

## SERIAL KILLERS AS VICTIMS: CAN THEY BE REFORMED?

Written by *Mansi Jain\** & *Ayushi Sharma\*\**

\* 5th Year BA LLB( Hons.), Nirma University, Ahmedabad, India

\*\* 5th Year BA LLB( Hons.), Nirma University, Ahmedabad, India

---

### ABSTRACT

The research article emphasizes serial killers from the viewpoint of victimology. The article studies victimization along with the psychoanalysis of the victims and offenders and their inter relationship with the criminal justice system. The article is limited to the study of serial killers in India. The article is contextualized with the analysis of serial killers as the victims of their past and the case studies on serial killers specifically in India. The article further introspects the failure of the criminal justice system of India in dealing with such matters and emphasizes the requirement of the criminal justice system to adequately equip itself to deal with such cases leading to proper dissemination of justice.

**Keywords:** Serial Killers, Psychoanalysis, Victimization, Victimology, Reformation, Retribution, Deterrence, Restoration, Rehabilitation, Theories of Victimization

## INTRODUCTION

Serial killing is a recurring phenomenon and numerous serial killers have killed hundreds of innocent victims during their spree. Thus, a serial killer is a person who has committed a series of murders and is an organized type of criminal. India has witnessed numerous serial killings like the case of Amardeep Sada, an 8-year-old boy who killed three newborn babies, including two siblings and the Thug Behram, who is accused of killing more than 900 people. Despite a large number of killings, there is no separate classification of death caused by serial killings in the statistics provided by the National Crime Records Bureau Report 'Crime in India'. This classification is necessary, as it would help in assessing the enormity of the problem and help the administrative agencies as well as the criminal justice system in the proper implementation of the laws and devising the necessary framework and mechanism for prevention of crime and protection of victims.

The serial killers are always considered as the ones violating the societal norms, who are deviant in nature and are a menace to society, but there is always a reason behind a person's behavior. The serial killers are a victim of their past which made them turn into serious criminals. Serial killers like Raman Raghav had a disturbed childhood, which led to the formation of his personality as a criminal. Serial killers committing serial killings being a gruesome act shall not be shown undue sympathy but some form of restoration and reformation techniques shall be emphasized more than the deterrence and retribution theory.

There are no official statistics available for the number of serial killings happening in India and most of the information and data rely on the media reports. A plethora of movies and series have been created on Indian serial killers while the real research on the subject matter abjectly stutters. The criminal justice system has been ignorant in dealing with the matter of serial killings and without any further consideration of even a minimal chance of their reformation, restoration and rehabilitation, they are awarded severe forms of punishment. The article is divided into three parts, Part-I emphasizes the study of serial killers as victims of their past. Part II discusses the ignorance of the criminal justice system in dealing with cases of serial killers and their reformation, Part-III deals with the psychoanalysis of these serial killers in reference to the case studies and their inter-linkage with different theories of victimization.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A serial killer is a person who has intermittently committed a series of murders on different occasions with an interval between the murders.<sup>i</sup> There is a reason behind every act of deviance and there is a past behind every individual turning to the path of crime. Serial killers are victims themselves who further hunt for victims. Their targets mostly comprise the vulnerable group or the high-risk victims which are easily approachable or they target that class of people for whom they have a feeling of hatred due to their past experiences.

### 1. *Serial Killers: Victims of their Past*

According to an American sociologist, Howard Becker, no one is a born criminal. It is the terrible past experiences that lead to the deviant behavior of an individual eventually turning him into a criminal. It is not disputed that serial killers being a menace to society shall not be punished but it is necessary to consider the psychological aspects of their criminal behavior. The famous criminologist, Adrian Raine, in his book "The Anatomy of Violence", believes that environmental and biological factors play an important role in deviating an individual's mind toward criminal behavior. Most serial killers have been a victim of child abuse in their childhood. Notably, the prevalence of abuse in serial killers is greater than in the population in general.<sup>ii</sup>

It can be asserted that most serial killers have suffered early childhood trauma which can be classified as physical or sexual abuse, separation of parents, emotionally unavailable parents, domestic violence and abuse, family dysfunction and many more. They have suffered a lot of traumas and their actions can be a result of Post Traumatic Social Disorder. Other environmental factors like malnutrition, poor education, poor standard of living, poverty and weak financial conditions, and social strife are some strongest behavioral proclivities that deviate an individual. Erratic, coercive and punitive parenting is another major factor that facilitates the development of antisocial personalities in an individual and they are more likely to become violent offenders.<sup>iii5</sup> Such individuals tend to develop narcissistic behavior, they are neurotic and aggressive and very protective of themselves. They tend to make up hypothetical situations in their minds which are influenced by the trauma they have suffered and then they try to defend themselves in such a way that they

end the lives of people before they could even hurt them. It cannot be denied that serial killers are dangerous to society but it can be clearly explained that these serial killers may have been victims of their past and they live the life that they have not chosen to live. They keep on fighting with their early life traumas even after they have ended and thus, they need more affection and critical care through reformation and rehabilitation techniques instead of harsher punishments.

## ***2. Are Harsher Punishments Causing Deterrence?***

It is proved from the aforesaid research that; serial killers are a victim of their past and suffer from various psychological disorders. It is agreed that these people derive immense pleasure from their gruesome act of killing and receive gratification. They can be differentiated from murderers as a simple murderer knows the consequences of his act, he knows that his act is not rational and is against the law. But a serial killer is usually a psychopath, suffering from psychological disorders who do not understand the consequences of his act. He believes his acts to be rational and that what he is doing is correct. He has difficulties in understanding the nature of his act and mere giving harsher punishments like the death penalty brings no solution.

The criminal justice system in India is quite backwards-looking and opinionated concerning serial killers. They are more likely to award them capital punishments instead of trying for reformation. In other words, they just end the problem before even trying to solve it. A person who is suffering from mental disabilities and psychological disorders needs more care and attention than a normal individual who understands the consequences of his act and merely giving them harsher punishments does not create deterrence, as if it would have deterred them, then the crimes would have never happened. Instead, it gives rise to more hardened criminals as these psychopaths derive pleasure from these acts. Thus, the criminal justice system in India must be more forward-looking and reformative measures for these serial killers must be adopted.

Reformation does not mean that we support the release of these serial killers, instead, we are emphasizing the fact that a person who is devoid of care and education can be restored

to society if he is given the right recognition and due care. For instance, Mary Flora Bell, a British serial killer in the United Kingdom, was convicted of serial killings at the age of 13 years.<sup>iv</sup> She was a psychopath and derived pleasure in murdering and felt at home in the prison. The psychologists along with other officials focussed on her reformation and she was released with a new name at the age of 23 years. She was restored to society and gave birth to a daughter.

It is not refuted that all serial killers cannot be transformed, reformed, rehabilitated and restored to society. But there is a possibility that some of them can be reformed and restored. All it takes is an extra effort from the side of the criminal justice system to deploy psychological experts to work. The Indian justice system is more focused on retribution and deterrence concerning serial killers. Rather it should be forward-looking and there is a need that they should realize that reformation of such serious offenders is possible, because if you cannot reform and restore such offenders, then the theory of reformation as a whole and prisons being correctional centres will be vitiated and will be of no use.

### 3. *Case Studies*

- ***Renuka Shinde and Seema Gavit:***

Anjana Bai [The mother] and her two daughters had a criminal history. The mother of these two serial killer sisters was skilled in pickpocketing and stealing jewellery from crowded areas as a means for her family survival. Anjana's husband divorced her due to her habit of indulging in criminal activities. Soon after her husband left her, she became a habitual offender to satisfy her financial needs. Her husband married another woman and they were blessed with a daughter. The first wife and her two daughters decided to kidnap and kill Mohan's daughter from the second wife. This habit of seeking revenge became a day to-day practice for them. This proves that a child's family history plays a major role in his deviant behavior.

Renuka used to take the assistance of her four year-old son for the act of pickpocketing. As the presumption was that women with a child won't steal, Thus, they started to carry a child be it there own son, or any other person's child whenever they wanted to commit a crime.

***Modus Operandi:***

- They kidnapped children from temples, playgrounds, etc. and commit theft. If the child screamed or cried or tried to scream, the child was either abandoned or was killed by them.
- They majorly targeted children under the age of six years. For instance, some children were beaten to death, their heads were bashed, they were thrown from stairs, buildings etc.

***Note***

1. *“This case is interesting because it was for the first time since after independence women were given the death penalty in India*
2. *Even the mercy petition in this case was rejected by the President of India in 2014*
3. *A short movie titled **Posham Pa** (on Zee5) was based on the life of these two sisters.”*

- ***Raman Raghav:***

Raman Raghav alias, Anna, Thambi was a famous serial killer in Mumbai Suburban during the 1960s. He is also known as India’s Jack the Ripper, as he was never caught even after his continuous killing spree in Slum areas of Mumbai. He was suffering from chronic schizophrenia and had delusions going in his mind all the time. He believed that the other slum dwellers around him thought of him to be homosexual. He wanted to prove himself as a ‘powerful man’ who is born as kanoon or law in himself.

He was a hunter and a scavenger who went on a killing spree in areas where high number of slum dwellers reside. He used to kill these dwellers and rob them to earn a

good amount so as to fulfill his desires to live a good life. He used to well groom himself and was never caught by the police. He was homeless and did not have a family. He resided in an area which was prone to crime. He was assaulted in his childhood.

The surroundings and his vulnerable experiences impacted him such that he started committing murder and theft. He was behind the bars for five years. After getting released from jail, he refrained from doing petty crimes and after some time started to kill people due to a disturbed mindset. He always used to carry an umbrella with him which became an important clue to identify him.

***Modus Operandi:***

- He ruthlessly killed people living in slum areas using a baton as a crime weapon.
- He used to smash their skulls and break their jawline. This case is interesting as Raman was never identified.

***Note:***

1. *DCP Kulkarni along with sub-inspector Fialho cracked this case by identifying Raman through photographs and identified two localities where he can be caught by the police and through detailed analysis of various police case files with the close investigation and finally by deploying two thousand police officers in the North suburb of Mumbai, the police tried to catch hold Raman Raghav.*
2. *It was a difficult catch for police as the killing spree continued for six consecutive years.*
3. *The sub Inspector Alex Fialho had an important role in identifying and catching him and he was given the title of "Indian Sherlock Holmes".*
4. *There were several movies released in different states in different regional languages which were based on the life of Raman Raghav. Some of them are Raman Raghav 2.0, psycho Raman, etc.*

### **3. Amardeep Sada:**

The youngest serial killer in India killed his two siblings and his neighbour's baby. He was a sadist by birth and enjoyed hurting and harming others. No one, in general, can believe that such a small kid can commit a heinous act of murder.

#### ***Modus Operandi:***

Sada told police, without any hesitation, that he killed the baby and his sisters in a deserted field by using a brick as a crime weapon. He used to hide dead bodies under a pile of dry grass and leaves. There was no fear in his mind and he happily confessed how he murdered the three kids.

#### ***Note:***

- 1. He was sent to a juvenile justice home for reformation and was given medical therapy, treatment and counselling to change his mindset.*
- 2. He was kept in solitary confinement in juvenile justice homes for ten years and was under continuous observation by a psychologist.*
- 3. A series titled "Crime route" (episode 3 is on Amardeep Sada's case).<sup>8</sup> Sada, who was eight years old, is not only India's youngest serial killer but he is the youngest serial killer in the world.<sup>vi</sup>*

### **4. Navas**

He is a school dropout who committed five murders in seventy-seven days in 2012 in the Kollam district of Kerala. He majorly targeted beggars and homeless petty



workers . He robbed and beat these people like animal while they were sleeping at night in the streets.

***Modus Operandi:***

- He used to roam as a rag picker in the streets during the daytime. He used to sleep in the afternoon and hunted for prey at the night.
- While robbing, if any of his victims woke up, he used to beat them to death using stones and brick kilns.
- He used to rob beedi, ganja (cannabis) and money from victims. Whenever the police while patrolling stopped him, he used to act like an insane person and was ignored by the police.
- He targeted the poor and homeless, labor class people who were old and defenseless and under the influence of ganja and alcohol.
- He was a disorganized criminal as he left the crime scene as it is. He used to walk to reach the place of crime and the localities he targeted were near to outskirts of the city which was near the highway and main road.

***Note:***

1. *The interesting thing about this case is that the offender targeted only the class of people he belonged to.*
2. *He was a drug-addled first psychopath who would sleep around eight in the morning and would wake up either in the evening or at midnight for his killing spree.*
3. *He was a psychopath and was sent to an asylum for treatment and was freed from police custody but even after release from the asylum, his killing spree went on.*

### 5. *Nithari case:*

This is the first cannibalism case in India. Surinder Koli was the serial killer in this case who killed nineteen girls between the age group ranging from five to twenty-one years. He was a Dalit and in childhood used to see his father butchering meat. He learnt the skill and technique of butchering from his father. He came to Noida in search of a job. He got a job as a servant in the house of Moninder Singh Pandher, who was an affluent businessman. He belonged to suppressed class and used to stay away from his family for work. He had a disturbing mindset and personality disorder. He had a desire to have sexual intercourse with the prostitutes his boss used to call during the night. But he was a psychopath such that he committed necrophilia and cannibalism whenever any woman denied having sexual intercourse with him.

#### ***Modus Operandi:***

- Koli lured small girls by giving them candies, and chocolates and used to call them inside the bungalow.
- He used to use a dupatta to strangle these minor girls or choke them with his hands.
- After killing them, he used to cover the face of girls and had sexual intercourse with their corpses.
- After killing he committed necrophilia and further committed cannibalism.
- Thus, he used to chop the dead bodies with butcher precisions and eat the chopped body parts and the remains were wrapped in black polythene bags and were disposed off in a nearby drain.

#### ***Note:***

1. *There are two crime patrol episodes namely episodes 709-710 (Season 1) on this case .*
2. *There is a documentary on Netflix called ""The Karma Killings"" on this case<sup>vii.9</sup>*

## **THEORIES OF VICTIMOLOGY: ANALYSIS WITH THE AFORESAID CASE STUDIES**

There are four theories of Victimology. These theories are based on physical, psychological, social and geographical factors which are a reason for the prevalence of Victimization. These theories are as follows:

### **1. *Victim Precipitation Theory:***

- This theory was conceptualized by *Hans Von Hentig and Benjamin Mendelson*. The theory focuses on *the inherent characteristics of the victim*.
- This theory tries to draw a link between offender and victim stating that the offender has an active role in crime as he is the doer whereas the victim has a passive role in crime as he is the sufferer.<sup>viii</sup>
- This theory holds the individual himself responsible for the occurrence of crime in the case where he is the victim as the basic inference drawn is that the victim has inherent characteristics which make him prone to or subject to the crime.

### ***Analysis with respect to the Nithari case:***

Surinder Koli belonged to a lower caste and faced a lot of violence in his early childhood. He was staying away from his family and was working as a servant in Delhi. His boss used to call for escort services and being away from his wife his sexual desires increased with time. He targeted these prostitutes and when they opposed having sex with him, he used to commit necrophilia and butcher the bodies. Here the women themselves being prostitutes and arriving at Moninder's flat led them to become prey of the psychopath. The way women dressed up and the act of prostitution in which they were involved here can be said to be one of the causes

that led women to become victims of the crime.

## 2. ***Routine Activity Theory:***

- It was propounded by *Cohen and Felson*. It majorly focuses on *the role of the ecosystem* which makes criminality a part of the routine of the victim<sup>ix</sup>.
- This theory emphasizes the convergence of the three elements that led to happening of crime which are as follows:
  1. Motivated offender
  2. A suitable target
  3. Absence of capable guardian<sup>x</sup>

### ***Analysis with respect to the Geeta sisters case:***

In this case, the two sisters and their mother used to kidnap children, use them for petty pickpocketing and kill them as they had fear that the screaming of a child can create a problem for them. Here, the two sisters in their childhood saw their mother's habit of pickpocketing. When the father of the girls left the family and had a new family of four, after the second marriage, the ex-wife and her two daughters wanted to seek revenge. They kidnapped and killed both the daughters of the second wife.

Here, the parental and surrounding environment had a major effect on the mindset of the Geeta sisters. They were not educated nor had their father's hand on them. Under the influence of the mother, the crime commission became a part of the routine for these sisters being victims of parental abuse. The three elements of the crime can be easily inferred as the Geeta sisters became motivated offenders due to their bad past, then they targeted a suitable target i.e., children and there was no one to guide them to the right path. Thus, the outcome was that they became serial killers themselves and began to do petty crimes which later got extended to heinous crimes too.

### 3. *Lifestyle Theory:*

- This theory was propounded by *Michael Hindelang, Michael Gottfredson and James Garofalo*.<sup>xi</sup>
- This theory clearly states that *the probability of Victimization increases because of the lifestyle*<sup>xii</sup>.
- When individuals spend a subsequent amount of time in public places at night surrounded by strangers the chances of the individual becoming subjected to Victimization increases.
- Lifestyles are important because they increase the exposure to would-be offenders without effective restraints that can prevent a crime.
- Thus, it is the exposure to risk and not the lifestyles per se that create opportunities for Victimization.

### *Analysis with respect to Raman Raghav Case:*

The psychopath Raman Raghav used to travel at night in slum areas and committed multiple killings in a single go. The lifestyle of slum dwellers is such that they involve in criminal activities very often for earning money, power and control. Raman was homeless and did not have any family. The geographical area in which he resided consisted of a high population of slum dwellers who were involved in criminal activities like theft and robbery. He was assaulted in his childhood. The surroundings and his vulnerable experience impacted him such that he started committing robbery and theft. Here the demographic location is of such a nature that exposure to it can make one a victim of crime. Raman himself was a victim of assault in his childhood and chronic schizophrenia from a very young age impacted him such that he became a criminal at a later point in time.

### 4. *Deviant Place Theory:*

- This theory was propounded by Rodney Stark.
- According to this theory greater the exposure to dangerous places greater the chances of an individual becoming a victim of a crime.<sup>xiii</sup>
- So, one must avoid staying in areas where crime rates are extremely high.
- *For example, South Central Los Angeles* is known for its notorious

gangs and higher crime rate. The more the individual ventures into such places, the more are the chances of his becoming a victim. Thus, one must migrate from such high risk areas<sup>xiv</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

From the aforesaid research, it can be inferred that the reformation of serial killers has been neglected by the criminal justice system of India. The law has been harsh on these killers and no efforts have been made to understand the plight and pain of these serial killers, considering them as victims. Punishment being necessary to create deterrence has been used as the only method to solve the cases but the question of whether such harsher punishments are causing deterrence remains unanswered. It is very unfortunate that the criminal justice system has not even considered the option of reformation and rehabilitation of such serial killers and has directly awarded them with harsher punishments like the death penalty. Serial Killers being psychopaths and suffering from personality disorders are themselves a victim of their past, who need love, affection and care. It is only because of this lack of care and abundant abuse, which is a major reason for their deviant behavior. Even if they could not be directly released into the society, as it might lead to a huge risk to many lives, minimal could be done by providing them with proper mental support and guidance in the prisons, leading them to a reformed lifestyle, instead of harsher punishments. It is to be remembered that the prisons nowadays work as correctional centres with the aim of the reformation a criminal and directing harsher punishments instead of trying for reformation would lead to a mockery of the Indian justice system.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Deepak, S., 2022. *Serial Killings in India: Case Studies and Profiling Strategies*.
2. Mitchell H, Aamodt MG. The incidence of child abuse in serial killers. *J Police Criminal Psychol*. 2005. Petherick, Wayne (2005). *Serial Crime: Theoretical and Practical*

Issues in Behavioral Profiling. Elsevier. ISBN 9780080468549.

3. Monacelli, A., 2018. *Murderous Children: 11-Year-Old Serial Killer Mary Bell*. [online] Owlcation. Available at: <<https://owlcation.com/social-sciences/Murderous-Children-Mary-Bell>> [Accessed 15 April 2022].

4. Pujari, S., 2022. *10 Notorious Serial Killers in India who had Created a Reign of Terror..* [online] The Best of Indian Internet. Available at: <<https://www.scrollroll.com/10-notorious-serial-killers-in-india/>> [Accessed 20 April 2022].

5. Nofziger, S., 2009. Victimization and the General Theory of Crime. *Violence and Victims*, 24(3), pp.337-350.

6. Trojan, C. and Salfati, C., 2010. Comparing the Criminal History Profiles of Serial and Single-Victim Homicide Offenders. *Victims & Offenders*, 6(1), pp.38-63.

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>i</sup> “Deepak S.,2022, *Serial Killings In India: Case Studies And Profiling Strategies*”.

<sup>ii</sup> “Mitchell H, Aamodt MG. The incidence of child abuse in serial killers. *J Police Criminal Psychol*. 2005. Petherick, Wayne (2005). *Serial Crime: Theoretical and Practical Issues in Behavioral Profiling*. Elsevier. ISBN 9780080468549”.

<sup>iii</sup> *ibid*

<sup>iv</sup> “Monacelli, A., 2018. *Murderous Children: 11-Year-Old Serial Killer Mary Bell*. [online] Owlcation. Available at <<https://owlcation.com/social-sciences/Murderous-Children-Mary-Bell>> [Accessed 15 April 2022].”

<sup>v</sup> “Pujari, S., 2022. *10 Notorious Serial Killers in India who had Created a Reign of Terror..* [online] The Best of Indian Internet. Available at: <<https://www.scrollroll.com/10-notorious-serial-killers-in-india/>> [Accessed 20 April 2022].”

<sup>vi</sup> *ibid*

<sup>vii</sup> *ibid*.

<sup>viii</sup> “Nofziger, S., 2009. Victimization and the General Theory of Crime. *Violence and Victims*, 24(3), pp.337-350.”

<sup>ix</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>x</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>xi</sup> *ibid*

<sup>xii</sup> *ibid*

<sup>xiii</sup> *ibid*

---

xiv *ibid*

