

Frankenstein in the Lights of Hinduism**Amar Debnath**Lecturer in English, Women's Polytechnic
Hapania, West Tripura, India**Abstract**

Frankenstein (1818) poses several questions pertaining to ideology and ethical issues involving religious beliefs, humanism and nature of origin. It is still questionable to allow reproduction and creation of living being in an unnatural way using human knowledge of science and technology. How far is it ethical to create a life form in an artificial way only for material gain shunning humanistic considerations? The monster created by Dr. Frankenstein did earnestly strive for a life of a natural human being, but in turn, it was treated with abhorrence, leading to violence in the entire narrative. This paper will explore the perspectives of the two major characters of the novel in the lights of the Hinduism. This narrative is a classic example in showing that any sort of alteration in the realm of 'creation' by selfish human interference will lead to ultimate chaos and drift human civilization to apocalypse.

Keywords: Hinduism, Existence, Scriptures, Humanity, Creator**Introduction:**

The creation of the universe and life in it is a mystery. The question why and how is it created baffled the human race since it started questioning for the quest of knowledge. The sustenance of the universe and the evolution of life form in earth (as we don't know about life in other celestial bodies) put forward several questions about the purpose of it. Humanity has always tried to find the purpose of its existence in an otherwise absurd universe. Life as it is created must lead itself with a purpose. And thus it made way to institutions like religion, nation, family, society etc.

Hinduism is one of the ancient religions having a clear vision about the purpose of life and living. An individual being known as *Atman*, is an indispensable part of the greater being called *Brahman*. The spiritual union between these two beings is defined as the *Moksha* or the salvation which has to be the ultimate purpose of life. Human must perform all selfless acts and services to be released from the cycle of incarnations. But in a world, where human being is capable of performing acts like creating, controlling and modifying life and death with the applications of acquired knowledge that almost equal themselves to Supreme Creator. Human knowledge of science and technology is now capable of creating artificial life form (Cloning for example). Although, practically there are several ethical issues have to be addressed by such human creators. Reproductive cloning of human being would be of a great benefit for organ or limb replacement. A mere reproduction of life in an artificial way only for commercial gain does not sound ethical. Once a life form is created by any means, the creator must be responsible to protect and nourish it.

In *Frankenstein (1818)*, by Mary Shelley, a similar concept like cloning is focused in which the 'creature' is depicted to be in a quest of finding its own identity and to integrate itself to a family and society. The novel is a reminder to scientifically advanced human race that a cloned life or artificially created human 'Borg' may derive its innate feelings and emotions by default and as a result they should not be used as livestock or copyright commodity. Creation must go on and on in its natural process. As per the Hindu scriptures, when unrighteousness in any form shall pose a threat to the creation, the god will intervene to restore it in his own way (Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 4, Verses 7-8).

Findings and Discussion: Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* posed a question so many years ago which is equally relevant to the contemporary world. We can see a steady increase of scientific intervention in the realms of biotechnology. What if Dr. Frankenstein would create an entire race of monsters? It would have surely dismantled the social and ecological balance with a parallel monster-society living along with human civilization. We can imagine that brave new world populated by freakish lab-grown monsters that could possibly pose threats to the humanity. By doing that Dr. Frankenstein would have felt immense guilt for such unnatural procreation of a new breed against the law of nature. However, by not doing so he minimised the calamity to the human civilization although his judicious denial played havoc on his personal life. The Hinduism would refer to his suffering as the effect of his own *Karma* or deed. The effect of his deed would also follow his soul in his next incarnation unless and until he mitigates his *Karma* and strive to achieve liberation from the bondage of cycle of life called *Moksha* (Broadd 53).

In the Bible, it is vividly depicted how human inquisitiveness led them to fall from the blessed position. The disobedience in seeking the knowledge beyond the frontier resulted in perpetual banishment. It took a great deal of penance and sufferings by Jesus to restore the position of human being to god.

“Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit/Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste/Brought death into the world, and all our woe,/With loss of Eden, till one greater Man/Restore us, and regain the blissful seat...”

— Milton, Paradise Lost Book I

Hinduism recognizes the importance of four Puruṣārthas which literally mean "object of human pursuit". These are: 1. *Dharma*- meaning righteousness 2. *Artha*- meaning prosperity 3. *Kama*- meaning pleasure and 4. *Moksha*- meaning liberation (Kollar). Among these, *Kama* refers to the various aspects of procreation as a pursuit of life. The *Kamasutra* by Vatsayana is based on the various aspects of marriage and procreation in order to ensure offspring and perpetuate family distinctions from generation to generation. The *Sutras* or the laws were intended to regulate reproduction rather than sexuality. Although the concept of *Kama* is generally taken as sexuality in contemporary world but it is elaborately defined in *Kamasutra* which refers to any desire, wish, passion, longing, pleasure, and aesthetic enjoyment of life, affection, love, with or without sexual connotations. Gavin Flood rightly puts *Kama* as "love" without violating *Dharma* (moral responsibility), *Artha* (material prosperity) and one's journey towards *Moksha* (spiritual liberation).

The following lines from *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* describe Dr. Frankenstein's action in the novel in the best way:

*And here they say that a person consists of desires,
and as is his desire, so is his will;
and as is his will, so is his deed;
and whatever deed he does, that he will reap.*

— *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.*

Dr. Victor Frankenstein is full of *Kama* when he strappingly feels to divulge the secrets of heaven and earth in the name of responsibility towards science. And the result of *Kama* is the creature. But the responsibility to the mental or cerebral offspring is never taken by the father. The creation is born out of most unnatural scientific way not to carry forward his personal genetic traits but the extra human qualities he fancied to bestow the creature. Dr. Faustus of Christopher Marlow dismisses his previous studies in philosophy, law, physics, claiming that they have not brought him satisfaction. He is similarly full of *Kama* when he says:

Divinity, adieu!
These metaphysics of magicians,
And necromantic books are heavenly;
Lines, circles, scenes, letters, and characters;
Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires. (1.40–50)
— Christopher Marlowe, Dr. Faustus

His *Kama* led him to forget the other three *Purushartahas* which drifted him towards eternal damnation. Doctor Faustus mortgages his soul because of his voracious hunger for knowledge, power and pleasure. Both the protagonists possessed with excessive unnatural desire, take resort to uncanny decisions which brought tragic consequences. In the Gita it is said that:

“One’s inferior natural work is better than superior unnatural work.
Death in carrying out one’s natural work is useful. Unnatural work
produces too much stress.”

---- *Bhagavad Gita 3.35*

Occult practices, black magic or scientific experiments of giving life to the dead are all like supernatural tantric activities which relates to the Hindu spiritual law of cause and effect. It is described as *Karma* by which each individual creates his own destiny by means of his thoughts, words and deeds.

The concept of *Karmayoga*, first appears strongly in the Bhagavad Gita. The word "Karma" denotes the “deed” of a self which in turn generates responses just by the universal principle of cause and effect. The *karma* comprises not only the action, but also actor's state of mind before and during the deed. The *karma* philosophy suggests that every living being's soul transmigrates (recycles) after death, carrying the seeds of Karmic impulses from life just completed, into another incarnation. This cycle continues indefinitely, except for those who consciously break this cycle by practising *Yoga* to reach *Moksha*. The karma concept thus encourages each person to live a moral life in the path of *Dharma*. Understanding the meaning and significance of karma is the basic building block of life. But it is seen that the protagonist, Dr. Victor Frankenstein, succumbed to blind ambition of fame which can be

termed as *Maya* over ethics of life or *Dharma*. His deeds or karma is influenced by *Maya*, the illusion which keeps a being (*Atman*) separated from Divine (*Brahman*). The individual Soul can achieve divinity and feel united with the Super-soul by eliminating *Maya* by individual spiritual evolution. In the Hindu scriptures, it is well prescribed as to how one can mitigate his bad karma by following a virtuous life, performing good deeds, practising yoga, praying to God and conducting pilgrimages to sacred places to get grace of God. Dr. Frankenstein realised his misdeeds and tried to rectify it by not complying with the request of the creature of creating a female counterpart for him.

“In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature and was bound towards him to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty, but there was another still paramount to that. My duties towards the beings of my own species had greater claims to my attention because they included a greater proportion of happiness or misery. Urged by this view, I refused, and I did right in refusing, to create a companion for the first creature.”

--- Mary Shelley, Frankenstein: Chapter 24

It is advised in the Hinduism to act in a selfless way in order to get freedom from the bondage of cycle of life known as *Samsara*. The selfless actions are described as service or *Seva* which has positive impact on the ‘fruits of Karma.’ The thought and action of Dr. Frankenstein were not a selfless *seva* to the humanity but they were guided by ambition to ‘pioneer a new way to unfold to the world the deepest mystery of creation’. Therefore could not free himself from the Karmic bondage and had to suffer tremendously.

Dr. Frankenstein fathered the creature but could not mother it. He did not show any kind of affection towards it but abandoned it for its horrific outlook. He never showed any compassion towards. In the Hindu scripture *Bhagavad Gita* it is categorically mentioned to Perform all work carefully guided by compassion. But in the entire narrative we can see that no one showed any compassion towards the creature. Instead everyone abhorred it and abandoned it. The creator himself turned hostile because:

“He showed unparalleled malignity and selfishness in evil; he destroyed my friends; he devoted to destruction beings who possessed exquisite sensations, happiness, and wisdom; nor do I know where this thirst for vengeance may end.” ----Mary Shelley, Frankenstein: Chapter 24

Whenever there is no compassion is attached to any action it would lead to terror, turmoil and ultimately lead to tragic consequences. T.S Eliot took to the Upanishad in his poem *The Waste Land* to find remedy of the barrenness of the world. At the end of the poem the clouds make sound Da Da Da referring to Datta, Dayadhvam and Damyata (Give, sympathise, control). By following this mantra the ‘waste land’ will become fertile again and *Shanti* or peace will prevail. Wrong was done to the creature so it took vengeance showing no mercy to anybody. Every religion in the world believes in Mercy and compassion but these are the two notions completely absent from the narrative. These are synonymous to peace and prosperity and absence of which definitely mean war and destruction as we see in the novel.

The Hindus believe that the universe undergoes endless cycles of creation, preservation and destruction. The three gods *Brahma Vishnu* and *Maheswara* form ‘the supreme one’- who create, protect and destroy the universe continuously. Dr. Frankenstein acted like Lord Brahma who is also known as *Bidhata, the Creator*. He created the monster on his whim. He also acted like Maheswara the destroyer. But what he missed is the role of Vishnu, the protector. He is not willing to protect his creation and abandoned it forever. So the law of the universe is broken leading to catastrophe for the creation. He no doubt did repent and remorse after he realised the fault therefore he did not want to become the Bidhata or the creator of ‘a race of devils’. He vowed to destroy the creature:

“...oh! That I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence, restore those victims whom you have so diabolically murdered!”----Mary Shelley, Frankenstein: Chapter 10

Dr. Frankenstein took the role of Lord *Krishna* who declares:

“yada yada hi dharmasya
glanir bhavati bharata
abhyutthanam adharmasya
tadatmanam srijamy aham
paritranaya sadhunam
vinasaya ca duskrtam
dharma-samsthapanarthaya
sambhavami yuge yuge.”

Bhagavad Gita 4.07-08

Whenever there is a decline of *Dharma* (righteousness) and a predominance of *Adharma* (unrighteousness), oh *Arjuna*,¹ then I manifest Myself. I appear from time to time for protecting the good, for transforming the wicked, and for establishing world order *Dharma*.

In Hinduism, it is believed that a being is created in *Samsara* by the mixture of *Panchabhuta* or five substances namely fire, water, air, earth, sky. All natural life forms are made of those five ingredients. But in case of the monster creature we see that it is made up of some artificial chemical and electrical substances. Therefore it possesses unnatural or supernatural qualities. The chemical and electrical processes, although, were able to generate natural human feelings in the creature which is a motif of the narrative. The human feeling in a zombie and the urge to live a happy and contented life like natural human beings and the subsequent denial by the creator causes the narrative to move forward.

The feeling of being abandoned by the creator is the torment that haunts the creature and this feeling of banishment guides him to take resort to vengeance. His soul craves to attain the *Purusarthas* like a normal human being. It is in a quest for finding the purpose of ‘afterlife.’ It has developed the desire for a finding a space in the world for having a social and spiritual connection within that space. As Dr. Victor Frankenstein acted under the illusion of getting fame by creating new avenue so is the creature to yarn to live an earthly life at par with human. It is under the impulse of *Maya* that he declares:

“But when I discovered that he, the author at once of my existence and of its unspeakable torments, dared to hope for

happiness, that while he accumulated wretchedness and despair upon me he sought his own enjoyment in feelings and passions from the indulgence of which I was forever barred, then impotent envy and bitter indignation filled me with an insatiable thirst for vengeance.”

---Mary Shelley, Frankenstein: Chapter 24

The creature longs to meet the creator to seek answers of certain questions like Adam did:

*“Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould me man? Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me? Or here place
In this delicious garden? ”*

---John Milton, Paradise Lost X, pp743-746

The Hindus believe that all life is sacred, to be loved and revered, and therefore practice *Ahimsa*, non-injury, in thought, word and deed. But while planning the life of the creature, Dr. Frankenstein did not thought of the sanctity of life, did not thought of non injury to the life he created. After the creation, he was full of abhorrence and violent towards it. No one is morally or ethically permitted to ‘sport thus with life.’

In certain religion repentance and submission to god is also a way to reach holiness. It is believed in Hinduism:

“when a person responds to the joys and sorrows of others as if they were his own, he has attained the highest state of spiritual union”

---Bhagavad Gita 6.32

The words of the creature on death of Dr. Frankenstein signify a great deal of penance:

*“Oh, Frankenstein! Generous and self devoted being!
What does it avail that I now ask thee to
pardon me? I, who irretrievably destroyed thee by
destroying all thou lovedst. Alas! He is cold, he cannot
answer me.”*

---Mary Shelley, Frankenstein: Chapter 24

The creature is very near of getting Moksha through his last gestures. Like *Bhishma Pitamaha*² of *The Mahabharata* the creature sought his own death seeing the futility of living anymore. Finally it wanted to die in a nonviolent and peaceful way to finally meet *the Brahma*, the spiritual essence.

*“Polluted by crimes and torn by the bitterest remorse, where can I find
rest but in death?”*

---Mary Shelley, Frankenstein: Chapter 24

The way it fancies the funeral pyre, marks the end of suffering of others by him:

“I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My spirit will sleep in peace, or if it thinks, it will not surely think thus. Farewell. ”

---Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*: Chapter 24

This is the ultimate selfless act or a kind of *Seva* (service) to the mankind which would bring him the *Nirvana*. On the other hand, the unfulfilled desire of destroying his own creation would bind Dr. Frankenstein to the cycle of rebirth refraining him from the *Moksha*.

Conclusion: The progress in the various fields of science and technology is enriching the human civilisation in multiple ways. Ambition like *Icarus*³, in applying the knowledge to recreate a parallel race may pose threat to the very existence of the human being. Religion and ethics play a vital role in sustainability of the humanity as a whole. All religion champions humanity with the preaching of virtues like self restraint, benevolence, non violence, and above all believing in one Supreme power. Non-obedience of decree in the regime of the supreme has often led to calamity. Adam and Dr. Frankenstein are both in the same line who had dared to eat the forbidden fruit of knowledge. Their action made them sinful to suffer and repent perpetually. *Frankenstein* is a narrative of un-fulfilment, revenge, vengeance leading to tragic consequences. Both the characters are at a loss with the real purpose of their lives. Hinduism has an answer to the question of the purpose of life and death. It preaches one to be righteous and act to achieve liberation or *Moksha* from the bondage of cycle of life. *Moksha* is the state where the individual soul *atman* gets united with its origin *paramatma*, the Supreme Being called *Brahman*.

Notes:

1. *Arjun*: The archer and the third among the five sons of king *Pandu*, in the *Mahabharata* who was guided by *Lord Krishna* to fight against his relatives which forms the *Bhagavad Gita*, the Holy Book of the Hindus.
2. *Bhishma Pitamaha*: The great grandfather of the *Kauravas* and the *Pandavas* in the *Mahabharata* who was blessed to have control over his death.
3. *Icarus*: In Greek mythology, *Icarus* is the son of *Daedalus* who ignored his father's instructions and flew too near to the sun with wings of wax made by his father. The melting of his wings cost him his life.

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