability.

Raskolnikov's ambition was limited by poverty. His Marxism made him conclude that he had become a puppet in the hands of exploitative capitalists and thus hated them. His sister's impending marriage with Looshin, Svidrigailoff mistreating his sister, the pawnbroker's miserliness; all amplify his hate towards the manipulative rich class. He blamed such people for his failures.

The reader can gauge his extreme sense of hate from the incident at the K—Boulevard when he addresses a ' coxcomb' as Svidrigailoff, a man aiming to take advantage of the vulnerable. An analysis of the text reveals that Raskolnikov also believed in the ' Superman'9 and that he was part of the echelon. He considered himself to be superior and expected himself to perform miracles. Through the lines " The next class [extraordinary], however, consists exclusively of men who break the law, or strive...

to do so... And if in the execution of their idea, they should be obliged to shed blood, step over corpses, they can conscientiously do both in the interest of their idea.

.. " 10 , Raskolnikov outlines the powers of ' Supermen' and indirectly his own rights. However, these powers were restricted by poverty. This belief in the ' Superman' without a chance to use his powers inflamed his discontent.

We also see the notion of 'Negative Utilitarianism'¹¹ in Raskolnikov's life. He reasoned that it would be in the best interest of society if parasites like Alyona Ivanova could be got rid of. His belief in 'Negative Utilitarianism' and the 'Superman' translated the murder into a dual advantage- the cleansing of society with the satisfaction of fulfilling his destiny as 'Superman'. His belief in the different philosophies amplified his discontent and influenced him to kill her. Siddhartha was dissatisfied with his rituals and scriptures (he had learned as a Brahmin¹²) since they were devoid of Atman. Hence he joined the Samanas¹³ in the hope that through their techniques he will reach Atman.

Siddhartha did achieve independence from his ego through meditation and self denial, but he again felt discontented since he could only achieve this state briefly. It was ironical that in finding the permanent Atman, he could only achieve it temporarily. He concluded that the independence was no different from a drunken state. In both, one could escape from one's conscious Self for only a short time period but eventually had to return back to the harsh realities. His belief in the absolute permanence of Atman made him discontented and prompted him to leave the Samanas.

Siddhartha's belief in the infinity and independence of Atman made his experiences with Gotama unsatisfactory. Gotama's teachings were based on rules and conventions. Siddhartha wanted to achieve a state of Nirvana whereby he was not bound to anything, not bound by anything. It seemed paradoxical to him that he could only achieve Nirvana -a feeling of pure freedom-through the rules and conventions preached by Buddha.

His beliefs made him question Buddha's teachings and left him discontented with them. Society also plays an important role in augmenting the protagonists' discontent. Almost all characters throughout 'Crime and Punishment' were desperate for money: the Marmeladovs, Razumukhin and Raskolnikov's own family. In a letter to Raskolnikov, his mother informed him of the impending marriage between his sister and Luzhin. He perceived this as a sacrifice on his sister's part to help him financially and his frustration heightened. Moreover, he was a witness to the horrors afflicting the Marmeladov family.

A drunken husband, his tubercular wife, a harlot daughter and three hungry children; all seemed to present examples of how wretched and dismal life could be without any money. From Raskolnikov's point of view the murder would have several positive implications. After the murder, he would steal Alyona's money and rescue his sister from a marriage of convenience, assist his struggling friend, rescue Sonya from a life of prostitution whilst fulfilling his obligation to society. Raskolnikov's felt it was his duty to cure societal evils. The only avenue he found was murdering Alyona Ivanova.

On the other hand, after leaving Gotama, Siddhartha was catapulted into society and became a hedonist. His experiences took him from a journey of sensuality with Kamala, the courtesan, to Kamaswami, the businessman. He led a life steeped in materialism. However, he soon became discontented with his life since all previous vestiges of spiritualism had been replaced by materialism.

He was disgusted with his life and decided to end it by the " River". His life in Society gave him a glimpse of a life exactly opposite to that of Brahmins and Samanas. Hence he realizes that Atman could only be reached through the Middle Path. 14 Raskolnikov's and Siddhartha's discontent ultimately assumed different manifestations.

Poverty, his beliefs and societal pressures influenced to Rakolnikov to kill the pawnbroker. Thus, his discontent ultimately manifested itself into murder. In contrast Siddhartha's dissatisfaction with Brahmins, Samanas and Society ultimately helped him reach Nirvana. Resigned to frustration (after leaving Society), he gave up all efforts to seek Atman. Once he freed himself of all desires- like the second and third noble truths of Buddhism- he got his first insight into Atman.

Siddhartha then learnt the meaning of Atman through the River. He realized the non-existence of time and that accepting it would lead to happiness. While one's inner self stayed constant, one's experiences in the world did not. They were in a constant state of flux like the flow of water in a river. Life was full of opposites, both positive and negative.

If Time was non-existent then one would realize that positive forces and negative forces would ultimately overlap. By realizing that Time created an illusion, Siddhartha finally fused with the Atman. Later he explains to Govinda that the reason why Govinda could not attain Atman was because he was so obsessed with reaching it that he neglected to look all around him- a source where Atman pervaded. Thus, Siddhartha's discontent manifested itself into achieving Atman. Discontent is the seed of ethics' -Friedrich

Nietzsche On comparing the lives of Raskolnikov and Siddhartha we realize that dissatisfaction can manifest itself in different ways.

Raskolnikov and Siddhartha lead discontented lives but their frustration assumed different forms. Raskolnikov proves himself to be a discontented Marxist whereas Siddhartha shows himself as a hungry spiritualist. Ultimately however, both the protagonists reach the proper direction-Raskolnikov finds consolation in religion whereas Siddhartha attains Nirvana. In a way, their dissatisfaction was responsible for their respective achievements.

My conclusion as a third person would be to follow Aristotle's middle path which he termed as " The Golden Mean".