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Crime and Confession: Overcoming Trauma in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Rahimi's *A Curse on Dostoevsky*

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Abstract:

This paper explores trauma in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Atiq Rahimi's *A Curse on Dostoevsky*. While *Crime and Punishment* narrates how the murderer-protagonist overcomes trauma through repentance, confession, punishment and redemption in a stable legal and political system of mid-19th century Russia, the trauma narrative of *A Curse on Dostoevsky* presents its protagonist's confession ending in confusion and chaos of the post-Soviet war-torn Afghanistan. The historical and collective memory of both the protagonists is mixed up with their personal memory so that their traumatic experiences get a wider perspective. This paper deals with all these points through textual analysis of these two novels using insights from some trauma theories, and especially in the light of Freud's psychoanalysis.

Keywords: Trauma, Memory, Consciousness, Ego, Repression, Russia, Afghanistan.

While investigating the theme of trauma in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and Atiq Rahimi's *A Curse on Dostoevsky*, a common trope has been detected. Both the novels deploy a common trope of murder of an old woman and the consequent traumatic experience of the murderer-protagonist. Through such trauma narratives, the novelists raise questions on ethical issues in the contemporary socio-political contexts of their respective nations. The traumatic experiences of the characters are as intimate and sincere as are the experiences of their respective authors. So, it would not be out of context to introduce this discussion with the authors' personal experiences as regards 'trauma' before a comparative analysis of these texts using insights from some trauma theories, and especially in the light of Freud's psychoanalysis.

When Fyodor Dostoevsky was only 28 in 1849, the Czar's secret police arrested him along with some other co-members of an organization which advocated social changes in Russia. However, when the firing squad was ready to execute the death sentence on Dostoevsky and his fellows, a herald declared a royal pardon for them. They were now convicted for four-year imprisonment in Siberia. Death sentence by shooting and sudden escape from the jaws of death was a traumatic experience for him. He considered himself resurrected as he expressed to his brother Mikhail, "Now, changing my life, I am being reborn into a new form. Brother ! I swear to you that I shall not lose hope, and shall preserve

my spirit and heart in purity. I shall be reborn to a better thing. That is my whole hope, my whole comfort!" (Dostoevsky, *Letters* 11). This experience affected his attitude to and philosophy of life thereafter. All this can easily be traced in his fictional narrative especially in the character Raskolnikov of *Crime and Punishment*.

Atiq Rahimi, as he reflects in his "Preface" to *Three*, fled from Afghanistan in 1984 at the age of twenty two to escape the 'red terror of Communism' and had to remain in exile in France with a 'sad recollection in the recesses of my memory, a memory traumatized by my brother's killing' in around 1990 (x, viii). Rahimi personally experienced traumas in and about his native land 'first trampled underfoot by the Red Army, then destroyed by a fratricidal war of revenge before ending up lacerated and flogged by the "army of Darkness", the Taliban' (*Three* ix). The dreams and nightmares, terrors and traumas that Rahimi experienced haunt his main characters in *A Curse on Dostoevsky* like his earlier novels.

As the autobiographical touch makes the traumatic experiences of the characters of Dostoevsky and Rahimi more authentic, insights from the Freudian concept of trauma can be helpful in looking into their innermost thoughts and thereby tracing their psychological complexities. The action of the novels in focus centres round heinous murders. To deal with such a complex psyche, we may start with Sigmund Freud's analysis that traumatic experiences, which have occurred during infancy and childhood, could affect an adult personality:

I am of opinion that the influence of childhood makes itself felt already in the situation at the beginning of the formation of a neurosis, since it plays a decisive part in determining whether and at what point the individual shall fail to master the real problems of life. ... that the neurosis in later life was preceded by a neurosis in early childhood. (Freud, *History in Freud, Reader* 421)

This can be traced in the central character of *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov, who belongs to the poor class. His father died early and his mother gets a little amount of annual pension after his father's death (*Crime* 31). His educated sister Dounia received an amount of money in advance as governess employed by the ill-motivated Svidrigailov, to support his study as a university student of law in the city of St. Petersburg (*Crime* 31). Raskolnikov has to live in a narrow and airless apartment in the Haymarket Square, St. Petersburg, which is nearly always crowded by the drunkard slum-dwellers (*Crime* 60-61). Lack of money and food has beset his career. He has to depend on the pawnbrokers for money (*Crime* 6). So poverty, unhealthy living, his father's death and his inability to support his family – all these contribute to his traumatic experiences.

In Rahimi's *A Curse on Dostoevsky*, the protagonist Rassoul speaks about his setbacks, the conflict with his communist father who sent him to study at St. Petersburg in the USSR against his will. He only stayed three years from 1986 to 1989 (*Curse* 44). When the Red Army withdraws from Afghanistan in 1989, Rassoul withdraws from his study and returns to Kabul (*Curse* 44). At St. Petersburg, a Russian girl (a Dostoevsky scholar) gave him an initial book, *Crime and Punishment*, which changed his life (*Curse* 44-45). The book

promotes rationalism wedded with spiritualism for a peaceful living. Rassoul considers the philosophy underlying this book essential to save Afghanistan already destroyed by the Russian Red Army (*Curse* 46). He hates his father for supporting communist ideals imported from Russia (*Curse* 63). It is important to note that a childhood scene of his father's cruelty in killing their traumatised donkey in an exhaustive hunting adventure overwhelmed Rassoul so much that it haunts him now and then (*Curse* 128-35). He sees the traumatised state of the donkey in himself and in the faces of people of his war-ridden watan (*Curse* 128, 135, 157, 200-201).

Freud's theory of 'repression' may now be taken up to reflect on the trauma action of murder by Raskolnikov and Rassoul. Associated with the childhood trauma experiences are the repressed thoughts, ideas, and urges that, according to Freud, make one a bit irrational, which may result into neurosis. The repressed can return into consciousness through a traumatic action that shows these characters' lack of control in a given situation. As Freud opines:

The process of repression is not to be regarded as an event which takes place once, ... repression demands a persistent expenditure of force, ... the repressed exercises a continuous pressure in the direction of the conscious, so that this pressure must be balanced by an unceasing counter-pressure. ... The mobility of repression, incidentally, also finds expression in the psychical characteristics of the state of sleep, which alone renders possible the formation of dreams. (Freud, *Repression* in Freud, *Reader* 572)

In the case of Raskolnikov, we find that a brilliant student of law, mentally weakened by poverty, disgraced by the sacrifices of his mother and sister and overburdened by the loan from an old pawn-broker lady, becomes desperate to experiment with his ill-fed theory of superman. He compares himself with 'super' human beings like Napoleon or Mahomet (*Crime* 263), takes law in hand and kills an old lady (*Crime* 77-78) to get rid of her and to serve the moneyless with her money. His experiment fails as his ego is overwhelmed. He is overpowered by the fear of 'crime and punishment' and tries hard to wipe out all evidences by killing the victim's innocent sister who startles him by her early return on the spot (*Crime* 80-81).

In *A Curse on Dostoevsky*, Rassoul is one of the confounded educated but jobless youths of a country without a proper government and without a legal system after the Red Army left it devastated. Poverty, hunger, civil war, and bizarre weather make ordinary citizens to find temporary relief with drugs at the saqikhana. In such a state, Rassoul's fiancé Sophia is forced into prostitution by her landlady Nana Alia to save her family (*Crime* 33). Unable to bear his fiancé's pathetic situation, he plans to kill Nana Alia apparently in an imitation of Raskolnikov as he reflects on his 'repressed' idea/memory: "Or perhaps that story buried deep within, incited him to the murder (*Curse* 2)." However, Raskolnikov had a monetary relation with his victim who had no role in his fiancée Sonia's prostituting herself to save her poor family. Rassoul's case is reversal of Raskolnikov's. Again, Rassoul is not moved by any ill-fed theory of Superman like that of Dostoevsky hero who takes law in hand

and kills an innocent woman to eliminate an eyewitness. Rassoul had no courage to kill an innocent one. That's why hearing someone to call her name, "Nana Alia," he escapes jumping out of the spot and wounding his ankle. He blames Dostoevsky for stopping him from "killing a second woman, this one innocent...and becoming prey to my remorse, sinking into an abyss of guilt, ending up sentenced to hard labour (*Curse 5*)."

Rahimi narrates this murder in terms of trauma: "The moment Rassoul lifts the axe to bring it down on the old woman's head, the thought of *Crime and Punishment* flashes into his mind. It strikes him to the very core. His arms shake; his legs tremble. And the axe slips from his hands. It splits open the old woman's head, and sinks into her skull (*Curse 1*)." The murder overwhelms his psyche. "His patou falls from his bony shoulders. His terrified gaze is lost in the pool of blood ... Total inertia. ... He doesn't move. Just stands there. Rooted to the spot, like a tree. A dead tree, planted in the flagstones of the house (*Curse 2*)."

Freud states that the illness follows as an immediate consequence of the traumatic experience (*General Introduction 316*). After committing murder, Raskolnikov returns to his residence with a broken mind. "For the first moment he thought he was going mad. A dreadful chill came over him; but the chill was from the fever that had begun long before in his sleep. Now he was suddenly taken with violent shivering, so that his teeth chattered and all his limbs were shaking. . . . another unbearable fit of shivering. ... he ... once more sank into drowsiness and delirium. He lost consciousness (*Crime 89-90*)."

He suffered physically for several days until he recovered with the help of his friend Razumihin, the young Doctor Zossimov and his landlady's maidservant Nastasya (*Crime 147*).

In *A Curse on Dostoevsky*, after the murder, Rassoul suffers from nausea, wanders many hours and finally returns his rented room. By this time he has lost his voice. "He tries again, taking another deep breath of air, collecting all his strength in his chest to push the words out of his lips. Nothing (*Curse 19*)."

"His tongue is nothing but a piece of old wood. ... His throat is still dry and void, void of sound (*Curse 21*)."

With a 'worn-out' feverish body he lies down on the bed, 'harassed and uncertain, staring into the abyss, lost in dreams, engulfed by nightmares' (*Curse 36*). The next day his cousin Razmodin finds him looking 'like a beggar, or a madman escaped from an asylum' (*Curse 55*). Razmodin gives him money to consult a doctor. Rassoul consults the doctor who identifies his three-day's voice-loss as an effect of his 'emotional' trauma and suggests: "The only way to get your voice back is to relive the situation, the emotion (*Curse 95*)."

The doctor's advice to Rassoul 'to relive the situation' is as the homeopathic principle of 'like cures like'. To relieve the emotion or shock is to relive or revive the traumatic situation. And Rassoul has been constantly reliving the situation by transposition to the overwhelming event, a neurosis called 'post-traumatic stress disorder' (PTSD). Rassoul's situation is wholly applied to Cathy Caruth's definition of PTSD "that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event (Caruth 4)." Freud uses the term

'repetition compulsion' or 'compulsion to repeat' to explain this. According to Freud, in traumatic neuroses, dreams obey the 'compulsion to repeat' supported by the wish to lift up the 'repressed'. The dreams echoing childhood traumas, 'anxiety dreams' or 'punishment dreams' merely replace the prohibited wish-fulfilment by the suitable penalty for it; they carry out the wish of the unconscious 'sense of guilt' which is the reaction to the 'repudiated impulse' (Freud, *Beyond in Freud, Reader* 609).

Raskolnikov also relives the traumatic situation and psychologically suffers from the 'repetition compulsion' through several dreams of the pawnbroker and her murder by him. Traumatized by the action of murder, he behaves so oddly that he appeared to be insane. During the discussion of the crime in the police station, he faints (*Crime* 156, 164). After he gets normal, instinct of 'repetition compulsion' compels him to return to the spot of murder (*Crime* 82-83). The details of his crime possess him and he becomes a spectre of himself.

The terror working in the psyche of Raskolnikov since the moment of his crime, may be grasped in the light of Freud's theory of 'Ego', 'Super-Ego' and 'pleasure principle'. Freud writes: "There is no doubt that the resistance of the conscious and unconscious ego operates under the sway of the pleasure principle: it seeks to avoid the unpleasure which would be produced by the liberation of the repressed (Freud, *Beyond in Freud, Reader* 603)." Raskolnikov's repressed ideas/passions gets liberated through the murder of the old woman and his 'repressed guilt' for this crime produce 'the unpleasure' in him. His ego tries to avoid this unpleasure by rationalising his crime: "... if Napoleon, for instance, had happened to be in my place, ... there had simply been some ridiculous old hag, a pawnbroker, who had to be murdered too to get money from her trunk ... Well, I too . . . left off thinking about it ... murdered her, following his example (*Crime* 421)."

It is to note that, though Raskolnikov's belief in his 'superman' theory has induced him to kill the repulsive pawnbroker woman and her innocent sister, he has no 'superman' courage to face the consequences. Physically and emotionally wrecked, he is haunted by the fear of being detected. He wants to suppress all evidences of his crime, but his eccentric behaviour makes him suspicious of the crime. Frequent call from the police station and his interrogation by the investigating officer Porfiry Petrovich, make his mental state worse.

In fact, the 'father complex' or the moral dictator 'super-ego' works in him. According to Freud:

The super-ego retains the character of the father, while the more powerful the Oedipus complex was and the more rapidly it succumbed to repression (under the influence of authority, religious teaching, schooling and reading), the stricter will be the domination of the super-ego over the ego later on – in the form of conscience or perhaps of an unconscious sense of guilt. (Freud, *Ego in Freud, Reader* 642)

Raskolnikov's traumatic suffering originates from his 'unconscious' sense of guilt that is a fear of being detected and punished by the authority, and the fear of losing the love of 'an indefinite number of fellowmen' (Freud, *Narcissism in Freud, Reader* 562). That is why, after a long time of hiding his crime and traumatic suffering, he attempts to unburden

himself by disclosing it before Sonia whom he loves and confides in. Under her influence and under the pressure of circumstances exposing his crime, he confesses it and accepts the punishment of imprisonment to get rid of the traumatic suffering.

Though initially Raskolnikov's 'repressed' and 'unconscious' sense of guilt can be explained in Freudian terms in discussing his traumatic experiences, it cannot be called a conscious and Christian sense of guilt for committing a heinous 'sin', until very late. When Sonia asserts her faith in God, Raskolnikov says, "But, perhaps, there is not God at all (*Crime* 327)." When he bends down and kisses the foot of Sonia who has prostituted herself to feed her father's family, he says, "I did not bow down to you, I bowed down to all the suffering of humanity (*Crime* 327)." There is a definite goodness in him from the first out of which he helps the helpless even with the money whatsoever left in his pocket in spite of his utter poverty.

Raskolnikov finds in Sonia a mirror for himself: "How this shame and degradation can exist in you side by side with other, opposite, holy feelings (*Crime* 328)?" It is interesting that he requests her to read out the story of the Lazarus from the New Testament and listens how that sick man died, was buried and made alive by Jesus Christ. This explains how much Raskolnikov hankers for remedy of his traumatic sickness. And finally he realises his crime, "Did I murder the old woman ? I murdered myself, not her! I crushed myself once for all, for ever. ... But it was the devil that killed that old woman, not I (*Crime* 425)." When he unburdens himself by confessing the crime before Sonia and being ready to burn his sin with his suffering in Siberian prison, he is prepared to receive the cross Sonia offers with her words, "We will go to suffer together, and together we will bear our cross (*Crime* 428)!" All this happens before his confession of the crime in the police station. Sonia here plays the role of Messiah in his life and tries to influence him with her cross and the Bible. At the same time when the investigating officer Porfiry advises Raskolnikov to confess his crime before the authority, with his assurance of shortening his punishment, he too advises him to have faith in God, to confess, to suffer for the atonement of his sin in prison for his own peace in life ahead (*Crime* 466). During the first Easter in the prison of Siberia when Sonia meets him, the novelist narrates, "They were renewed by love; the heart of each held infinite sources of life for the heart of the other (*Crime* 557)." They determined to wait with patience for seven years: "what terrible suffering and what infinite happiness before them (*Crime* 557)!" So guilt, confession, suffering, fellow feeling, compassion, love etc. have come in unity to cure his traumatic experiences and to give him a new life, "the beginning of a new story – the story of the gradual renewal of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration (*Crime* 559)."

Let us now discuss the case of Rassoul. We have already discussed the physical illness and 'repetition compulsion' associated with his trauma experience. Now we may explore how at a time while suffering from trauma, other things come to alleviate and divert his mind from the traumatic action on the whole day. His failed pursuit of the veiled woman who he thinks may have taken the jewellery box and money of the dead Nana Alia, his theorising that she might be a relative of Nana Alia and her betrayal of her family is worse than 'murder', his immediate sharing of the collective trauma and panic of the people affected by two terrifying rocket explosions at the petrol pump and his carrying an injured

girl on his back out of the flame that burns the corpses, giving all the fifty Afghani from his pocket to a poor woman to feed her three children keeping himself hungry instead (*Curse 6-17*).

But the guilt of murder has entered into the deep of his consciousness. “No way, I can’t just forget it all like that (*Curse 15*).” He analyses his crime, compares his crime with Raskolnikov’s. He consoles himself that he carries no proof (money, jewels, axe etc.) of his crime. Besides the blood stain on the hem of his shirt reminds him of his brave and benevolent action of saving a wounded girl as well as his charity to the poor woman convinces himself that “you have a good heart, in spite of everything. You may be capable of killing a *loathsome creature* but you can stop a poor family from dying of hunger. Intention is what counts (*Curse 17*).”

When in the night following the murder, Rassoul is taken to the police-station, he thinks that the woman in sky-blue chadar might have informed the issue of murder, he thinks “I’m going to turn her in as my accomplice. She has no right to live in peace, not sharing my crime and my punishment (*Curse 40*)!” But when Parwaiz, head of the security of Kabul, informs Rassoul of finding Nana Alia’s body, he goes pale and collapses on the sofa. Trauma thus repeats and the fear of being detected terrifies him like that of Raskolnikov. The sense of guilt is hinted when later on Sophia asks Rassoul what has happened to Nana Alia and he ponders in his dumb state, “Don’t try and find out what he’s done to her, Sophia! You will lose him” (*Curse 82*).

The emotional trauma of Rassoul gets translated into his physical trauma i.e. loss of voice haunts him in his nightmare. The important thing is that the dead pawnbroker whom Raskolnikov has killed haunted him in his nightmares. But, in Rassoul’s case the living ones haunt in his nightmares. His landlord Yarmohamad whom he hates, appears in his nightmare brandishing a knife and chops off the breasts of his fiancé Sophia (*Curse 38*); and the woman in sky-blue chadar whom also he despises for the alleged theft of the jewellery and money and whom he fears as a witness to the murder, appears in a nightmare to offer him his ‘Adam’s apple’ or his voice-box out of the jewellery box (*Curse 96*). The former nightmare is about his concern for his fiancé Sophia for whose safety he has killed Nana Alia and whom he is to save from the clutches of warlords like Amer Salam. His other concern is to save his sister from the Commandant Rostom. All these add to his original trauma that has made him like ‘a madman escaped from an asylum’ (*Curse 55*). Out of such a psychic state he even attacks a lame man with the latter’s crutch mistaking it as stolen from his fiancé’s dead father Moharamollah and then he ruminates: “Nothing justifies your savagery towards this man, nothing, unless you’re trying to commit another murder in order to re-experience the same situation, the same trauma, the same emotion that made you mute. All this just to recover your voice (*Curse 101*)?”

The author remarks that ‘the nightmare is his life’ (*Curse 96*). When he finds himself unable to save his fiancé (in whose purity and innocence he wants to absolve himself) from Amer Salem and his guests and when his cousin Razmodin flees away to save Donia and his mother from commandant Rostam, despair engulfs him: “I am just a failed son, failed friend,

failed enemy, failed student, failed fiancé, failed murderer ... and that is all I am (*Curse* 119).” He re-experiences the ‘trauma’ when Sofia’s mother advises Rassoul to leave them and to go to take care of his sister and mother. He finds himself ‘emptying of blood, hope and life’ (*Curse* 124). His trauma reaches its zenith.

The death-like face of Jalal (a frequenter at the saqi-khana) before his eyes explains his own traumatic situation in a lawless land where trauma is found in many faces around. Rassoul analyses this trauma as a question without a question mark – a ‘state of being’ – a ‘state in which questions astound than challenge, ring out rather than enquire’ (*Curse* 128). He has seen such a state (that he experiences in himself now) in the traumatised face of their exhausted and confounded donkey that was shot dead by his father during a hunting expedition when he was merely eleven. In this hopeless situation he desires to shoot himself (*Curse* 137), but his thought that it is not a part of his national and religious culture as Allah with His name ‘Al-Mumit’ (i.e. He who deals death) will not forgive for such a cowardice act.

Rassoul is ultimately relieved of his trauma through the process of confession. Previously he noted down in the diary he got from his fiancé, “Today, I killed Nana Alia” (*Curse* 22) and later on “I killed her for you, Sophia” (*Curse* 105). He noted down why he had killed Nana Alia for her: “I will tell her, in writing” (*Curse* 105). And ultimately he lets her read his diary to know his crime. Knowing it, Sophia asks him to go with her to Shah-e-do-Shamshira Wali’s tomb to pray, to revive his faith in Allah and to do *tobah*. But his confession has no religious intention: “But I didn’t kill in the name of Allah. And I don’t need His forgiveness (*Curse* 146).” The confession relieves Rassoul of the post traumatic stress syndrome to some extent and he gets back his ‘Adam’s Apple’ i.e. his voice (*Curse* 167). But he still suffers from a ‘repressed sense of guilt’ which he reveals while chasing the woman in sky-blue chadar: “We share a life, a destiny. We are the same. The two of us have dirtied our hands with same crime. I killed; you stole. I’m a murderer; you’re a traitor ... I’m haunted by remorse. Help me. ... Who cares if they arrest me, who cares if they hang me; at least I will be relieved of my crime. I will be finished with all this suffering (*Curse* 169).” So his traumatic suffering has not yet been cured.

In Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*, an investigating officer Porfiry was engaged to find out the murderer. But in *A Curse on Dostoevsky*, Rassoul himself surrenders to the law. He insists the court clerk to arrest him as he is a criminal for the murder of Nana Alia. The experienced and wise court clerk fittingly analyses Rassoul’s crime and its traumatic effect in the socio-political context of Afghanistan of the time, which appears more true to Freud’s definitions of ‘repressed sense of guilt’:

Really, you killed that madam to wipe a cockroach off the face of the earth, and most of all to avenge your fiancée. But now you recognize that it didn’t change a thing. The murder didn’t ease your thirst for vengeance. It didn’t comfort you. On the contrary, it created an abyss into which you are plunging deeper every day ... So what is tormenting you now is neither the failure of your crime nor the guilt of your conscience; rather, you are suffering from the futility of your act. In short, you are the victim of your own crime. Am I right? (*Crime* 180-181)

The court clerk explains the absurdity of his crime and confession in a country where ‘killing is the most insignificant act there is’. He criticises Rassoul’s act of killing that woman to give meaning to his life and then to give his crime some meaning by surrendering to the law – as nonsense: “Like all those who kill in the name of Allah so as to forget their sins! That’s nonsense, young man, nonsense (*Curse* 181)!” He criticises Rassoul’s effort to plant Dostovsky’s philosophy in Afghanistan that ‘if God didn’t exist ... everything would be permitted’:

So, how would your precious Russian explain the fact that here, today, in your dear country, everyone believes in Allah the Merciful yet all atrocities are permitted? ...

Yes, but these days it seems to me . . . If he exists, it is not to prevent sins, but to justify them. . . .

We are always using him, and History, and Conscience, and ideologies to justify our crimes and our betrayals. Rare are those who, like you, commit a crime and feel remorse. (*Curse* 182)

The clerk appreciates Rassoul’s ‘level of awareness’ of his crime that creates his ‘guilt’ and finds no need of a trial or a sentence in his case: “Your soul is imprisoned in your body, and your body in this city.” and “Legal proceedings—in an ideal world—are for those who don’t recognize their crime or guilt” (*Curse* 183). The clerk makes it clear that there is no suitable judge, public prosecutor, no more prison, no more ‘surveillance’ department, not even the law in Afghanistan at this time. Such a state of affairs leads him from his personal trauma to the collective trauma in a lawless land: “Rassoul is staggered—wordless, voiceless, more mute than before.” He finds himself like their traumatised donkey in a ‘nowhere land’ (*Curse* 184).

More traumatic, though apparently farcical, is the real experience of Rassoul when he faces a trial-less death sentence in the hand of a fanatic, heartless and senseless Qhazi or Judge who falsely charges him as a ‘communist’ and a ‘thief’ of Amer Salam’s jewellery pawned with Nana Alia instead of dealing with his legal confession of the crime of murder. He expresses his desire to have a trial with his last words to the world before being sentenced (*Curse* 197) and expresses his desire: “I want my death to be a sacrifice . . . to bear witness to these times of injustice, lying and hypocrisy . . . My trial will be on behalf of all war criminals: communists, warlords, mercenaries . . . (*Curse* 211-212).” A trial happens ultimately to give some meaning to Rassoul’s absurd case and Commandant Parwaiz pleads:

The conduct of this young man, who handed himself over to the law in order to be sentenced within the context of a public trial, seems to me exemplary. It is a dazzling lesson. If we all decided, today, on the example of this young man, to put our own activities on trial, we could conquer the fratricidal chaos that is currently reigning in our country.

There was no murder. Listen to me: this is an imaginary murder, the illusion of a murder, simply to put our own behavior into question!

. . . not only is he not insane, he is absolutely lucid, and quite aware of his illusions. It is we who are mad, we who have no awareness of the crimes we commit! (*Curse* 236)

The public trial and the following chaos makes Rassoul laugh as if it is a relief from the trauma that was so long haunting him. His sentence by hanging finally results into the self-hanging of Parwaiz and the firing of the judge (*Curse* 245-250). Rassoul has finally 'turned the world upside down' as the old clerk observes (*Curse* 249). Besides he gets his love Sophia back as she is freed from the dead Nana Alia's grip after which her daughter Nazigol leaves with Amer Salem (*Curse* 248).

All these help Rassoul overcome his personal trauma though it is still a long way to get rid of the collective trauma that his war-torn nation suffers from. Atiq Rahimi has done a challenging job of commemorating an Afghan holocaust through textualising a cannibal time in the character of Rassoul.

Both *Crime and Punishment* and *A Curse on Dostoevsky* are more or less true to Anne Whitehead's analysis of 'Trauma Fiction' that by means of literary techniques and devices such as tropes, recurring motifs, repetition, ellipses, fragmentation, etc., a trauma text mimics the 'symptomatology' of trauma, a mode of 'bearing witness', to create among readers an ethical reading practice (Whitehead 83-85). Through these literary devices and techniques we find that Raskolnikov and Rassoul do not suffer from amnesia, and so their active memory (though sometimes blurred) makes their traumatic suffering more acute and poignant. The historical and the collective memories are mixed up with their personal memories in such a way that their traumatic experiences get a wider perspective.

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