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CRIMINOLOGY

Q. Critically analyze the biological theories of criminality.

A. Introduction:

Biological theories of criminality developed with the emergence of positivist school of thought to explain the causation of crime. Prior to that, criminal behavior was associated to demonic possession or free will of humans. This school of thought proposed that ~~there are~~ there are certain biological, sociological and psychological reasons behind a crime being committed. Positivist school of thought arose in late 19th century by Cesare Lombroso. He believed that human doesn't commit crime only by free will but other factors are also involved. In his book "Criminal Man", he highlighted some physiological differences a criminal and a non-criminal might have. His study played a fundamental role in the development of modern criminology.

Biological theories of criminality:

Biological theory of crime can be traced down back to the nineteenth century by Cesare Lombroso. He published a book "Criminal Man" in 1876 which was the first work on biological perspective of criminal behavior. In his book, he focused on the physical differences between a criminal and a normal criminal. His book laid the base of further study on biological perspectives. He emphasized on anatomical, physiologic, physiological or genetic abnormalities within an individual which might be the reason behind a person committing or wanting to commit a crime.

Biological theories initiated by C. Lombroso were the first challenge to the "free will" approach of criminality. In late 18th century and early 19th century according to classical school of thought, humans were rational beings and they committed crime due to their own free will. But Cesare Lombroso challenged this approach by being a base to a new approach which sounded more rational and acceptable to society.

Phrenology:

Lombroso used phrenology to predict and identify criminal behavior. Phrenology is the detailed study of shape and size of the **skull** as a supposed indication of character and mental abilities. It proposes that the shape and size of the skull can tell what kind of a person someone can be or his mental capability to do certain tasks. In late 18th century, an act was passed according to which the bodies of criminals would not be buried in grounds but to deepen their punishment would be hung in chains or be analysed in laboratories for medical purpose. In those centers, skull of various criminals were studied concluding that the skulls of criminals had a slight **bump** over their right ear. Hence skulls, at that time, were seen as literal hard evidences of a person's character and criminal behaviors. Moreover, Lombroso measured the distance of the **toes** of criminals and non-criminals, noting that criminals have gap of **3mm** more than that of a non-criminal.

Physiognomy:

Physiognomy refers to the study of **facial features** of a person regarding an indication of his character or ethnic origin. Lombroso also studied facial features of people and linked them with criminal identity. He identified some specific characteristics which might indicate criminal tendencies, such as:

- pointy head
- heavy jaws
- receding brows
- scanty beard

Lombroso claimed that criminality was inherited and those who were born criminal could be identified by these sorts of physical properties.

~~Racism~~

Racist Stereotypes:

Lombroso also associated some racial stereotypes with criminal behavior. Since he believed that all **Mangolians** were criminal, he associated oblique ~~of the~~ eyelids with criminal's characteristic. Moreover, according to his study, people with lower projection of face or jaws were criminals - who were **Negroes** in fact. Hence most of his indications were considered racial.

Free

Female offenders:

Lombroso also analyzed female offenders and offenders and wrote a book "The Female offender" in 1895. He in his book suggested that most women are not criminal but those who are, are usually occasional criminals. Also, women offenders were difficult to detect than men and were more cunning and more vicious. According to Lombroso, women with more masculine physical characteristics were attributed with a biological susceptibility to criminality. For Lombroso, the largest category of female criminals were prostitutes who he believed had more atavistic quality than other female offenders.

Somatotypology:

The somatotype school was developed by William Sheldon, another great name in the history of biological school of thought. He suggested that criminals can be distinguished on the basis of their distinct physiques which make them susceptible to particular types of antisocial behavior. He classified man into three body types:

a) Mesomorphs:

Mesomorphs have well-defined muscles and an athletic appearance. They are active, aggressive and sometimes violent, and most likely to be criminals. Since they are aggressive and violent, they are most likely to be involved in crimes involving strength. Mesomorphs are perceived as a threat and are therefore more likely to be arrested.

b) Endomorphs:

Endomorphs have heavy build and are slow moving. They are known for lethargic behavior, resulting in unlikely committing a violent crime. They are more willing to engage in a less strenuous criminal activity such as fencing stolen property. Endomorphs are not majorly involved in crimes that require strength or stamina.

c) Ectomorphs:

Ectomorphs are tall, thin and less social. They are known as introverted, sensitive and artistic individuals. Their body is focused on the nervous system and the brain hence they are more likely to be involved in crime requiring excessive thinking or brain work. For example hacking, cybercrimes etc.

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Chromosomes theory:

According to various criminologists, one of the major characteristics of a criminal biologically is an extra chromosome in his genetics. Generally a male has **XY** pairs of chromosomes and a female has **XX** pairs of chromosomes. However, a study of Scottish prisoners found that a small number had **XYY** chromosomes. They were identified as potentially violent and labelled as "**supermales**". Hence, people with extra chromosome is more likely to be a ~~chris~~ criminal.

Conclusion:

These biological theories laid a basis to the development of modern criminology. Though most of these studies were denied their validation after proper development in science and technology but the foundation these put in the causation of crime and criminal behavior played a significant role in further studying crime.