



Research Paper

A Journey In Search Of Meaning For Existence In Mary Shelley's Frankenstein

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ABSTRACT: :All human beings have a desire to be alive and wish to survive or stick on to the environment they belong to. It is actually applicable to all living things in the world. The existence of a species is not solely dependent on the organism, but the habitat, proper living conditions and social relations also plays a pivotal role. In the novel Frankenstein, the creature had a quest for creating a meaning for its existence. We can consider it as a partial human being; it successfully acquires a space for itself in the living conditions of human society. The monster customizes itself and adopts the characteristic traits of human beings for its survival. But the society was not ready to accept the monster as a part of its social set up. Existential philosopher Albert Camus states that "I rebel; therefore I exist" (The Rebel, 15). Most human beings try to create a meaning for their existence in different stages of their life, starting from initial stages of life to till their end, and thinking, accept, and contradict with the worldly powers and ideas. As a result of this continuous evolution, each and every human being find own way and meaning for their existence. This paper tries to dismantle the psyche of the monster with a social as well as existentialistic perspective and attempts to signify the importance of habitat, peer groups and a society which are the integral components of existence.

KEY WORDS: Existentialism, Habitat, Social relations, Adoption, Customization, Traits.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Man is a social animal, and enjoys a sophisticated freedom which no other living thing has. In the modern days, anthropocentric attitude prevails in the mind of people and they are moving to modify and deconstruct the world according to the advancement in the field of knowledge acquisition and technological expansion. Initially mankind led a barbaric and nomadic way of life. They ate raw food for their survival but later equipped themselves with tools to hunt and create a shelter for protecting them from the climatic conditions. Then they connected themselves with other human beings as tribes, clans, and formed a civilized society. In the modern era, people rely mostly on technological apparatus for connecting themselves with others and for better communication. But still human behavior is largely dependent on the predecessor's reactions to the existing stimuli.

In the novel Frankenstein, Victor an ambitious but aimless scientist gives life to a creature (unnamed living being) from a human corpse with the help of his knowledge in life science and alchemy. But he did not create it for a definite purpose. It is the byproduct of his curiosity of learning and eagerness, he establishes in his field of interest. In general, any living being exist in the world with a suitable habitat. Likewise in the novel, the creature feels very strange and absurd about its existence because there its existence is unique and it fails to find someone to share its feeling and shed its emotions. At that point of time, it starts to communicate with human beings to escape from its loneliness but it was avoided and rejected with great despair and hatred.

II. THE PROCESS OF MEANING MAKING

According to Eric Maisel a well-known U.S Psychotherapist an individual should create meaning based on his or her subjective experience. So the individual need not compare and contrast the features existing in the universal existence. In Noimetics process, one should seek psychological experience to create a meaning for existence, even though, fulfilling the external demands or physiological needs is a primary and predominant one [3]. The twenty-first century existentialist Richard Moran emphasizes the same thing in a different perspective in his work Authority and Estrangement. He talks about the importance of first person insight which deals with

an individual's relations with his own mental life. He states that self knowledge is all about knowing and interpreting what is important in being human personae. The deficiency in providing an adequate knowledge about self results in nothingness and absurdity [4]. Every living being needs to survive as well as to exist in a habitat, this is termed as self-preservation. In order to preserve oneself, a living being needs to perceive, adopt and respond to the stimulus they belong to. According to Freud, sexual instincts play a pivotal role in preserving oneself [5]. So the biological fulfillment also affects the survival of a living being. In the novel, the unnamed living being expects for a mate rigidly for its existence.

“Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator; he was allowed to converse with and acquire knowledge from beings of a superior nature, but I was wretched, helpless, and alone”. (Frankenstein, 154)

The creature alludes itself with Adam then it painfully describes that, it feels empty and discontented towards life because there is no one to take care or ponder it like how Adam is nurtured in the hands of God in the garden of Eden. The creature expresses its grief and solitude by alluding itself with Adam. The desire to alive is an instinct, which exists in every living being and it mostly depends on the components of environment where it belongs. For better existence living beings need to adopt as well as to avoid certain things to enable them to survive. Victor's creature starts adopting itself to the human conditions. The living creature starts to learn and develops the abilities to adopt things which are analyzed through the social learning theory. This paper makes an attempt to justify the process underwent by the unnamed living being (monster) in the context of social learning and establishes the similarities of its learning process with that of human kind.

III. BANDURA'S SOCIAL LEARNING PROCESS

Albert Bandura's theory states that the learning process of an individual is influenced by the behaviors of others. An individual reacts accordingly to the social environment consisting of behaviors, thoughts and the physical surroundings. According to him learning process is cognitive in nature and it happens with respective to the social context. Every individual starts to learn and acquire knowledge by directly observing the society. The best example is that a child starts to learn through imitating actions or speech sounds from its family or surroundings. Bandura claims that as a result of this learning a new pattern of behavior is obtained. The fundamental form of learning happens mostly through direct experience, where the individual gets a chance to identify either positive or negative consequences of any action [6].

In the novel the creature states that “I discovered the names that were given to some of the most familiar objects of discourse; I learned and applied the words, ‘fire,’ ‘milk,’ ‘bread,’ and ‘wood.’ I learned also the name of the cottager's themselves” (Frankenstein, 130-31). The living being created by Victor stays alone in the wood and it starts to observe the behaviors of its nearby cottage. From that observation, it learns language and slowly grasps knowledge about the worldly things within a short span of time. Social learning of an individual starts from clear observation of the external environment. Likewise, the unnamed living being also adapts the same learning process and it shows a rapid growth in the levels of cognition. It is a clearly indicated that the unnamed living being facilitates itself far an acquisition process that is very much similar to the humanity.

In the learning process, Individual starts to acknowledge his/ her actions and understands the outcome or results. The collected information from the experiences naturally helps them in developing their thoughts. In fact, these information act as a guide to their future actions. Accurate thought process of individuals can lead them towards success and the negative outcomes result in failure. In the differential consequences, cognitive events are used as a tool to strengthen or disconfirm the future actions. This understanding makes an individual to analyze his own actions and their effect on the society [6]. In the learning and understanding process, the unnamed living creature expresses that “One day, when I was oppressed by cold, I found a fire which had been left by some wandering beggars and was overcome with delight at the warmth I experienced from it. In my joy I thrust my hand into the live embers, but quickly drew it out again with a cry of pain.” (Frankenstein, 120) the unnamed living being wanders in the woods most of the time. It does not know the purpose of fire, when it accidentally makes use of the fire it learns that it provides warmth during the winter season and it also developed the reciprocal knowledge about the adverse touching efforts of fire. With regard to reinforcement of information process, it acts like the other living beings.

On the other part, incentive motivational factors were affected by the man's preconceived ideas. Mankind acts according to the experience it gained over time. Human actions can be regulated with the help of anticipated consequences. The cognitive skills of man provide insight and foresight behavior. In the novel, when the human beings meets the unnamed living creature they did not accept him because of its appearance. “My heart beat quick; this was the hour and moment of trial, which would decide my hopes or realize my fears. The servants were gone to a neighbouring fair. All was silent in and around the cottage; it was an excellent opportunity; yet, when I proceeded to execute my plan” (Frankenstein, 158). Frankenstein tries to meet a

visually challenged neighbor in the absence of his children. Frankenstein doesn't display courage to socialize himself to the external world as he had a preconceived idea of experiencing fear and humiliation from the alien society it belongs to. This happens because of its gained knowledge from the past, which motivates it not to encounter human beings as it leads to feeling desperate and isolated.

Frankenstein's social learning process starts progressing to other dimension through its learning about family life by observing the cottagers. "My companion will be of the same nature as myself and will be content with the same fare" (Frankenstein, 176). It longs to have a companion from its own species just to escape from the loneliness in its life. This thought takes place in mind of the creature because of the awareness it gained from the society. It experienced the negative result (while developing a relationship with human beings) which becomes the reason for it to alter its ideology regarding humans. Thus, it proves the learning process adopted by human being can also be acquired by the unnamed living being to develop social learning.

IV. ESSENCE IN EXISTENTIALISM

On the contrary, Existentialism a prominent philosophical movement advocates that one's own meaning of life is formed with the help of subjective experiences. One can create meaning for life by solving and conquering the inner conflicts. Throughout the novel, the unnamed living being tries to construct a meaning as well as purpose to its life. According to the existentialists, every living thing has a purpose to exist in the world. There is always an essence in every component which defines and makes it meaningful. Therefore, existence precedes essence and it plays a significant role in the meaning making process. But nowadays at certain stages of life, most of the people feel that their existence is meaningless. Jean Paul Sartre quotes about existentialism that "I want to leave, to go to somewhere where I should be really in my place, where I would fit in... but my place is nowhere; and I am unwanted". It explains that every human tends to move away from reality [7]. The monster struggles to create a space for itself and wishes to move away for an alien space where it can find the meaning of its life. "It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of my being; all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct" (Frankenstein, 118). Through the words of victor's creature it is evident that it suffers from being socially alienated, so it feels distorted and confused about its existence.

Another existential philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard stated that "The actuality of action is so often confused with all sorts of ideas, intentions, preliminaries to resolution, preludes of mood etc., that there is very seldom any action at all" (Attack Upon "Christendom" ,The Instant No, VII). A living species always possess a set of assumptions, ideas and perceptions towards their life. Likewise in the novel, the creature feels that it can survive in the world and struggles to create a habitat for itself, but it is very much confused and lacks the ability to sustain in the society. This kind of complex, unclear and distorted views about life was portrayed by Jean Paul Sartre that "I exist, that is all, and I find it nauseating." He quotes that the real frustration of mankind is in his existence [8], this is similar to the thoughts of the creature in the novel who feel bad about its existence. The unnamed living being thinks that there are no specific reasons for it to exist and in the final phase of its social learning, it realizes that the people around it never going to accept it.

The existentialist ideals in relevance with absurdity can be extended here because whoever fails to create meaning for existence, they tend to experience nothingness in life like the creature in the novel Frankenstein, who feels a kind of absurdity in life. There are several factors which affect an individual to feel absurd; they are one's misconception about life, pessimism, an intense dissatisfaction based on internal as well as external factors. Every living being at certain stage in his or her life feels absurd by the above mentioned factors. The creature fails to find out the inherent value of its existence. Even though, the creature's presence in the world is determined by its creator and a kind of identity crisis develops in its thought process, because of the lack of social ambience to groom itself, a significant alienation exists in the monster from its birth. Albert Camus in his work *The Myth of Sisyphus* quotes that "In a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile...This dissociate between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity divorce" (13). He states that all human beings keep on trying to create a meaning for their existence in a senseless world because the whole world is evolutionary in nature, when people incline to search a sense for its existence it becomes absurd and useless[9]. People try to define their lives in a futuristic perspective removed from realistic vein in the absence of self as well as social awareness.

V. CONCLUSION

In the novel Frankenstein, the monster struggles hard in the attempts of meaning making process which results in low regard for its existence. But the monster adapts to the human conditions and social learning process. The creature makes meaning for its life through its actions. Like every being it also exists and learns to analyze about its existence. At a particular time, the creature takes revenge against its creator in order to make him to realize the pains it experienced in solitude. So the creature killed its creator's brother, wife and his friend.

It created an impact on its creator Victor. But at the same time, the creature exhibits a kind of adaptability towards the humanistic society to survive, while it undergoes the adaption process it experiences a kind of alienation and stumbles to find a place in the society which leads it to the failure of its existence. In order to find meaning in life, living species resort to the factors such as habitat, mate, physical environment and social acceptance. In the final phase of the novel, the creature feels a sense of meaninglessness in its life after the death of its creator Victor. The novel portrays the struggle of existence of a creature in the absence of habitat and better living conditions. It tries to preserve itself and fails miserably even though it attempts to acquire the human characteristics as well as behavioral traits to create a meaning for its life. With the help of Bandura's social learning theory, learning process undergone by the monster can be analyzed and it reveals the failure of the monster in its socialization process. In the next phase, the creature tries to make a meaning for its existence by mingling with in respective human society. We can consider Frankenstein as a partial human being who keeps on trying to acquire a position in the humanistic society. But the flaw exists because it was created by aimless purposeless creator that results in the monster's life and makes it a meaningless one which results in nothingness towards its life.

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