



## THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN CRIMES- A STUDY ON ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S STORIES

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### ABSTRACT

Crime is the most challenging problem of the day. The governments all over the world are vigorously fighting against the crime. Although there are differences among the experts in the opinions on crime, they all share a common belief. Criminal behavior is in many aspects of society, and it needs to be addressed. Among various stimulants for crimes, emotions play a vital role. A negative emotion like anger, if unattended, leads to destruction. The paper analyses revenge as the key drive of crime in the stories of Arthur Conan Doyle. The criminals suffer from unquenchable thirst for revenge and it lures them to indulge in felony. They are the victims of poor emotional skills. They all fall prey to the circumstances that drain their self- control. Along with criminal procedures, the legal system can pay equal importance to the emotional needs of the criminals. The strengthening of emotional skills is necessary to control criminal impulses and thus to thwart crimes. By addressing the emotional needs of the criminals, a perfect rehabilitation can be established.

**Keywords:** Crime, Emotions, Revenge, Psychology

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### INTRODUCTION

Today crime is a common phenomenon seen and heard everywhere. It is an integral part of the risks in everyday life. Both expert and public opinion state that crime is associated with harm and violence; harm to individuals, destruction of property, and the denial of respect to people and institutions. There is no common opinion among the experts on the definitions of crime. Scholars have agreed that the definition varies from person to person, culture to culture and country to country. Referring to the subjective nature of crime and its control, Henry and Lanier suggest that "what counts as crime at one place and time, culture, or location may not be considered as crime at another time, in another culture, or even across the street!"(7).

Pressing problems of a social and individual nature exist in understanding crime. Though there is a lack of agreement on the most basic question, namely what crime is, everyone agrees that whatever act is against the welfare of the humanity is crime. A person who has violated a law, or has breached a rule, is said to have committed a criminal offense. Glanville Williams, for example, defines crime as "an act that is capable of being followed by criminal proceedings, having one of the types of outcome (punishment etc) known to follow these proceedings" (107). This means that there is no shared opinion or a common element to a crime other than the fact that all the crimes are liable to legal proceedings.

### The Subjective Nature of Crime

The works of various scholars reveal the contextual nature of crime and its control. The crime is the product of power hierarchies within society and that the conflict with the law often results in untoward incidents. Crime can be branded as the undesirable result of the socio-economical imbalances in the society. This definition of crime is most commonly accepted, as was brought out by Tappan: "an intentional act or omission in violation of criminal law (statutory and case law), committed without defense or justification, and sanctioned by the State as a felony or misdemeanor" (96-102). Usually, crime happens when there is an appropriate motive, means and opportunity. It is commonly believed that criminals are normal human beings in their routine and they do not have much dissimilarity. But recent neuroscience researches prove that the brain pattern of criminals show some evidence that the brains of certain kinds of criminals are different from those of the rest of the population. While these findings could improve the understanding of criminal behavior, they also raise questions about whether and how society should use this knowledge to combat crime. Clara Markowitz explains in her article, "Criminal Minds Are Different from Yours, Brain Scans Reveal":

In addition to brain differences, people who end up being convicted for crimes often show behavioral differences compared with the rest of the population. One long-term study that Raine participated in followed 1,795 children born in two towns from ages 3 to 23. The study measured many aspects of these individuals' growth and development, and found that 137 became criminal offenders.

One test on the participants at age 3 measured their response to fear – called fear conditioning – by associating a stimulus, such as a tone, with a punishment like an electric shock, and then measuring people's involuntary physical responses through the skin upon hearing the tone. In this case, the researchers found a distinct lack of fear conditioning in the 3-year-olds who would later become criminals...

Overall, these studies and many more like them paint a picture of significant biological differences between people who commit serious crimes and people who do not. While not all people with antisocial personality disorder — or even all psychopaths — end up breaking the law, and not all criminals meet the criteria for these disorders, there is a marked correlation.

Along with biological changes, the emotional state of the criminals gains much attention. While some crimes are difficult to be measured by the scale of existing criminal proceedings, many of them are based on revenge, thirst for money and power, anger and frustration, fear, etc. Doyle splendidly describes these base and primitive nature of human beings in his stories.

### Doyle's Criminals

Numerous researches have been done on Doyle's stories and most of them focus on the investigation of crime. The researchers are often blinded by the radiance of Sherlock Holmes that the criminal's point of view is less treated. In this law bound society, a law breaker is branded as a criminal and is prosecuted. The society forgets that even criminals are human beings with complete rights to live fairly in the society. Like illness in the body, their criminal impulses are illness in the mind. It should properly be treated and cured. It is true that the nefarious act of the criminals affects the society, irreparably sometimes, but their right to lead a decent life is undeniable. The root of the criminality is to be identified and addressed properly. Even in organized crimes, a psychological study is possible. Doyle's criminals are from various layers of the society and represent their time well. Doyle handles the criminals in an objective way and does not present any analysis. The perpetrators of crime in the stories are mostly losers by failing to handle their harmful emotions. Those who are high in their emotional skills are able to curb their negative emotions and handle the crises properly. They never pose a threat to the harmony of the society. But the criminals portrayed by Doyle are individuals who fail to manage their socio-emotional skills due to some

painful experiences and misconceptions in their minds.

### Revenge as Key Crime Motive

Jefferson Hope, the criminal in Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet*, suffers from an unquenchable revenge for his lost love. Hope spends his whole life in pursuing the murderers of his ladylove and punishes them. The novel has two parts, "The Lauriston Gardens Mystery" and "The Country of the Saints". The second part narrates the incidents that made Hope burn with revenge. It presents the love life of Jefferson Hope and Lucy Ferrier that took place in 1847. It also narrates the villainy of Joseph Stangerson and Enoch Drebbler whose ruthless acts lead to the death of both Lucy Ferrier and her father. Swearing vengeance, Hope follows Drebbler and Stangerson continuously, coming close to kill them on numerous occasions. Though he suffers from aortic aneurysm, a heart ailment, he never gives up his search for the murderers. Finally, he manages to kill them in London in the guise of a cabman. However, Sherlock Holmes manages to identify him and arrests him. However Hope dies from his aneurysm the night before his trial, with a smile on his face. The case of Hope shows that revenge is one of the important motives of crime. In the article "The Complicated Psychology of Revenge," Eric Jaffe says:

A few years ago, a group of Swiss researchers scanned the brains of people who had been wronged during an economic exchange game. These people had trusted their partners to split a pot of money with them, only to find that the partners had chosen to keep the loot for themselves. The researchers then gave the people a chance to punish their greedy partners, and for a full minute, as the victims contemplated revenge, the activity in their brains was recorded. The decision caused a rush of neural activity in the caudate nucleus, an area of the brain known to process rewards. The findings, published in a 2004 issue of *Science*, gave physiological confirmation to what the scorned have been saying for years: Revenge is sweet.

Hope fails to understand that preserving human life is more important than destroying it. Hope himself is a victim of crime and has lost his love life in the hands of two criminals. His loss and anger overshadows his reason and dulls his intellect that he devotes his entire life in planning and executing his revenge instead of concentrating on starting a fresh and meaningful life. He is the perfect embodiment of suppressed primitiveness in human beings. Hope nurtures the poison tree within his mind and allows it to be deep rooted. Though he has a cause to risk his very life to revenge his enemies, the result is not satisfactory and encouraging. It should have happened that once Hope avenges his enemies, he settles peacefully to spend his remaining life; but it does not happen. He dies of his heart ailment that he developed because of his long suppressed stress and anger.

Another cruel revenge is presented in "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box". The story is about two severed ears received in parcel. Miss Cushing, a spinster, receives the terrifying gift from an unknown person. She has two siblings, Mary and Sarah. Mary is married to a sailor and Sarah is unmarried. Holmes involves in the case and learns that Browner, Mary's husband, is the culprit. As he rejected Sarah's advances, she caused a cleavage in Mary's family by making her involve in a relationship with a handsome sailor. Browner revenges the lovers by killing them and then severing their ears to be sent to Sarah to show the tragic result of her malice. However, he feels bad for his act, suffers from nerve breakdown and willingly surrenders himself to the police.

"The Boscombe Valley Mystery" presents yet another story of revenge. McCarthy, a wealthy man, coaxes his son to court his patron Turner's daughter Alice and fails. Due to this dispute, the son leaves his father to live alone. Later, McCarthy is killed and the suspicion falls on the son. During Holmes's investigation, it is revealed that Turner was a robber in Australia who murdered a group of travelers for the wealth they carried. However, he spared the driver McCarthy and later settled in England along with his daughter. McCarthy tracked Turner and started blackmailing him. When Turner heard McCarthy compelling his son to court Alice, he

killed McCarthy to silence him forever. After his confession to Holmes, Turner also informs that he has been suffering from a deadly illness that will take his life shortly. He pleads the detective not to disclose these facts to his daughter and dies soon.

"The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge" presents another form of revenge. The detective Sherlock Holmes receives a strange case from Mr. Scott Eccles. He reports that his friend Garcia, a young man, is missing under mysterious circumstances. Eccles dined with Garcia in the previous night and slept in his house. Throughout the dinner, the young man seemed tensed and went missing from the morning. Holmes is informed by the police that Garcia's body was discovered a little away from his house. He resolves the mystery by examining the governess of Garcia's neighbour. It unfolds that a middle-aged foreigner called the Tiger of San Pedro is the culprit who killed Garcia's father. Garcia was after the villain to punish him. Garcia tried his best to avenge the killer and wanted to use Eccles as an alibi, but he himself became a victim. But the criminal is killed along with his secretary. Revenge takes its stand. Eric Jaffe again says in his article "The Complicated Psychology of Revenge":

The long history of vengeance in art suggests a basic instinct for retribution ingrained in the human spirit. Indeed, recent facts largely confirm this age-old fiction: Revenge has been cited as a factor in one in five murders that occur in developed countries, and a report from 2002 found that between 1974 and 2000 three in five school shootings in the United States were driven by vengeance.

Eccentrics are common for all the ages. They are noted for their poor emotional management and execute their will without analyzing the consequences. Jonas Oldacre, in "The Adventure of the Norwood Builder," is such an eccentric who takes his revenge in a different way. He is a builder by profession and carries the wound of past broken love in his heart even in the old age. When he decides to disappear from the public, he plans for revenge. He meets McFarlane, the son of his past beloved, and assures him of his wealth. Later, he fires his timber yard and hides himself in

the building. The suspicion falls on McFarlane and he is arrested. Holmes takes a personal interest in the case and visits the scene of crime. He understands that the young lawyer has been cynically victimized by the builder. Holmes arranges for a false fire alarm and brings out the builder who is hiding in his house. The builder is sent to prison and McFarlane is free. Thus, revenge eats up the man who nurtures it.

In the past few years, psychological scientists have discovered many ways in which the practice of revenge fails to fulfil its sweet expectations. The 'sweet revenge' is in fact a slow poison that kills the bearer at the end. Behavioural scientists have observed that instead of quenching hostility, revenge can prolong the unpleasantness of the original offense and that merely bringing harm upon an offender is not enough to satisfy a person's vengeful spirit. They have also found that instead of delivering justice, revenge often creates only a cycle of retaliation, in part because one person's moral equilibrium rarely aligns with another's. The outcome of these insights proves why the pursuit of revenge has persisted through the ages, despite tasting a lot more bitter than expressed. Stillwell says in the article "We're all victims here: Toward a psychology of revenge":

Successful revenge appears to make the avengers feel satisfied that equity has been restored, but in many cases the recipient of revenge will perceive the aftermath of revenge as marked by inequity and negative outcomes.

In spite of its sourness, people similar to Doyle's criminals are never tired of using revenge as the motive of crime. They lack the emotional management to keep their harmful emotions under control. For centuries, it is the favourite theme of literature. For example, Greek mythology is filled with revenge themes like Hephaestus's revenge on his mother Hera for abandoning him as a child. Revenge is the central motive in many Shakespearean plays like *Hamlet* and *Titus Andronicus*. They all have become successful. In a way, the fear of revenge maintains the harmony of the society. It prevents the people from harming

others except in some cases. But revenge is always a coarse reaction to a wrong committed already.

Hans J. Eysenck, British psychologist, is popular for his theory on personality and crime. He proposed that "criminal behaviour is the result of an interaction between certain environmental conditions and features of the nervous system" (qtd. in Bartol and Bartol 99). Followers of Eysenck believe that each individual offender has a unique neurophysiological makeup that induces an individual to become a criminal when mixed with a certain environment (Bartol and Bartol 99). It is important to note that Eysenck proclaims that criminals are not born, but the combination of environment, neurobiological, and personality factors constitute to different types of crimes. Eysenck further explains it as follows:

It is not itself, or criminality that is innate; it is certain peculiarities of the central and autonomic nervous system that react with the environment, with upbringing, and many other environmental factors to increase the probability that a given person would act in a certain antisocial manner. (7)

When the smooth existence and wellbeing of human beings are under threat, some of them tend to become criminals.

#### Conclusion

Though Doyle's villains excel in their intelligence, they fail because of their destructive impulses. They are the fallen angels who believe in the darker side of the human mind. They all share a common quality that they lack the emotional skills. Doyle deals with the villainy of groups, individuals, men, women and children in his stories, just like Thomas Hardy who exposes the inherent qualities of people in his Wessex novels and R.K. Narayan who depicts the follies and foibles of the people in his Malgudi novels. There are numerous psychological theories like rational choice theory, theory of personality and crime, trait theory, psychodynamic trait theory, social structure theory, social process theory, social conflict theory, etc., by various masterminds like Sigmund Freud to bring human beings under their scale of definition. Yet, the human behaviour is still an enigma to the researchers and eludes their clear comprehension.

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