

# The Recluse as a Hero: A Study of Haruki Murakami and Fyodor Dostoevsky

Varnika Raizada

Ph.D. Scholar, Amity University, Noida  
E-mail: varnikaa.raizada@gmail.com

---

**Abstract**—The psyche of a person who is not following the conventions of the society is a curious place to delve in. There are questions about right and wrong which follow the study of such characters. This paper will bring out a comparative analysis of *Crime and Punishment* and *Kafka on the Shore* by Fyodor Dostoevsky and Haruki Murakami respectively. Both the writers have portrayed characters who have denounced the rituals and rules of the society, forming a separate niche for themselves. Nakata and Kafka Tamura from *Kafka on the Shore* and Raskolnikov from *Crime and Punishment* are the characters whom we will look at through the lens of Friederich Nietzsche's theory of the *Urbemensch*. These characters fought their own battles, for themselves and the society as a whole. It is crucial for a critical society to understand the background which would have influenced a person to commit certain actions in his life.

**Keywords**- Recluse, Outsider, Psyche, Hero, *Urbemensch*, Savior, Cultural differences, Soul Searching.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“One must still have a chaos in oneself to give birth to a dancing star.” As Friedrich Nietzsche writes in his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, he explains how one must always raise questions and be curious in order to bring out something new or the best version of themselves. In order to quench this thirst of knowledge, one must distance himself from the given surroundings and look at the society from a third person perspective. A person who has distanced himself from society often becomes a subject of interest. Some people assume him to be a rebel who does not believe in the system and turns towards criminal activities, some think of them as nihilists who want nothing to do with the human race while the works which we are going to look into in this paper have shown them in different lights and shades. They have shown to be courageous people who are following what they believe in and overcome their fear to commit certain actions which they believe are necessary. They are heroes not because they did the right thing as such but because dared to do what they believed in. The idea of crime or right and wrong can be a subjective concept, what people believe in are their ideological

foundations which can be highly influenced by their social and cultural backgrounds too.

## 2. THE IDEA OF UBERMENSCH

The ‘*Urbemensch*’ or the ‘Overman’ was a concept which was thought of by the great philosophical writer, Friedrich Nietzsche. He argued that any man could be considered to be the man of the future if he transcends the present ideologies of the society and does things in an extraordinary way which could never cross the minds of the present average human race. A man who is free from the bounds of religion, a given belief system or any practices related to worshipping certain out worldly forces. This man who immerses himself in the real world problems and fights for them would be the goal of every man to become. He has ‘rage of passion’ and is a ‘lightning frenzy’ in the world full of dark clouds.

Although this idea of the ‘Superman’ is considered to be the archetype of the being of a ‘Hero’ but the times have changed and in the recent times of soul searching and a world full of atrocities it becomes essential for the hero to fit himself in the required mould of the ever-changing times.

## 3. RASKOLNIKOV- THE ‘JUSTICE’ PROVIDER

Dostoevsky knew that he would never be able to create a ‘perfect man’ on the contrary to Nietzsche's hope of the birth of a ‘perfect man’ one day. Dostoevsky has shown a raw image of the most destitute of humans, who not only has left his studies in the middle but has also given up on his duties as a son, a brother and as a man. Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment* though has committed a crime, and it is not only unethical but also a punishable offence based on the norms and laws of the society, there are certain traits in his character which place him parallel to the idea of the ‘Superman’. He was a part of the world which was being taken over by the capitalistic ideas, bringing the middle class into greater power with each day and the victims of these changes were destitute like him, he saw the rich getting richer and the poor getting

poorer. Although he committed the crime not for the benefit of the society as such, his action can be considered to be a representation of what was to be understood as a step against the rising discrimination practices. Although he took justice into his own hands but he saw the pawnbroker as the root cause of the increasing atrocities in the society and his life and thus represented a microcosm of the revolution that was about to begin. He was a rather selfish man, his actions were though not directed for the society's greater good, but he had done something to change his own life. He had replied to the system in a particular manner. 'Raskolnik', in Russian means, 'divide' and he justified his name by creating a divide between his personal space and the society. He can be seen as a ruthless person who committed murders, but the real sense of a hero can be understood from his foundational ideas of humanity. He showed his benevolent side when he gave away all his money to Sonya and her family. He fainted when he heard about the murders, and the sole reason that his crime could be caught was his guilt and the psychological pressure he was undergoing as an effect of this guilt, these instances prove the existence of the human traits in him. He is shown to be entirely away from any sort of belief system. His only ideology was based on what he considered was right or wrong because he identified the pawnbroker as a threat to society, he did what he thought was right.

Moreover, we can see that his ideas were evident because the reason he was caught was the guilt of what he did with the sister and not the victim he had planned. He became a criminal in his own eyes only because of the second murder. He had set a goal for himself and went ahead to attain it at any cost. He can thus be seen as a fit in to the idea of the *Urbemensch* because he "made danger his calling and perished by the calling" and even after all the consequences and conditions he did not kill himself or run away. This is what Nietzsche describes as a trait of an overman, who does not leave the world and run away to the forest, instead stays here and faces what comes.

#### 4. NAKATA- THE LIGHTNING FRENZY

Murakami questions the existing ideas of reality and truth in his work, *Kafka on the Shore*, Nakata poses a threat to the existing rational minds and what is believed and proven in the world. He believed and without any second thoughts went for what he thought was his calling and the meaning of his existence. Although Nakata's goal was not very close to the reality of the Earth but he did not get detached from the things which kept him somewhere related to the world. He was a saviour and a messiah for the cats, and this was his heroism, his way of giving back to the world which he held so close to his heart. His heroism lies in the following of his ideas and not giving up on them until he succeeds. The murder which he committed on the provocation of the victim itself and the guilt which follows the action, throw light at the human nature of Nakata. The murder saved many lives and helped the victim in fulfilling the twisted purpose of his own life. He brings in the

streak of belief thus moving away from the concept of nihilism which Nietzsche thought was one of the prime things an overman must do. He was an indirect victim of World War II and represents the chaos which followed the catastrophic event and the search for meaning post the loss of it all, including the identities of the people.

#### 5. KAFKA TAMURA-THE STRONGEST FIFTEEN YEAR OLD BOY

Kafka is the most relatable of the three characters as he represents the simple wandering and actions of any boy who is in search of a meaning for his life. Kafka's journey is to learn about himself and be a better version of whomever he is. He can be considered as a modern-day hero, who goes through tough times as a child and later also struggles with his bond with his father. His journey signifies the most heroic aspect of today's world where he moves from the point of oblivion to knowledge. He is the overman of the recent times who struggles to form his own identity and instead of just disappearing from the life which he belonged to, he returns as an evolved personality who grasps his life with gratitude. He escapes and becomes his own hero, he longs for knowledge and learning as much as he can, even though he had multiple reasons to stop believing in the system he never stopped, he found his own ways around it and took the world as it came to him. He knew that 'running away was not going to solve anything.' He became "a sea, to receive a dirty stream without becoming unclean" and comes back as a hero who has a better understanding of himself and the earth.

#### 6. CONCLUSION

The world evolves with time, and this phenomenon will never cease. When Nietzsche wrote about the ideal man, he considered his contemporary times, but in the present world, the definition of a superman can change. A person who is working on the betterment of his self, who follows his ideas with utmost discipline and can still be a part of the society by being at its periphery, can be a hero. The society in recent time is disintegrating in a manner where it is essential for each one to get a little distant from it and in order to understand ourselves and others better. A hero in the present world is a person who can be independent and still know how to strike the equilibrium point between getting excluded and still being a part of the community. The three characters which we analysed in this paper may not be fitting into the conventional idea of a superman, but they are the modern world heroes, who have a belief system of their own, who are not nihilists even after being the critiques of a world which others accept as it comes. The recent trend of exploring oneself is the new way of finding a meaning for the earthly existence. The 'seed of the highest hope' which Nietzsche talks of can be the idea of, and this can be the goal of every man to lead a better life and create a better society. The three characters are of

different age groups and different backgrounds; they portray distinctive forms of heroism and courage.

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was supervised by Dr. Tanu Kashyap, Amity Institute of English Studies and Research.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Dostoevsky, Fyodor, trans. David McDuff, *Crime and Punishment*, Penguin Books, London, 2003.
- [2] Murakami, Haruki, trans. Philip Gabriel, *Kafka on the Shore*, Vintage Books, London, 2005.
- [3] Nietzsche, Friedrich, trans. Kaufman, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Dover Publications, London, 1999.
- [4] Yama, Megumi, 'Haruki Murakami: Modern-Myth Maker beyond Culture', Routledge, 29 February 2016.
- [5] Baik, Jiwoon, 'Murakami Haruki and the historical memory of East Asia', Routledge, 17 March 2010.
- [6] Poljakova, Ekaterina, 'Fyodor Dostoevsky and Friedrich Nietzsche: Power and Weakness', Routledge, 14 April 2017.