

# *Abstract*

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Logotherapy is a theory propounded by Viktor Frankl. *Logos* is a Greek word which denotes 'meaning'. According to logotherapy, striving to find meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man. Viktor Frankl was the survivor of four concentration camps and he applied the therapy on himself in the camps, before writing books and publishing about its effectiveness in the year 1945. The English version of the book was published in the year 1959 with the title *From Death-Camp to Existentialism*. Later, the book was renamed as *Man's Search for Meaning*. According to logotherapy, man can discover meaning in life in three ways. Creating a work or doing a deed that would improve the lives of fellow human beings is the first way. Experiencing feelings such as love, peace, truth or having someone to love and live for, is another aspect to focus on, in order to lead a meaningful life. The third way is to maintain a favourable attitude towards life, despite being in the midst of unforeseen tragedies.

According to Frankl, meaning of life is as unique as the individual and thereby, what is cherished by one person cannot have any value for another. He also adds that man cannot demand an answer for the meaning of his life, as it is he who has to answer the question. Logotherapy helps to counteract unhealthy trends in the present-day culture, where the sufferer is given very little opportunity to be proud of his suffering.

Existential Vacuum has become a common phenomenon in the modern age, wherein the individual feels that his life is empty and he frequently experiences boredom. Several suicide cases have also been traced back to boredom. The individual in these cases had a strong feeling that life was not worth living. Hence the popular misconception that people commit suicide only because of problems has been debunked. No amount of wealth or

success can eradicate the feeling of existential vacuum because most of the people are successful according to the standards of the society, but within themselves, they experience emptiness because their purpose in life does not align with their domain of action. Logotherapy has provided the assurance to people experiencing existential vacuum, by stating that every human life has a meaning and the potential to experience that meaning, irrespective of the circumstances is also present in him.

Viktor Frankl elucidates the importance of dereflection, which means, shifting the focus away from the problem. When a person is obsessed with his problem, he becomes stressed on account of it, which eventually renders him incapable of finding a solution. By shifting the mind from the problem to another worthy activity, the mind gets relaxed and thereby obtains the ability to concentrate on the future course of actions.

The novels chosen for research are by authors belonging to five different nationalities. The research thereby holds good for mankind in general and the applicability of logotherapy is not restricted to any specific nationality. The plots of all these five novels are either completely or partially based in war-torn regions. The characters chosen for the study are the ones that possess immense mettle. These characters had applied logotherapy unconsciously as did the neurologist Viktor Frankl when he was imprisoned in the concentration camp. He formulated his own experiences into this therapy and his life is a concrete proof of the success, applicability and universality of this therapy.

*The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* (2008) by Mary Ann Shaffer and Annie Barrows, *The Book Thief* (2005) by Markus Zusak, *An Unnecessary Woman* (2014) by Rabih Alameddine, *Mister Pip* (2006) by Lloyd Jones and *Human Bondage* (1915) by Somerset Maugham are the novels chosen for research.

The thesis has been divided into six chapters. The introductory chapter charts out the origin and growth of novels as a specific genre. It offers a brief insight into the evolution of the manner in which the concept of war has been dealt with in literary works. It delineates the concept of logotherapy and attempts to give a brief insight into the chosen novels and the lives and achievement of the authors.

Chapter II titled *Shifting Focus from Traumatic Memories* attempts to explain the concept of dereflection, which is a technique adopted to shift the focus away from the traumatic events in life. Instead, the individual engages himself in a task that he enjoys doing, which would not only prevent him from brooding over the problem and stressing himself further, but would also rejuvenate him and thereby fortify his mind to deal with the problem in a better way. The mode of dereflection opted by the characters chosen for the study is reading, and the chapter throws light on how books serve as a faithful companion. Reading also prevents the characters from brooding, by mentally transporting them to another place and time and also enabling them to experience the life of another individual.

. Chapter III titled *Combating Existential Vacuum* highlights the techniques used to combat existential vacuum. Failing to participate in life's activities or indulging in a task which adds no value to one's life culminates in a feeling of boredom. The individual begins to feel empty from within. In order to combat it, an individual ought to create something worthwhile or perform deeds that he finds meaningful or makes the life of another human more comfortable. A study is made on the effectiveness of indulging in a task during difficult times and the positive impact it has on the individual and the people around them.

Chapter IV titled *Effect of Social Support on Psychological Distress* throws light on the importance of good interpersonal relationships in enabling the individual to lead a

meaningful life. Man is a social animal and it is evident that he is capable of thriving only in the company of fellow human beings. The characters chosen for study become better versions of themselves solely on account of the love and support they receive from their family, friends and loved ones.

Chapter V titled Role of Attitude in Overcoming Suffering emphasizes on the advantages of cognitive restructuring and the pivotal role played by it in aiding the individual to overcome suffering. This chapter accentuates the importance of maintaining a positive attitude to overcome suffering. It emphasizes on the fact that situations are not responsible for the pain and suffering one faces in life, instead, it is determined by the individual's estimate of it and his reaction to it. The chapter also highlights the importance of accepting the challenges posed by life instead of living in denial and overcoming it by being grateful for the good things and remaining hopeful about the future.

The concluding chapter attempts to reassert the applicability of logotherapy. It also hopes to motivate people with suicidal tendencies and assure them that, every problem can be overcome by applying the principles of logotherapy. The chapter has refuted the absurd theorists who state that life is meaningless. It also vociferously condemns the practice of applying reductionist theories on man and viewing him as a victim of his desires and drives. On the whole, the study endeavours to assure mankind that he is more powerful than his problems. It also offers the assurance that every life has a meaning and the responsibility of discovering it lies exclusively with the individual.