JETIR.ORG ISSN: 2349-5162 | ESTD Year : 2014 | Monthly Issue
JOURNAL OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATIVE RESEARCH (JETIR)
An International Scholarly Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Understanding the Human psyche: Criminal consciousness and pursuit of justice in Long Shadows and The Night She Disappeared.

Rajnandini Nag
Student
Amity University

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to Crime Friction and Psychological Thriller:

Crime friction and psychological thrillers are two gripping genres that keep reader on edge. Criminal friction revolves around crime, investigation and law enforcements. It often serves as a mirror reflecting societal fears, traumas, moral conflicts and darker side of the human mind. It also features detectives whether professional, amateurs, or even criminal themselves working to solve mysteries. Traditionally rooted in the pursuit of justice and resolving mysteries. The genre has developed over decades into a multifaceted field incorporating sub-genres. Which includes hard-boiled detective stories, legal trillers and noir fiction. Classic authors like Agatha Christie, Arthur Conan Doyle and Raymond Chandler set the foundation for this genre with intricate plots, clever twists, and suspenseful storytelling.

Psychological thrillers emphasise not merely on the crime itself, but on the mental states and motivations of both the criminals and investigators. These stories delve into paranoia, deception, and psychological manipulation, often exploring themes of trauma, obsession, and mind games. Writers like Gillian Flynn, Patricia Highsmith, and Stephen King have mastered this style, crafting deeply unsettling narratives that make readers question reality. Another fascinating genre that has emerged by merging these two gripping genres is called the Psychological Crime Friction. In psychological crime fiction, the crime is a gateway to a deeper exploration of human consciousness. These narratives often highlight, the mental instability or complexity of the criminal and his/her crime; the psychological toll on investigators/detectives and victims; uncertainty and corruption in the justice system; the tension between truth and perception. This sub-genre reveals how justice is not simply a legal outcome but a psychological necessity for closure and healing.

Literature Review

In this project the topic of discussion is understanding why criminals commit crimes and what are the factors which contribute in enabling a person to commit illegal actions which leads them to be punished by law. It also focuses on how justice is served to them both realistically and psychologically. This topic for this project has been chosen because of the current crime rate in India. According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Insia's crime rate was 422.2 per lakh population in 2022, down from 445.9 in 2021. In 2024 India's crime rate stood at 445.9 per 100,1000 people, making a decline from 487.8 in 2020. Despite an overall decrease, crimes against women increased by 4%. Uttar Pradesh has reported the highest crime rate with theft, robbery, and assault being prevalent. Major crime categories include homicide, assault, theft, and cybercrime. Crime impacts society and the economy through fear, healthcare cost, and hindering investments, necessitating effective prevention strategies and community engagement.

Research Gap

This project explores how crime fiction becomes a mirror to human psychology. By analysing these two novels, the study aims to understand how fictional representations of crime reflect deeper truths about trauma, justice, memory, and morality. The duality of professional vs. personal justice, and systemic vs. domestic crime, presents a well-rounded ground for comparative analysis.

Methodology

This project adopts a qualitative analytical approach by using textual analysis to extract its thematic analysis, character study, narrative style and psychological literary theory. Concepts like trauma study, criminology, and psychoanalysis such as repression, projection, and PTSD etc. are included in this interpretation. Comparative analysis is used in the cross-analysis of character development, criminal motivations and justice mechanisms in both texts. Providing a parallel distinction between the texts.

Chapter 2: Psychological and moral dimensions of crime in *Long Shadows*

Introduction to David Baldacci:

Born on August 5th 1960 (aged 64) is an American novelist. He was born and raised in Richmond, Virginia. He is of Italian descent. An attorney by education, Baldacci writes mainly suspense novels and legal thrillers. His novels are published in over 45 languages and published in over 80 countries, having sold over 130 million copies worldwide.

Introduction to *Long Shadows*:

Long Shadows is the seventh book in Baldacci's Memory Man/Amos Decker Series. Which also features the character Amos decker, an eponymous detective as the central character. It is a captivating book series that follows the life of an ex-football player, turned detective who uses his unique memory ability to solve crimes and uncover the truth. *Long Shadows* is a 2022 American crime thriller written, published by the Grand Central Publishing. It is the author's 51st crime book. The novel was ranked as the New York Times Best Seller in October 2022.

Amos Decker

David Baldacci's *Long Shadows* is a compelling psychological thriller that integrates elements of memory; trauma; deception; grief; loss; and justice. Baldacci here presents Amos Decker, as a main character. A deeply complex person with lots of emotional turmoil burdening him in his current job as F.B.I consultant working with detectives and special agents in solving cases. Amos had never actually thought of becoming a detective, he was all set to become a professional football player. His career was cut short following a devastating football injury which permanently damaging his brain. His football injury

gave him one of the most exceptional brains in the world. His cognitive sensory pathways got melded from the hit resulting in an infallible, photographic memory also known as Hyperthymia. His possession of a big body with extraordinary strength and speed alongside his turbocharged brain that somehow unlocked what we all have but never use. These were the qualities that he possessed which gave him an edge in his field of professionalism. But along with its advantages also came the downside where he is left haunted by traumatic memories, especially the murder of his own family.

Motivation Rooted in Vengeance and Justice

The judge's murder is not a random act; it is a consequence of hidden motives connected to past cases and personal retribution. The killer believes their actions are morally justified, by blurring the line between justice and vengeance. Judge Julia Cummins's death is one based on personal retribution. In her case when further investigation was done at first it was hypothesised that Julia and Alan was murdered by the someone who might have threatened Judge Julia. Later a second hypothesis was formed where in it was determined that the murder of Julia and Alan were not connected and was done by two different killers using two different methods, at the same time and place. It was only after further investigation was done that it was revealed that Barry Davidson Julia's ex-husband was indeed one who killed Jullia over repeated personal instigation by Julia herself and the situation she was in. On further investigation it was discovered that Alan Draymont was killed due to hiss hidden motive connected to past case of a murder in president, Ronald Regan's room. Then after connecting the dots very carefully and intricately the detectives, Amos Decker and Agent Whites were able to deduce that Mr. Julia Perlman was the one instructed to kill Alan and his supervisor Lancer. In the process of solving the murder of a federal judge and her bodyguard, they were also able to solve a case of a missing person, Kanak Roe.

Institutional Blind Spots

Institutional blind spots refer to systemic failures in recognizing ethical, operational, or social issues, often leading to corruption, inefficiency, or injustice. In *Long shadows* these blind spots are revealed through the murder of Judge Cummins. This blind spot is known as Judicial Corruption, it exposes weaknesses in the legal system, where power and influence distort justice. Therefore, these layers of corruption only delayed their investigation and served as distractions for the detectives. Decker despite his exceptional memory, struggles with the slow law enforcement procedures and its limitations. These bureaucratic inefficiencies and institutional biases restricted them from investigating people related with the case who might have been able to sever as potential leads to solve the case as soon as possible. They were only able to reach them few minutes prior before they were targeted by the killers, thus leading to loss of potential witnesses and suspects.

Moral Ambiguity

Moral ambiguity in *Long Shadows* is evident in Decker's internal struggles with his Hyperthymesia. Which force him to relive past traumas continuously without a break, affecting his ability to make purely rational decisions. Each time Decker is assigned to solve a case his actions are all dictated by his intuitions based upon his memory. Every person he holds accountable or suspects for the murder are done purely by his subjective observations and understanding of the case. Justice vs personal ethic plays a very important part while understanding Moral ethics. As it raises questions about whether justice is truly served or if it biased based upon personal preferences. Power and manipulation also serve important roles in the understanding of moral ambiguity. The characters of Barry Davidson and Mr. Trevor Perlman exploit moral ambiguity to justify questionable actions, reflecting real-world ethical dilemmas. The novel's themes of power and control mirrors Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, where individuals act based on deep-psychological patterns.

Decker's Internal Conflict

In *Long Shadows*, David Baldacci uses the character of Amos Decker to explore the tension between solving a case and finding emotional closure. His internal conflict is rooted in: Unresolved Grief; Decker is haunted by the suicide of a former colleague and the lingering trauma of his family's murder (from earlier in the series). These memories are ever-present, unfiltered, and emotionally raw. Emotional Detachment; As a coping mechanism, Decker often suppresses emotional expression. This detachment isolates him from others and complicates his ability to process grief or form new bonds. Fear of Cognitive Decline; Decker also begins to question the reliability of his memory a terrifying prospect for someone whose identity is built on perfect recall. This fear adds a layer of existential anxiety to his character arc. Moral Exhaustion; Constant exposure to violence and deception wears on Decker's psyche. He begins to question whether justice is truly being served or if he's simply part of a flawed system. These elements reflect a psychological resolution that remains incomplete. Even when the case is solved,

Decker's emotional wounds remain open, suggesting that justice in the legal sense does not equate to personal healing.

Justice as a Conceptual Question

In *Long Shadows*, the murder of a federal judge and the layers of deception surrounding it reveal how justice can be manipulated, and how truth is often obscured by power. Even when the case is closed, the emotional and ethical consequences linger. The novel challenges the reader to consider justice not just as a legal outcome, but as a moral and psychological construct: Legal vs. Moral Justice; The novel raises questions about whether the legal system delivers true justice or merely a procedural resolution. Characters manipulate the system, and outcomes often feel morally ambiguous. Procedural Fairness; The investigation reveals how institutional blind spots and power dynamics can distort the

pursuit of justice. This aligns with psychological theories of procedural justice, where fairness in process is as important as fairness in outcome. Psychological Closure; For victims, investigators, and even perpetrators, justice is often sought as a form of emotional resolution. Yet, the novel suggests that closure is elusive, especially when trauma and loss are involved. Justice as Perception; The story reflects the idea that justice is not an objective truth but a subjective experience, shaped by memory, emotion, and personal values.

Chapter 3: Victimhood, gaslighting and intuition in *The Night She Disappeared*

Introduction to *The Night She Disappeared:* -

The Night She Disappeared is a 2021 mystery novel by *New York Times* best-selling author Lisa Jewell. This novel was written during the pandemic, COVID-19. It's a whodunnit packed with multiple red herrings and a large cast of characters, *The Night She Disappeared* offers a contemporary look at domestic abuse, teen moms, dangerous friendships, and the tantalizing call of wealth. This novel has a complex structure, featuring three timelines: 2016, 2017 and 2018; and three narrators/perspectives: Tallulah, Kim Knox, Sophie Beck. The novel has many misleading leads which are for the readers to resolve in order to uncover the truth at the end. It unravels a web of family trauma, dark secrets, and the mystery surrounding an abandoned mansion; Dark Place, culminating in a dramatic and suspenseful conclusion.

Tallulah and the Representation of psychological abuse

Lisa Jewell's *The Night She Disappeared* offers a chilling and nuanced portrayal of psychological abuse, particularly through the character of Tallulah, a young mother caught in a web of manipulation, control, and emotional coercion. Her experiences reflect the insidious nature of abuse that often hides beneath the surface of relationships. Those who have experiences with coercive control, gaslighting, and enforced silence reflect the emotional entrapment many victims endure. Tallulah is portrayed as an intelligent, ambitious young woman whose life is slowly consumed by her relationship with Zach, her manipulative boyfriend. Who is the father of the baby

named Noha. Tallulah in her search to provide Noha a good and stable life started am affair with Scarlett Jacques a rich girl living at the Dark Place. But with the sudden turn of events Tallulah's wish to provide Noha a good and stable life turned into a wish for survival and living long enough to be reunited with her son, Noha once again. Through the sudden change of events, we are able to access the amount of psychological abuse Tallulah had to undergo. And how she retaining some sanity within herself for the sake of her son.

Coercive control and Gaslight

Tallulah's relationship with Zach, the father of her child, is marked by coercive; a form of control and abuse where the perpetrator dominates the victim through manipulation, threats, and emotional pressure. Zach isolates Tallulah from her mother and friends, using their child as leverage to keep her compliant. He presents a charming front to outsiders, especially to Tallulah's mother, Kim, masking his controlling behaviour behind a facade of normalcy. Isolating Tallulah from her support system and undermining her autonomy. This dynamic is intensified by Tallulah's role as a young mother. This form of subtle abuse demonstrates how psychological violence can occur within socially acceptable frameworks.

Later, Tallulah becomes entangled with Scarlett Jacques, whose influence is more insidious. Scarlett uses gaslighting a psychological tactic that makes the victim doubt their own perceptions and reality. Scarlett Jacques introduces another layer of psychological abuse. Scarlett, charismatic and enigmatic, draws Tallulah into a relationship that blurs the lines between affection and control. She alternates between affection and emotional withdrawal, creating a cycle of dependency and confusion. Scarlett's manipulation culminates in Tallulah being drugged and held captive, orchestrated by Scarlett and her mother, Joss, after Zach's death a literal and symbolic manifestation of the psychological imprisonment she has endured. But, somehow at the end of the novel we are able to understand from where Scarlett's manipulative behaviour stems from her mother, Joss Jacques. We see that it is her mother who instructs Scarlett to blame Tallulah for her wrong doings under the pretence of saving them from the police and providing them a better life.

Victimhood and Silence

Tallulah's victimhood is compounded by her silence, both enforced and internalized. She hides the truth about her relationships from her mother and friends, partly out of fear and partly due to the emotional confusion caused by her abusers, and partly because of societal judgements, society does not easily accept homosexual relationships openly. Therefore, they had to keep their affair a secret. This silence is emblematic of many real-world abuse survivors who feel trapped by shame, fear of disbelief, or emotional manipulation. Even after her disappearance, the narrative reveals how others misinterpret her actions assuming she ran away or made poor choices rather than recognizing the signs of abuse. Her voice is suppressed, both literally and metaphorically, until she is finally

rescued and begins the long process of reclaiming her identity and agency. It symbolises how victims are often 'erased' before they are even heard.

Tallulah's eventual rescue reveals the long-term psychological damage she has suffered. She is found traumatized, drug-dependent, and emotionally broken, a stark representation of how psychological abuse can erode identity and agency. Her recovery is not just physical but deeply emotional, requiring her to rebuild trust, autonomy, and self-worth. Jewell's portrayal of Tallulah's trauma aligns with trauma theory, which emphasizes how abuse disrupts memory, identity, and emotional regulation. The novel does not offer a neat resolution but instead presents healing as a gradual, painful process a realistic depiction of post-abuse recovery of the victim.

Intuition and Emotional Intelligence

Kim, Tallulah's mother, is the emotional core of the novel and shown as a relentless mother. Her journey reflects maternal intuition. From the beginning, Kim sensed that something was wrong. She refused to accept the official narrative of Tallulah's disappearance due to hypervigilance. This highlights that emotional intelligence is often overlooked in institutional investigations. Which mostly focuses on factual information rather than taking into account the emotional intuitions of the characters. Kim faced lots of drawback while conducting her own inquiries. It was only through her perseverance and dedication that she was able to convince the police to open a rescue mission for them. She challenged the police and followed leads others dismissed. Her persistence embodies the psychological resilience of a parent seeking truth. Kim's role underscores how grief and love can fuel a pursuit of justice that is both personal and profound, she acts as the agent of justice. Kim's character aligns with the Wounded Healer archetype her pain becomes her power, driving her to seek justice not just for her daughter, but for herself.

Sophie, a mystery writer who moves into the area, she enters the story as an outsider but quickly becomes a psychological proxy for the readers. It is due to her intuitions as a writer of mystery detective writer. Her role reflects narrative curiosity, Sophie's background as a writer gives her a unique lens through which she notices patterns, inconsistencies, and hidden meanings that others overlook. She although being a rookie detective is able to identify the right path for her investigation based on her intuition only. When Sophie discovered the buried ring box under the 'Dig Here' sign in her backyard rather than showing detachment, Sophie emphatically engaged herself in solving this cold case. Although she just an outsider in that place she took the initiative to ask those questions others won't. She serves a symbol of civilian empowerment and seekers archetype of the truth-seeker, someone who is compelled to uncover hidden realities, even at personal risk. Sophie represents how ordinary individuals, when driven by empathy and intellect, can challenge institutional blind spots and uncover hidden truths. Her collaboration with Kim forms a psychological alliance, where shared empathy and determination compensate for institutional apathy.

Evil Hidden in familiarity

Zach embodies the terrifying idea that abuse can come from those closest to us. His manipulation and eventual crime stem from insecurity and the desire to control, not overt hatred or insanity. Jewell presents him as disturbingly ordinary. Zach has been shown as a boy who was often bullied in his previous school and was a nerd. Tallulah and Zach have been shown as childhood sweet hearts who were always close and know each other since long time they even have a baby son, Noah. He was also shown as a very caring and responsible. And he being Tallulah's boyfriend and her son's father, she didn't expect his to be emotionally manipulative and controlling. Scarlett Jacques was one of those rich kids of the neighbourhood who bring chaos wherever they went. She was a person who was always shrouded in mystery and lived in a mansion like house. She belongs from a wealthy family, therefore whenever she caused any trouble her mother, Joss Jacques would voluntarily cover it with her power and influence. Scarlett with her charisma would choose her victims wisely. She would first choose someone very simple and innocent like Liam Bailey and Scarlett. Then first be too clingy and overly sweet then create moments of withdrawal to create a scenario of confusion for her victims, then abruptly end things with them only to keep them hooked to her by making them her emotional support person. But all her evil actions were always shielded by her privileged parents and brother, Rex Jacques. Their social standing and outward appearances allow them to evade suspicion, reinforcing the idea that evil can wear a familiar face. This aligns with the concept of the hidden criminal someone who commits acts of violence or abuse while maintaining a facade of normalcy.

Resolution as Psychological Healing

Psychological healing is not simply about the cessation of pain it's about reclaiming agency, restoring coherence, and finding meaning in the aftermath of trauma or injustice. Two powerful mechanisms in this process are emotional justice and empowerment, and the role of narration in healing. The eventual discovery of Tallulah and Zach's downfall do not mark the end of the story they serve as the beginning of a long healing process. In psychological terms, resolution refers not just to the end of a conflict or trauma, but to the internal process of integrating and making peace with emotional experiences. It's a cornerstone of psychological healing, where the goal is not to erase pain, but to transform it into understanding, acceptance, and growth. Lisa Jewell's *The Night She Disappeared* is not only a psychological thriller it's a layered exploration of trauma, survival, and emotional restoration. The novel's resolution offers more than just answers to a mystery; it provides a framework for psychological healing, particularly through the lenses of emotional justice and empowerment, and the role of narration in healing.

The Role of Narrative in Healing

Narrative therapy helps people separate themselves from their problems, enabling them to view trauma with clarity and compassion. As a mystery writer, Sophie becomes a stand-in for the reader and a symbolic narrator. Her discovery of clues and her reconstruction of events serve as a therapeutic process, both for herself and for Kim. Through Sophie, the novel explores how storytelling can organize chaos into meaning. The story like narrative provides logic and consistency to the novel, here trauma is often fragments memory and identity. Narration helps organize chaotic experiences into a structured story, which the brain craves for emotional resolution. Kim and Sophie sharing stories invite each other into their experience, this in turn reduces isolation and fosters communal healing. Kim's act of piecing together Tallulah's story through flashbacks, journal entries, and discovered objects mirrors the therapeutic process of narrative reconstruction, where trauma survivors reframe their experiences to regain coherence and control. Sophie, by helping Kim uncover leading clue about her daughter's missing case is able to overcome her writers block which posed as a hindrance in her writing career. By giving voice to Tallulah's trauma and Kim's grief, the novel allows readers to witness pain without turning away. This witnessing is essential in trauma recovery, as it validates the survivor's experience and fosters empathy. Narratives allow for emotional release and the construction of meaning, both essential for long-term psychological well-being.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Criminal Consciousness and Hidden Motives: Both novels explore the psychological architecture of criminal minds. In *Long Shadows*, the antagonist is shaped by emotional detachment, sociopathic traits, and a calculated need to protect power structures. In contrast, *The Night She Disappeared* presents a more intimate form of criminality coercive control, narcissism, and gaslighting where the abuser hides behind charm and social privilege. These portrayals emphasize that criminality often thrives in secrecy and emotional manipulation, not just overt violence. Victim Psychology and Trauma: The victims in both novels are not passive figures but psychologically rich characters. Amos Decker, though an investigator, is also a trauma survivor whose hyperthymesia traps him in perpetual grief. Tallulah, in Jewell's novel, is a victim of emotional abuse and captivity, whose silence and isolation reflect the invisible scars of psychological violence. Both texts highlight how trauma reshapes identity, memory, and agency. Legal vs. Emotional Justice: In *Long Shadows*, justice is pursued through formal investigation and legal channels, yet the resolution leaves emotional wounds unhealed. Amos Decker solves the case, but his internal trauma and moral exhaustion remain unresolved. The novel critiques the fragility of institutions, suggesting that legal justice may be achieved while psychological justice remains elusive. In contrast, *The Night She Disappeared* emphasizes emotional and restorative justice. Tallulah's rescue and the exposure of her abusers offer no courtroom drama, but they deliver validation, empowerment, and healing. Justice here is not about punishment it's about reclaiming voice and agency. In *Long Shadows* and *The Nigh She Disappeared*; justice is not a courtroom verdict it is a psychological reckoning. Truth is essential, but closure is what allows characters to move forward. These

novels remind us that justice is not just about solving a mystery it's about restoring the human spirit in the aftermath of trauma.

Work Cited

Primary Texts:

Baldacci, David. *Long Shadows*. Grand Central Publishing, 2022.

Jewell, Lisa. *The Night She Disappeared*. Atria Books, 2021.

Secondary Sources:

Bennett, Andrew, and Nicholas Royle. *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. 5th ed., Routledge, 2016.

Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Translated by James Strachey, W. W. Norton & Company, 1961.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Ego and the Id*. Translated by Joan Riviere, W. W. Norton & Company, 1960.

Jung, Carl. *Man and His Symbols*. Dell Publishing, 1968.

Kaplan, E. Ann. *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. Rutgers University Press, 2005.