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CROSSING THE LINE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MASS MURDERERS AND SERIAL KILLERS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT:

This research paper examines the complex psychology of mass murderers and serial killers through a comparative lens from a psychological and legal perspective. Since both terms have a significant conceptual difference, we will focus on these specific crimes' meanings and nature. Examining case studies and psychological theories, as well as from a legal point of view, the paper examines classifications and sentencing guidelines, as well as the difficulties in prosecuting such crimes. We will also explore the motivations or patterns behind committing these crimes and attempt to comprehend the nature of the crime. This study employs the Analytical Research Methodology. Through a comparative lens of analysis, we will attempt to understand the factors that contribute to the heinous crimes committed by mass murderers or serial killers and look at the consequences of prevention, intervention, and justice. Understanding the complexities of these crimes can lead to better preventive measures and better legal responses, thus promoting a safer and fairer society.

KEYWORDS: Mass murderers, serial killers, death, psychology.

INTRODUCTION:

According to Dr. Michael Stone, professor of psychiatry at Columbia, mass murderers are generally dissatisfied people, and have poor social skills and few friends. Generally, the motives of mass murderers are less obvious than those of serial killers. According to Stone, 96.5% of mass murderers are male, and most of them are not clinically psychotic.¹ Rather than being a psychopath like most serial killers, mass murderers tend to be paranoid individuals with acute behavioral or social disorders. Like serial killers, mass murderers also display psychopathic tendencies, such as being cruel, manipulative, and uncompassionate. However,

¹ Crime Museum, <https://www.crimemuseum.org/crime-library/serial-killers/serials-killers-vs-mass-murderers> (last visited Feb.25,2024)

most mass murderers are social misfits or loners who are triggered by some uncontrollable event.

This research paper aims to conduct a comprehensive comparative analysis of mass murderers and serial killers within both psychological and legal contexts. By delving into the underlying motivations, psychological dynamics, and modus operandi of these offenders, we seek to illuminate the intricate differences that define their respective criminal behaviors. Furthermore, we will explore how these disparities influence the legal frameworks governing their prosecution, sentencing, and treatment within the criminal justice system.

To achieve this objective, the paper will proceed as follows: first, we will provide a conceptual overview of mass murder and serial killing, delineating their defining characteristics and typologies. Subsequently, we will delve into the psychological underpinnings of these phenomena, examining the intricate interplay of factors such as psychopathy, trauma, and socialization in shaping the behaviors of mass murderers and serial killers.

Moving beyond the realm of psychology, we will then analyze the legal implications associated with mass murder and serial killing. We will explore how legal frameworks differentiate between mass murder and serial killing. Finally, we will synthesize our findings to elucidate the broader societal implications of understanding mass murder and serial killing from both psychological and legal perspectives. By elucidating the complex interplay between individual psychopathology, social factors, and legal constructs, this research aims to contribute to a deeper comprehension of these aberrant forms of criminal behavior.

WHO ARE SERIAL KILLERS:

There is no singular definition of a serial killer accepted across the globe in different paradigms due to uncertain factors associated with the term itself. Every criminal jurisdiction and/or police department has defined it differently and has been following their own opinions in this regard. The Federal Bureau of Investigation,² the United States law enforcement agency, and the prime investigation department have given terminology concerning specific conditions for any criminal to be regarded as a serial killer.

²ResearchGate, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333565816> What is a Serial Killer What is a Mass Murderer How do they Differ, (last visited 26.Feb,2024)

Any criminal killing more than three people in more than a month with some cooling period in between as a mode to emotionally stabilize itself. This definition has various uncertain elements it shall not be the sole basis to regard any normal roadside criminal as a serial killer. This is just one angle to the complexity of the term.

The other definition, proposed by the National Institute of Justice, has provided a closer insight into the sexual needs of the criminal leading to the commission of brutal crimes. This deals with the psychological concept of inherent motive to satisfy the sexual urge through some sadistic action that is beyond the sanction of law and is deemed unlawful in every criminal jurisprudence. It is identified as one of the sexual crimes, but with the optimum amount of brutality and gore that can intimidate any normal person. It is deemed as a consequence of uncontrollable or irresistible sensations to satisfy sexual urges.

This definition has been considered as closest to the yet-to-be clearly explained term but it too has its limitations. This is based on the assumption that only males can be serial killers with their out-of-control sexual urges while losing out on the possibility of any female serial killer in society. The stereotypes have eluded the rational perspective over gender-neutral actions either with similar objectives or varied personal gains. It has also failed to take into account any other factor driving any individual to kill numerous people without any hint of guilt.

In case of the absence of any legally, socially, culturally, and globally accepted norm on the exact definition of the term, it would be safe to enumerate all the elements or factors forcing the individuals to carry out mass killings.

WHAT DRIVES A SERIAL KILLER:

Serial murders are a rare phenomenon, accounting for less than one percent of murders per year. However, the impact of these crimes on society is profound, so it is important to understand the psychological factors that drive these individuals to repeat acts of violence. Researching serial killers can help shed light on mental illness and psychopathy, which can be important in developing strategies to prevent and treat violent crimes. When it comes to serial killers, what makes a killer a serial killer? Serial killers are individuals who commit multiple murders over some time. They often have a troubled past that can lead to personality problems. These killers have no clear motives for their crimes; they do it primarily for the act itself,

even if it doesn't solve their underlying problems. The motivations and state of mind of serial killers have long fascinated criminal psychologists, officials, and the public.

While there is no single psychological profile that fits all serial killers, several recurring traits have been observed:

- **Childhood Trauma:** Many serial killers have experienced childhood trauma, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Studies have shown that a significant number of them were abused in their early years. In India, child protection laws are crucial to deal with such problems.
- **Lack of Empathy and Remorse:** Serial killers often show disturbing empathy and remorse for their actions. They seem unable to understand or care about the suffering of their victims. The Indian legal system recognizes the importance of assessing the mental state of the accused, including his capacity for empathy, in determining guilt or innocence.
- **Antisocial Behavior:** Extremely antisocial behavior is characteristic of many serial killers. They ignore both legal and social norms and do not show the laws that govern society. Such behavior is necessary to understand their actions and motives under the Indian Penal Code.
- **Desire for Control:** Serial killers prefer "practical" killing techniques such as strangulation, stabbing, or beating instead of shooting. This preference probably gives them greater personal control over their victims. The choice of method of killing can be decisive evidence in Indian criminal investigations.

India has seen several high-profile serial murder cases over the years that have left an indelible mark on its legal system. Notable cases include the Cyanide Mohan. This case not only shocked the nation but is a poignant reminder of the need to understand the psychological complexity behind serial killings. Psychology and law enforcement often work hand-in-hand when dealing with people with mental illnesses, understanding the causes of criminal activity, and providing treatment or resources to people who need them. Such profiles help investigators narrow down suspects, which can save time and resources. Understanding the art of profiling is crucial to solving serial murders in India.

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROFILING:

Psychological profiling is a key tool in identifying and apprehending serial killers. The FBI defines criminal profiling as a technique used to identify the perpetrator of a violent crime by identifying the personality and behavioral characteristics of the criminal based on an analysis of the crime, the criminal, and the crime committed.

Crime profiling is the in-depth analysis of a crime scene and finding common patterns with previous incidents. It helps to identify the choice of victims, manner, time and place, types of crime, contacts of the suspect, and condition of the scene.

Thus, criminal profiling techniques require a thorough examination of crime scenes to identify recurring patterns. Finally, criminal profilers can deduce possible motives for crimes. However, it is important to note that criminal profiling is not a tool to identify a specific criminal but to determine who most likely committed it.

MENTAL HEALTH ASSESSMENT:

Mental health evaluations of serial killers are an important part of the legal process. Forensic psychiatrists and psychologists play a key role in evaluating the defendant's state of mind. Indian law recognizes the importance of mental health evaluations, and these evaluations often influence the sentencing of serial killers. Understanding aspects of mental health is essential to ensure a fair and just process.

LEGAL PROVISIONS AND CHALLENGES:

The Indian legal framework, including parts of the Indian Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code, has evolved to respond to serial killings. Prosecuting serial killers, however, presents many challenges. The burden of proof, the admissibility of psychological evidence, and problems with confessions present major obstacles. The legal system must adapt to respond effectively to these challenges. International best practices on legal reforms and improvements can be a guide in this regard. The statutory provisions are the same as for murder, u/s 299 and 300, Indian Penal Code, 1860, which is punishable u/s 302 & 304 IPC. Further some other provisions, such as when serial murder involves kidnapping and ransom, Section 364A. In cases where sexual crimes are involved in the serial murder, Section 376 deals with the punishment for rape. If several persons are involved in a conspiracy to commit serial murder, they can be charged under Section 120B.

CASE STUDY: INDIAN SERIAL KILLER:

Cyanide Mohan

Mohan Kumar Vivekanand, also known as “Cyanide Mohan, is one of the most famous serial killers in India. He used to abuse women looking for marriage and would give them cyanide pills, saying they were contraceptive pills.

Who is Cyanide Mohan

Mohan Kumar Vivekanand, also known as “Cyanide Mohan,” is one of the most famous serial killers in India. He used to abuse women looking for marriage and would give them cyanide pills, saying they were contraceptive pills.

The former DG of Karnataka, S.T. Ramesh, in this case, made a statement, “It was the first case which I came across in my career that cyanide was used for homicide. The case created quite a sensation, most of all for the fact that the killer murdered women after promising to marry them. It was a completely different modus operandi”.

Crimes committed by Cyanide Mohan

His mode of operation was to lure these women with the promise to marry them, have coitus with them, and then the next day take them onto bus stands and convince them to take the pills. He would then send these women to the restrooms, claiming they might feel unwell after consuming the pill. When the woman succumbed to it, he would come back to the hotel room, collect all the jewelry and other belongings, and disappear from that place. All the victims were found in the restrooms of bus stands, decked out in wedding attire but without any jewelry. Further, all of them were from poor economic families, were between 22-35 years old, and resided either in Dakshina Kannada, Karnataka, or Kasargod, Kerala. They could not provide any dowry and thus were not able to find a suitable match. Mohan would lure them into marriage. The investigating teams had to break open the doors of all the restrooms because they were locked from the inside.

Arrest, conviction, and trial of Cyanide Mohan

Mohan escaped the clutches of the police for several years as most of the crimes were seen as suicides, even when there were traces of cyanide found in the victims’ bodies, until one day when he ran out of luck and was arrested in October of 2009 to several murders committed by him. The prime witnesses included the only woman who survived the cyanide pills and an

astrologer before whom Mohan revealed about the murders. The victim who survived exposed every detail of his modus operandi. The investigation was carried on by the then Assistant Superintendent of Police Chandragupta and Sub-Inspector Nanjunde Gowda before CID took over the case. Even when the case came up for trial, Mohan shook everyone by arguing his case. During his trial, he was sentenced to life imprisonment and a fine of Rs 25,00,00/- for the murders thus committed.

Punishment for crimes committed by Cyanide Mohan

Mohan Kumar was charged with several sections of the IPC, namely: Section 366 (Kidnapping, abducting, or inducing a woman to compel her marriage, etc.);

1. Section 376 (Punishment for rape);
2. Section 328 (Causing hurt using poison, etc., with intent to commit an offense);
3. Section 392 (Punishment for robbery);
4. Section 394 (Voluntarily causing hurt in committing robbery);
5. Section 417 (Punishment for cheating); and
6. Section 201 (Causing disappearance of evidence of the offence, or giving false information to screen offender).
7. Punishments were pronounced under several Sections of the IPC, namely, 366, 376, 328, 392, 394, 417, and 201. All of these sentences would run concurrently, as stated by the 6th Additional District and Sessions Judge Sayeedunnisa. Moreover, he was sentenced to death in five murder cases and life imprisonment in three others by the Karnataka High Court.

MASS MURDERERS

Mass murder is defined as the unlawful killing of multiple people, usually four or more victims, in a single incident or within a short period. The number of victims required to constitute mass murder depends on the definition used by different sources.

Mass murderers are people who kill several people in a single incident or a series of closely related incidents. The psychology behind these actions is complex and can vary from case to case. However, some general factors and theories have been proposed to explain their behavior:

- **Psychological disorders**: Some mass murderers suffer from serious mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, psychotic disorders, or severe personality disorders. These

disorders can impair their judgment, distort their perception of reality, and contribute to their violent behavior.

- **Trauma and Abuse:** Many mass murderers experienced trauma or abuse during childhood or adolescence. This can include physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, neglect, or witnessing violence in the home. Such experiences can increase anger, resentment, and a desire for revenge.
- **Social isolation and rejection:** mass murderers often experience social isolation, rejection, or alienation. They may feel marginalized or persecuted in society, leading to grievances and a desire to rage against others.
- **Escalation of Anger and Frustration:** Mass murderers often experience intense anger, resentment, or frustration that increases over time. These feelings can be triggered by personal failures, perceived injustice, or failure to achieve one's goals.

CRIMINAL PROFILING OF MASS MURDERERS:

Criminal profiling, considered a scientific method, is still relatively new. There are multiple definitions and boundaries for the term but this develops a description of the perpetrator based on examining the given evidence. According to one American media, one of the reasons for the massacre is the "minute of fame". Although this is not the only or the main reason for the massacres, all possible motives must be investigated. There are many reasons for the rise in mass murder. Many studies have addressed these causes and produced convincing results, but the phenomenon persists.

The event of a mass murder is unpredictable and unplanned. It is often linked to context-specific motivations or ideological beliefs. Contexts may include workplace disputes, gender-based violence, and in some cases racism. There is no specific mass murderer profile that can be derived from studies of past mass murderers. The methods, motivations, characteristics, and backgrounds of mass murderers are diverse. They come from all countries, all economic classes, and all cultures. Mass murderers use different types of weapons to carry out this crime. They also have different skills and abilities. Most people think that mass murderers attack random people in public places like playgrounds, malls, restaurants, or government offices. This type of murderer usually commits suicide or requires police intervention which often results in the death of the attacker. But public attacks are only part of the story.

One of the most common reasons for a mass murderer to attack is an estrangement or failed relationship, according to a University of Nevada study by Melanie Taylor.³ Individuals who commit mass murder often have a history of relationship or financial difficulties over a long period. The traumatic event is often what drives them to kill. Another common motive for mass murder is revenge. In some cases, the husband kills his wife and children because he sees them as part of his wife. Some of the other reasons for mass murder are: Gaining control, Robbing, and Sending a message targeting a specific group of people, Immigrants, or people of different races or genders.⁴

MENTAL HEALTH DIMENSIONS:

We often think of a mass murderer as a mentally ill person. However several studies have shown that most mass murderers aren't treated for mental health issues and aren't considered "psychotic" or "hallucinating." According to an analysis by Columbia University, only 11% of the studied mass murderers had a serious mental disorder. "Most mental illnesses are associated with low energy levels, low mood, and sometimes poor cognitive planning, which is not consistent with the mass murder that requires preparation, planning, and high energy", says Jonathan Metzl, Vanderbilt University professor of psychiatry.

Recent studies suggest that approximately 25% of mass murderers had exhibited a mental illness, but most of them had not appeared on the radar of either the mental health or law enforcement systems. Similarly, a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) study states that the person committing such acts is suffering from a mental illness of some kind, ranging from minor to more serious disorders. The study concluded that "formally diagnosed mental illness is not a very specific predictor of violence of any type, let alone targeted violence." These relatively weak associations highlight how mental illnesses in themselves rarely cause violent behavior and are not reliable predictors of multiple-victim mass crimes.⁵

LEGAL PROVISIONS AND CHALLENGES:

Many events that have occurred in modern India may be categorically categorized as crimes of genocide, yet they cannot be as there is no such crime recognized by Indian law. One major

³ Arcadia, <https://www.bycarcadia.org/> (last visited on 26 Feb.2024)

⁴ Arcadia, <https://www.bycarcadia.org/> (last visited on 26 Feb.2024)

⁵ National Library of Medicine, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7803479/#:~:text=19,13> (last visited on 26, Feb.2024)

obstacle to "bringing such criminals to justice" is the lack of explicit legislation addressing such offenses. For more than 20 years, this gap in the current criminal code has shielded those who commit these kinds of crimes from penalty and prosecution.

Since there is no legislation in India regarding genocide, mass murders are regarded as separate crimes along the lines of rioting, illegal assembly, and murder.

There are no provisions in domestic law that address the collective or the specific characteristics of these offenses. The Indian Penal Code, of 1860 stipulates penalties for offenses like murder, rape, assault, and other similar ones, but it makes no mention of mass crimes or crimes against humanity. Due to shortcomings in the Indian judicial system and a lack of legal sanctions under the Indian Evidence Act, CrPC, and IPC, these offenses typically go unpunished. The punishment of those who plan crimes and the applicability of evidence in mass crimes are rigidly governed by the Indian Penal Code and the Indian Evidence Act. The absence of provisions in these statutes concerning the punishment of the accused resulted in political turmoil and injustice throughout the nation. Numerous incidents have been reported regarding the protracted investigation of these crimes, which results in the perpetrators being held not accountable. As a result, we can conclude that Indian criminal jurisprudence has sadly failed to address this issue and lacks sufficient legal mechanisms to punish and prosecute those who plan mass murders.

MASS MURDERER: CASE STUDY

Surendra Koli v. State of Uttar Pradesh & Others [AIR(2014) 16 SCC 494].

The case revolves around Sections 302, 364, 376 of the Indian Penal Code, Section 164 of CrPc, Section 27 of the Indian Evidence Act, and Articles 21 & 137 of the Constitution of India.

FINAL JUDGEMENT

On 29 October 2014, the Supreme Court Bench headed by Chief Justice of India H.L. Dattu rejected the death sentence awarded by the High Court review petition with the view that the court had not committed any error in judgment. On 28 January 2015, the High Court bench headed by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and Justice Pradeep Kumar Singh Baghel commuted the death sentence to Life Imprisonment on the ground of "inordinate delay" in

deciding the mercy petition. In the end in February 2011, the Supreme Court upheld the death sentence of the culprits. In July 2014 the President had rejected the mercy petitions filed for them. On 3rd September, the court issued the death penalty against Koli. On the evening of 4th September, Koli was transferred from Meerut Jail because of the absence of hanging facilities. On October 29th, 2014, the Court bench headed by Chief Justice H.L. Dattu rejected the death sentence review petition. After so many review petitions, the court finally gave the death sentence to them in the 10th conviction in the year 2019.

CRITICAL OVERVIEW OF THE JUDGMENT

- Firstly, the accused was held liable for the murder by the Supreme Court. Secondly, his mercy petition was rejected after recognition by the nominal head of the Constitution. All this lacks relevancy, justification, and excuse for unacceptable delay. All mugged up seems everyone shuns his duties to be a decisive person at crucial times.
- The Government with compilation to the judicial system and legal fraternity should forward a robust mechanism to evict relevant delay and exhaustion of judicial timings in explicitly covering such cases.

In the official investigation and searches conducted by the authorities, the pattern, timeline, motives, and the way these serial murders were discovered, seeing which Surender Koli's criminal behavior, characterized by a series of heinous crimes over two years, can be attributed to psychopathy.

His psychopathic traits include a lack of remorse and empathy, manipulateness, and egocentricity. Koli displayed a disturbing calmness during his arrest and interviews, demonstrating hollow emotions. His manipulative tactics, scapegoating, and ability to evade suspicion for an extended period highlight his versatility and cunning nature. Medical tests revealed abnormalities in his ganglion and frontal lobes, contributing to his inability to feel empathy and control his emotional responses, ultimately underscoring the role of neurological factors in his actions.

CONCLUSION:

Ultimately, a comparative examination of mass murderers and serial killers within psychological and legal frameworks highlights notable differences as well as similarities

between these two types of criminals. A cooling-off interval is usually observed between each murder, however, serial killers follow a pattern of repeating killings over time, unlike mass murderers who usually carry out their crimes in a single, high-profile event involving several victims. Psychologically, impulsivity, wrath, and a desire for vengeance are features that mass murderers frequently demonstrate, whereas serial killers may show traits like psychopathy, manipulation, and a lack of empathy.

Legally speaking, the differences are in how these criminals are prosecuted and sentenced; mass murderers are frequently charged with acts of terrorism or mass homicide, whereas serial killers are charged with several murders. However, depending on the jurisdiction and the seriousness of their crimes, both kinds of offenders may be subject to harsh punishments, such as the death sentence or life in prison.

In general, successful preventative initiatives, intervention programs, and legal responses to these extreme types of criminal activity depend on an awareness of the distinctions and similarities between mass murderers and serial killers. Society may seek to lessen the frequency of such horrible crimes and promote safety and security for everybody by addressing the underlying psychological issues and putting the necessary legislative protections in place.

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