

Chapter II

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Shifting Focus from Traumatic Memories

Viktor Frankl advocated the technique of dereflection which is a component of logotherapy. According to Frankl, the opposite of dereflection is 'hyper-reflection', wherein, an individual directs excessive amounts of attention to himself and his problems. Excessive attention to oneself can be a hindrance as it is unhealthy and disruptive. On the other hand, dereflection is a technique wherein an individual diverts the attention from oneself and channelizes his attention and energy to the task at hand. Dereflection does not propagate distraction or escapism. Instead, it encourages the individual to lose themselves by redirecting the focus on another activity that would eventually enable them to reinvent themselves and get reintroduced to a better version of themselves.

Certain circumstances in life are unavoidable and an individual is left with no choice but to quietly endure it. Natural calamities, illnesses, accidents, death of loved ones and loss of faith are events which have the power to alter the entire course of an individual's life irrevocably. Such events are nothing short of a catastrophe as the very foundation on which an individual has built his dreams and ambitions gets shaken. A majority of the suicide cases occur as a result of the inability to cope with such uncertain situations.

An inmate of the concentration camp, Frankl had experienced the worst of what a man can inflict on another man. After having enjoyed the stature of being a doctor, he was forced to do manual scavenging in the concentration camp. His food comprised a

rationed portion of watery soup but he was expected to do all the menial jobs that demanded physical prowess. His most cherished notes were destroyed and he resided in a place where death and disease were ubiquitous. Despite all this, he looked forward to the day wherein, he would get released from the camp, as he believed that a beautiful and happy life was lying in wait for him. However, not many inmates toed his line of thought as they lost faith in life. Many perished in the concentration camp as a result of a lack of desire to continue living. Some others were reduced to breathing corpses even after their release, as they had lost the motivation to live after all that they had witnessed:

Usually it began with the prisoner refusing one morning to get dressed and wash or to go out on the parade grounds. No entreaties, no blows, no threats had any effect. He just lay there, hardly moving. If this crisis was brought about by an illness, he refused to be taken to the sick-bay or to do anything to help himself. He simply gave up. There he remained, lying in his own excreta, and nothing bothered him any more. (Frankl, "Man's" 82-83)

In logotherapy, Frankl delineates the methodology to lead a meaningful life and discover a personal meaning irrespective of the challenges life throws at an individual. First and foremost, he advocates the importance of cleansing the mind of the negative thoughts by directing the thoughts and attention towards something else. The individual always has the power to choose between ruminating over his problems, and diverting his attention towards other things that add value to his life. When a person thinks of something, he is unconsciously investing his energy and channelizing it towards the thought and thereby, empowering it in the bargain. Negative thoughts will thereby get converted into actions, which would culminate in the individual getting ensnared in a

vicious cycle of negativity. There are multifarious factors that trigger stress in the twenty-first century, which has the power to align man's thoughts negatively, when left unbridled. Regardless of that, man is also vested with the ability to discern the quality of thoughts and consciously alter them. Moreover, the power to choose how to react to the miseries is also the prerogative of man. A person can either ameliorate stress by brooding over the problem or employ his thoughts in a fruitful way by indulging in something of value to the individual.

The power of thoughts has remained undisputed since times immemorial. However, most of the thoughts are repetitive and when they happen to be negative, they have the power to make the life of man miserable. During times of duress, the mind unwittingly steers in a negative direction and the overall tone of thoughts becomes pessimistic. If left unchecked, they become stronger due to repeated affirmations and autosuggestions. This will have an impact on the actions of the individual. They would vent out their frustrations on their kith and kin, sabotaging valuable relationships in the process. Eventually, strained relationships with family and friends would increase the stress levels which in turn would instill a more deep-rooted negative outlook of life.

In order to change one's life, one thereby needs to work on the thinking pattern. The article "How to Change Negative Thinking with Cognitive Restructuring" by Rebecca Joy Stanborough notes that cognitive restructuring is a technique which therapists advocate, to release oneself from the negative entrapment of one's thoughts. The therapist suggests the patient to affirm certain positive statements to himself and when this is done over a period of time, the individual becomes capable of doing it all by himself. This technique ensures that

the thinking pattern is altered and thereby his actions would get altered eventually (Stanborough).

Meditation is another ancient and popular manner in which thoughts can be monitored. Meditation has played a vital role for ages in bridling one's thoughts and enables individuals to focus on the thoughts that are worth entertaining and can vitalize them with intense focus. The next advantage of meditation is that it enables to slow down the thought process, which relaxes the human mind and enables an individual to preserve his mental hygiene.

Besides meditation, people have taken refuge in an activity that they hold dear, in order to steer their mind away from the harsh realities. People resort to several productive modes of dereflection among which reading, singing, dancing, painting and playing a sport have topped the chart. These activities enable the individual to shift their focus from the problem to another activity and Frankl has termed this as dereflection, which is different from escapism. Escapism promotes dubious ways to momentarily get out of a problem and when the time to face the problem arrives, he finds it even more aggravated as he is not in a state of mind to deal with it. Substance abuse is a popular form of shifting focus from problems. Smoking, using drugs and consuming alcohol, momentarily relieves the mind of the nagging problems in life. Nevertheless, it has no contribution other than offering a temporary feeling of ease and has overreaching repercussions. Alcohol, drugs and cigarettes ruin the health of the person. They are highly addictive and the person gets trapped in a vicious cycle, wherein he not only loses his health and wealth but also becomes an outcast in the society.

Addiction to gadgets has become common in the twenty-first century. Cellular phones have become an immensely popular and indispensable gadget of the era. However researchers have proven that excessive use of mobile phones reduces the attention span of the users. The virtual experience available online, hampers the individual from enjoying reality. Social media is another additive factor which causes depression. People tend to compare the lives of the people on social media with their own and develop a feeling of inadequacy which eventually stresses them out and depresses them.

Eating junk food or sweets excessively, to get over depressing thoughts and improve one's mood, is becoming increasingly popular and this mindless gorging of food becomes the source of a host of illnesses, obesity being the chief of them. An unfit body is again a source of relentless problems and thereby, escapism offers no solution. Instead, it only gives rise to new problems and renders the individual physically and mentally misfit to deal with the problem. To adumbrate, man loses everything in bargain for a momentary relief from his problems.

On the other hand, dancing, exercising, travelling, singing and reading, are activities that not only divert the mind from the problem, but also rejuvenate the body and mind. This augments the individual's capability to face the problem in a better spirit. Reading tends to impact the minds of the readers apart from merely serving as a mode of dereflection. It has the ability to offer the individual an array of ideas and values from which an individual can choose and imbibe the ones that are suitable to his situation in life. In the article "Bibliotherapy", Clifton McAlister has stated that in many hospitals, books are prescribed by the doctors as a mode of treatment and this procedure is termed as bibliotherapy. Prescriptions are given to the patients by the librarian or doctor

according to the nature and severity of the malady, in order to clear out all his troubling thoughts and make him a happy person, which would make his mind more receptive towards the treatment (356-57).

Research has also claimed that reading has stress-relieving properties. The article “Reading ‘Can Help Reduce Stress’”, has made a record of the survey conducted in the University of Sussex which proved that reading is the most effective way to overcome stress. Reading tests conducted for six minutes revealed that the heart rates of the participants slowed down and the tension in the muscles eased up to 68%. The research also revealed that reading put brains into a trance-like state and bestowed health benefits similar to that of meditation (“Reading”).

Readers thereby tend to experience lesser stress compared to non-readers as reading alleviates stress by shifting the focus from the stressful situation and welcomes the reader into an altogether different world wherein the reader can slip into the shoes of any character of his choice. Books therefore come in handy in situations ranging from everyday problems, to the worst irreversible ones like war, terminal disease, loss of a limb and death.

In the book *The Proust and the Squid* (2000), Maryanne Wolf has asserted that, reading not only serves the purpose of shifting the attention of the individual from stressful thoughts, but also changes the neural wiring of the brain. The individual thereby becomes capable of shifting his attitude without exerting much effort as the brain is designed in a way to cooperate with the individual seeking a change: “Thus the reading brain is part of highly successful two-way dynamics. Reading can be learned only

because of the brain's plastic design, and when reading takes place, that individual brain is forever changed, both physiologically and intellectually" (5).

Reading can thereby assist man to remain sedate and composed even during catastrophes like war that has a hazardous impact on the psyche of individuals. Being a witness to incessant bombings, bloodshed, mutilation and death can seriously impair the mind, but the individual is also vested with the power to make a choice as to what to think in a given situation. Instead of letting the mind wallow in thoughts pertaining to disaster and death, the individual can shift the attention and focus on something else, to stabilize and prepare it for the forthcoming ordeals.

The characters in the novels chosen for research have all taken refuge in books. *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* is a novel set during the period of World War II and the time after its culmination. The novel is set in an island named Guernsey and the story unfolds itself in the form of epistles written by the characters to each other. The story begins during the period of the Second World War and ends in the post-war era. The sufferings endured by the characters during the war forms the major crux of the story. Juliet Ashton, a writer from London decides to record the story of how the Islanders survived the war and she travels to Guernsey to meet the people.

The island of Guernsey was taken over by the Nazis during the war and the people faced untold miseries under their authoritarian misrule. Curfews were imposed in the evening and the exact time of curfew depended entirely on the mood of the Germans. People had to subsist on meagre insipid rations that were a poor apology for food. Even basic commodities like flour and salt became a rarity in the island. Malnutrition had deprived people of the warmth provided by food and they were left with no defense against the cold.

Towards the end of 1944, even the Germans had to go about without food and they were forced to boil cats and eat them.

Before the arrival of the Nazis, majority of Guernsey's children were sent off to England to live with strangers, as it was difficult to feed them adequately. Moreover, it was unsafe to have the children around when the island was under the rule of the Nazis. The parents therefore had to take the heartrending decision of sending the children away to England without any assurance of being able to meet them again. Animal lovers had to witness the gruesome sight of all the animals being taken away and killed, as food was scarce even for human beings. The Nazis had not even left the trees alone.

An onslaught to the self-esteem of the islanders were caused by skin diseases that were widespread throughout the island as adequate soaps were not available to keep the clothes and the body clean. Lice infested hair coupled with pus oozing out of the body battered the spirits of the people as lack of personal hygiene was a constant source of humiliation.

Death was imminent as bombs were dropped through air at any time during the day and people were caught unaware. Life was steeped in uncertainty and the situation could drive anyone to their tether's end. In Guernsey, the Germans confiscated the homes that were considerable in size for their own use, and the owners were forced to move out of their own homes.

The book society was also formed while trying to escape from the atrocious Nazis. Elizabeth McKenna was the brain behind the formation of the reading club which was later christened as 'The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society'. It all began when Mrs.Maugery had invited people over to share a roasted pig, a delicacy that was forbidden

to the islanders by the Nazis. Nevertheless, she had managed to rear a pig with the utmost secrecy and everybody who was invited over, had a wonderful time at her residence but their delight was short lived when they realized that it was nine o'clock and the curfews were imposed at eight o'clock. Elizabeth and her clique were eventually caught by the Germans for having broken the curfew, when they attempted their homeward journey.

It was precisely at that time, that Elizabeth came up with a brilliant excuse to save the skins of her beloved friends and her own. She told the German officers that they were unaware of the passage of time as they were immersed in the discussion of a book *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* in their literary society. On hearing this, the officers politely asked them to report to the Commandment instead of incarcerating them. Thus, Elizabeth had managed to save everybody with her presence of mind.

Elizabeth had the prescience to foresee that the Nazis would definitely drop in someday and check whether a literary society really existed and thereby, she purchased and stocked up books and invited the islanders over to the meetings after having read up something. Thus, what began as a trick to deceive the Nazis turned out to be a boon, as a new habit was acquired and a close-knit group was born, which enabled them to smoothly sail through the turmoil caused by the war:

Then each went home and read. We began to meet- for the sake of the Commandment at first, and then for our own pleasure. None of us had any experience of literary societies, so we made our own rules: we took turns to speak about the books we'd read... We read books, talked books argued over books, and became dearer and dearer to one another. Other Islanders asked to

join us, and our evenings together became bright, lively times- we could almost forget now and then, the darkness outside. (Shaffer and Barrows 45-46)

Elizabeth was the daughter of a servant and she had come to the island to lock up her master's home, but she stayed on to help her friend deliver her child and that is how she got stranded on the island. She was not allowed to stay in her master's home as the Nazi Germans confiscated it for their use and she was given six hours to vacate and move into a cottage. Despite the short notice, she took all her precious books along with her to keep her company: "So many books, Sidney, that I haven't had time to investigate them- they fill the living-room shelves and overflow into the kitchen. She even stacked some at one end of the sofa to use for a table- wasn't that brilliant?" (Shaffer and Barrows 144).

While in Guernsey, Elizabeth fell in love with a German officer, who died leaving her unmarried but pregnant, which was scandalous. Despite that, Elizabeth brought her daughter up with great love and continued to remain vivacious despite her loss. She had to endure this personal tragedy alongside the sufferings inflicted by the war. Elizabeth stayed undeterred in the midst of all this as she took refuge in her books.

Another important character named Juliet Ashton, who was a writer, residing in London, learnt of the existence of the Islanders through the missives posted to her by Dawsey, an islander, who had purchased Juliet's second hand book and found her name and address written in it, and thereby decided to find out more about his favourite author Charles Lamb. Within a short span, Dawsey ended up divulging information about how the islanders had withstood the period of the German Occupation by seeking refuge in books. This kindled Juliet's interest and she intensely desired to know more about them. Juliet was a voracious reader herself, apart

from being a writer and the lives of people who read during the war was a matter of utmost interest to her:

The Times has asked me to write an article for the literary supplement. They want to address the practical, moral, and philosophical value of reading – spread out over three issues and by three different authors. I am to cover the philosophical side of the debate and so far my only thought is that reading keeps you from going gaga. You can see I need help. (Shaffer and Barrows 28)

Juliet's life was an eventful one, dotted with tragedies. She was orphaned at the age of twelve and was entrusted to the care of her great-uncle who was insensitive to her needs. She therefore ran away from his home twice and was finally admitted into a boarding school. However, these tragedies did not brutalize her and she managed to retain her sunny nature through the ebbs and flows of life, as she held onto her books and chose not to wallow in self-pity.

Juliet had to face a series of mishaps during the Second World War. Her flat was bombed and she lost everything that she held dear along with it. She had to call off her wedding with Rob Darty in the eleventh hour after she realized that they lacked compatibility. Intermittent bombings, limited rations, and an insecure life in general can be extremely taxing for any individual. Regardless of that, Juliet's devotion to reading had salvaged her from mental deterioration.

Eben Ramsay was an Islander who had to send away his seven year old grandson Eli to London. Shortly after that, he lost his pregnant daughter Jane along with her child. It was precisely at that time that the Nazis arrived. Eben was bombarded with tragedies, but instead

of going wayward, he managed to live through the ordeal, and eventually got reunited with his grandson after five years. The literary society and books had enabled him to divert his thoughts from the spate of horrific things that had occurred in his life:

We started out hopeful, sure they'd be gone in six months. But it stretched on and on. Food grew hard to come by, and soon there was no firewood left. Days were grey with hard work and evenings were black with boredom. Everyone was sickly from so little nourishment and bleak from wondering if it would ever end. We clung to books and to our friends; they reminded us that we had another part to us. (Shaffer and Barrows 57).

Another character named John Booker, who was the servant of Lord Tobias became an integral part of the Book Society, despite being an outsider. Lord Tobias fled with his family and belongings when Guernsey fell into the hands of the Germans. However, John Booker decided to stay back because Guernsey would offer him freedom from menial jobs, provide him with an opportunity to be his own master, and grant him the power to inhabit Tobias' deserted home along with an unlimited access to the wine that was stored in his master's cellar. However, the Nazis made him vacate his home and he eventually ran out of wine in 1941. Being stranded in a strange place during a war can be unnerving. Moreover, Booker was an alcoholic who had lost complete access to wine, and this could have had serious ramifications had it not been for the literary society, as relentless pining can give rise to grave problems. The book club not just provided him with the means to dereflect but also acted as a rehabilitation centre. Booker claimed that it was the habit of reading that saved him from living the life of a drunkard and living a respectable life: "I came to love our book meetings- they helped to make the Occupation bearable. Some of their books sounded all

right, but I stayed true to Seneca. I came to feel that he was talking to me –in his funny, biting way-but talking to me. His letters helped to keep me alive in what was to come later” (Shaffer and Barrows 81).

The editor of *The Times* had assigned Juliet with the responsibility of recording the impact of reading on the Islanders during the occupation. Juliet who was a reader herself did not consider reading as an idle pastime. Mrs.Maugery, an Islander was extremely grateful to Juliet for her wonderful portrayal of their literary society and reading habit instead of trivializing it as a mode of distraction:

After the uproar about your visit had subsided, the Society read your article about books in *The Times*. Everyone enjoyed it- not just because we were reading about ourselves, but because you brought us views we’d never thought to apply to our reading before. Dr Stubbins pronounced that you alone had transformed ‘distraction’ into an honourable word – instead of a character flaw. The article was delightful, and we were all so proud and pleased to be mentioned in it. (Shaffer and Barrows 121)

Mrs Clara Saussey who as an Islander herself, had belittled the literary society in a letter to Juliet but she was undeterred by her opinion as she herself had experienced the bliss of reading. She cherished every moment of her childhood that she had spent reading and recalled them with extreme fondness. She even took up a job in a bookshop which was purely out of love for the job and not for the paltry income it generated. According to Mrs Saussey, the literary club was an excuse to battle with boredom and the members were not lovers of literature.

Little did Mrs Saussey realize that her fellow Islanders had devised a technique to overcome their existential vacuum or had nipped it in the bud. People who resort to brooding and complaining either succumb to the problem or become embittered by it. However, by forming a literary society, even those who were hitherto untouched by the magic of books, got introduced to it and discovered friends and guides in literary characters.

Dawsey Adams is yet another major character in the novel. His father died when Dawsey was eleven and this was a major blow to his mother who remained secluded till her death. Moreover, Dawsey used to stutter, which made it impossible for him to communicate with ease and he remained shy and aloof all his life, but after he was admitted into the literary society by Elizabeth, he gained a new lease of life, as he ceased being shy and remaining aloof: “That was how it was until Elizabeth came-and made him be friends. Forced him really, into the Literary Society. And then, Isola said, how he blossomed! Now he had books to talk about instead of swine fever-and friends to talk to. The more he talked, the less he stuttered” (Shaffer and Barrows 203). Books added happiness in Dawsey’s life during the ongoing war and salvaged him out of his solitary existence as he found a friend in his favourite writer Charles Lamb. “Charles Lamb made me laugh during the German Occupation, especially when he wrote about the roast pig” (8).

Amelia Maugery, an islander who is one of the prominent characters in the novel, was the most educated and respected person among the islanders. She lost her only son during the war. The death of a loved one, especially the untimely death of one’s own child, has the power to rob a parent of all the meaning that they had associated with life. The view with which they had hitherto perceived the world gets altered drastically as the priorities of their lives are rudely shaken. Mrs.Maugery however managed to endure all

the sufferings that war had inflicted upon the island with great equanimity, as she decided to read books instead of pondering over her sad fate.

The habit of reading worked wonders upon the personality of the islanders apart from channelizing their thoughts away from their problems. Books kept John Booker away from alcohol and it made Dawsey a more confident person. It gave the islanders the courage to face separations and deaths and accept them. They learnt to accept life and flow with the tide, instead of being battered down by it.

The next novel taken up for research is Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip*, which is also set on an island in the South Pacific wherein, the island nation is ravaged by Civil War that had severely hampered normalcy in the lives of the islanders to such an extent that they were divested of their homes and every single article of material possession. It was reading that offered them solace and managed to keep the sanity of the islanders intact. Unlike the islanders of Guernsey, the inhabitants of Bougainville had access to only one novel titled *Great Expectations*. Nevertheless, the novel gave the children of the island a new lease of life, as the story gave them something to think and talk about.

The nub of the problems brewing in the island was related to mining and the ramifications of it. The Whites from Australia had been carrying out mining operations in Bougainville, from the time they discovered copper deposits. However, they deserted it when it stopped yielding huge profits and the island became the interest of the redskins belonging to Papua New Guinea. The Blacks residing in Bougainville were frequently terrorized by the redskins as they wanted to gain possession of the mines. The Blacks who resisted them in this attempt were termed as the 'rebels', who were mostly teenage boys, as no succor was available to the islanders residing in Bougainville from the outside world.

The rebels too hid themselves in the forests and attacked the redskins stealthily.

The property of the islanders were vandalized and looted by the redskins to give vent to their vengeance, while they combed the area frequently to find the rebels and eliminate them.

The islanders were badly affected because the island was completely cut off from the outside world due to the war. There were no newspapers or radios to bring in any news from outside. Children were dying in large numbers because no medicines were available on the island. The islanders were gripped by a perennial sense of fear and drifted about the island from one day to another, unsure of the course their lives had taken. The entire white community left the island except Mr. Watts who was married to an islander named Grace.

Mr. Watts took the initiative to teach the children, as all the teachers had left the island. The novel *Great Expectations* was read aloud to the students by Mr. Watts in the classroom, and the story captured the imagination of many students. Matilda, the protagonist of the novel *Mister Pip* was the one to be thoroughly influenced by it. The story had successfully kept the young minds away from the tumultuous thoughts related to war and allowed their minds to embark on a journey to nineteenth century England:

During the blockade we could not waste fuel or candles. But as the rebels and redskins went on butchering one another, we had another reason for hiding under the cover of night. Mr Watts had given us kids another world to spend the night in. We could escape to another place. It didn't matter that it was Victorian England. We found we could easily get there. (Jones 20)

Matilda found a friend in the character Pip, though he was brushed aside by her mother Dolores, as a mere fictitious character and a figment of Dickens' imagination.

Matilda's father had settled down in Australia, leaving her and her mother behind. Matilda did not share an amiable relationship with her mother as she was chronically displeased and angry because of her husband. She held the White men accountable for having taken her husband away from her and was therefore prejudiced towards Mr. Watts. Matilda's reverence for her sworn enemy namely, Mr. Watts, only worsened things. In circumstances such as these, Matilda found Pip as her saviour:

As we progressed through the book something happened to me. At some point I felt myself enter the story. I hadn't been assigned a part – nothing like that; I wasn't identifiably on the page, but I was there, I was definitely there. I knew that orphaned white kid and that small fragile place he squeezed into between his awful sister and loveable Joe Gargery because the same space came to exist between Mr Watts and my mum. And I knew I would have to choose between the two. (Jones 40)

The life of Pip had also instilled hope in Matilda because she believed that if fortunes could change for Pip and succor could arrive for him from unseen quarters, then her life also could change for the better. These thoughts kept her spirits high and optimistic while living in the midst of death and destruction which was the traumatic reality of the island. The story of *Great Expectations* made Matilda a more observant and empathetic person. Instead of being hassled by her mother's constant state of displeasure, she began to understand the reason behind the constant frown on her face as she noticed a similarity between her mother and Miss. Havisham of the novel *Great Expectations*:

Miss Havisham remains in her wedding gown for an event that has been and gone. I had an idea my mum was stuck in a similar moment. Only it

had to do with an argument with my dad. Her frown gave her away.

A frown that could be traced back to the original moment. I had an idea that whatever my dad had said still rang in her ears. (Jones 49)

It was the book *Great Expectations* that enabled Mr. Watts to carry on with his life on the island. He was the last White man on the island and lived with his mentally ill wife. They had lost their daughter and a sense of emptiness had gripped him and his wife. However, unlike his wife, his reading habits salvaged him from deteriorating mentally. The book was his unfailing constant companion that gave him a sense of belongingness while residing amidst foreigners:

It was always a relief to return to *Great Expectations*. It contained a world that was whole and made sense, unlike ours. If it was a relief for us, then what must it have been for Mr Watts? I feel equally sure he was more comfortable in the world of Mr Dickens than he was in our black faced world of superstition and mythic flying fish. In *Great Expectations* he was back among white people. (Jones 58)

Charles Dickens used to clear out some space to listen to the voice of the character that he was creating for his stories. Dickens attained enormous success in breathing life into his characters because he never let his voice overlap the voices of his characters. He understood the sanctity of individual voices which enabled him to produce characters that swayed people across generations, ages and nationalities. Mr. Watts had learnt this lesson from the life of Dickens and passed it onto the children of the island as well. He taught them that every individual had a unique voice which could not be taken away by anyone under any circumstances. When that unique voice was used to call out

one's own name, the experience was purely magical. Matilda had found this exercise to be an enriching experience and used it to listen to the dictates of her inner voice to take vital decisions as an adult:

The sound of my name took me to a place deep inside my head. I already knew that words could take you into a new world, but I didn't know that on the strength of one word spoken for my ears only I would find myself in a room that no one else knew about. Matilda. Matilda. Matilda. I said it over and over. I tried out different versions, dragging the word out and expanding that room. *Ma til da*. (Jones107)

The story of *Great Expectations* continued to bind the islanders together and deviate their minds away from dwelling on the unavoidable sorrow that had been inflicted on them, even after the copy of the novel was burnt down by the redskins. The islanders mistook Pip for a rebel and ordered the islanders to hand him over. Mr.Watts had tried to explain that Pip was a fictitious character from the novel *Great Expectations*. The redskins demanded proof and the entire classroom was scoured by Matilda. However, she failed to locate the novel as her mother had hidden the copy in their home to prevent Mr.Watts from reading out the story, as Dolores suspected that the novel was corrupting the minds of the children and alienating Matilda from her.

Dolores did not admit that she had hidden the copy and since it was nowhere to be found the redskins incinerated all the possessions of the islanders. They had left the possessions of Mr.Watts unharmed probably because he was White or perhaps because they had overlooked it. The angry islanders held Mr.Watts accountable for the mishap and were also suspicious that Mr.Watts had intentionally hidden the copy in his home.

They all marched towards his home when the couple were outside and ransacked the home but failed to locate the book. They gave vent to their anger by burning the possessions of Mr.Watts. A few days after this gruesome incident, Mrs.Watts breathed her last.

Mr.Watts was truly an outsider in the island now, as the single tie he had with the island had been severed and he was aware of the stance the islanders had taken towards him with the recently exhibited hatred. The series of misfortunes could have embittered anybody, but not Mr.Watts. He continued to teach their children like before, undeterred by their ingrate behaviour: “ I wasn’t sure how long Mr Watts’ mourning would last. Some of us worried that he would not come out of his house again--- that, like Miss Havisham, he would become stuck. So it was a surprise, three days later, when Mr Watts sent Gilbert to find me and ask why I wasn’t in school” (Jones 126).

Now, that the copy was nowhere to be found, he suggested that they recreate the novel by jotting down bits and pieces of their recollections of the story. This ignited the minds of the children with a sense of renewed enthusiasm and they kept their minds busy with the task of retrieving the story, so that one day they would be able to compile the story as a composite whole:

In the days that followed we worked hard to produce scraps of a vanished world. We walked around with a squint. ‘What’s the matter with you blimmin’ kids. Is the sun in your eye?’ our mums would say. Of course I did not tell my mum about our project. She was liable to say, ‘That won’t hook a fish or peel a banana.’ And she was right. But we weren’t after fish or bananas. We were after something bigger. We were trying to get ourselves another life. (Jones 127)

The civil war had rendered the islanders homeless, penniless and bereft of all possessions. It had robbed the children of their childhood. Mr. Watts was trapped in a completely strange island wherein, he was the only White man and visibly an outsider. The situation aggravated after the islanders expressed their hostility towards Mr. Watts by burning his possessions coupled with the death of his wife, who was the sole reason behind his decision to stay in that island. These situations would have caused undue amount of stress to anybody, but Mr. Watts chose to engage his mind in another occupation instead of ruminating over his troubles and encouraged the children to do the same with the help of *Great Expectations*. They were thereby safely stowed away mentally, in another world that was far away from the grim realities of the circumstances in the island:

The world Mr Watts encouraged us to escape to was not Australia or Moresby. It wasn't even another part of the island. It was the nineteenth-century England of *Great Expectations*. We were working our way there on assisted passage, each of us with our own fragments, with Mr Watts as helmsman sorting and assembling them into some coherent order. (Jones 131-32)

It was Mr. Watts who came to the rescue, when the islanders felt threatened by the presence of the rebels in the island. The rebels were creating havoc by drinking and indulging in ribaldry, but Mr. Watts put an end to this by engaging the rebels and the islanders with a story. He laid down a condition stating that he should not be interrupted while narrating the story. He also added that it would take seven nights for him to complete his story. He thereby managed to enrapture his audience and prevented them from creating trouble: "Those rambos had not heard a storytelling voice for years.

The boys sat there, with their mouths and ears open to catch every word, their weapons resting on the ground in front of their bare feet like useless relics” (Jones 141-42).

Mr. Watts had promised to narrate the story of his life and that worked as a suitable bait to enamour the islanders. They were curious to know about the life of the White man and what inspired him to marry Grace, who was one of their own kind, and settle down in that island against all odds, but Mr. Watts interspersed the story of *Great Expectations* with that of his own and came out with a semi-fictitious account of himself which prevented the islanders from knowing everything about him. Matilda was disappointed in particular because she was extremely curious to know more about her mentor, and when she realized that the story of Pip was overlapping the story of Mr. Watts’ life, she began to discern his real motive. Mr Watts was keen in engaging the islanders and the rambos with an interesting tale that would keep their minds away from the threat and fear that pervaded the island and he knew that to hold them spellbound and make them come back for more, he would have to improvise instead of merely stating facts of his own life.

The story of *Great Expectations* was something that enabled Matilda to engage her time with, after she rejoined her father in Australia post the death of her mother. She compensated for the years of education she missed out alongside reading all the works of Charles Dickens. Books had taught her to empathize with others, gave her a friend she badly needed and transported her mentally from the war-torn island to nineteenth century England. The getaway offered by the novel allowed Matilda to retain her sanity in an extremely stressful situation.

War causes instability and affects routine. As a teenager, Matilda had to live through the civil war, lose her home and possessions. She had to give up formal

education. However, the most traumatizing of it all was when her mother was raped and then killed. Dolores had offered to give up her life in exchange of exempting Matilda from being raped. She also had to witness the death of her beloved mentor Mr. Watts. After a string of traumatic events, she was taken away to Australia to live with her father and continue her education in a new country. She was initially admitted into a lower form so that she could catch up with the years she had lost. The oeuvre of Charles Dickens assisted her in sailing past the turbulent period in her life without falling prey to stress, trauma or depression:

People sometimes ask me ‘Why Dickens?’ which I always take to be a gentle rebuke. I point to the one book that supplied me with another world at a time when it was desperately needed. It gave me a friend in Pip. It taught me you can slip under the skin of another just as easily as you own, even when that skin is white and belongs to a boy alive in Dickens’ England.

(Jones 198-99)

The next novel chosen for research is *An Unnecessary Woman*, set in Beirut, a city that was in the grip of Civil War. The protagonist is Aaliya Saleh, a divorcee residing alone in an apartment in Beirut. Similar to the islanders of Guernsey and Bougainville, Aaliya took refuge in books and prevented her thoughts from going berserk.

Aaliya had lost her father at a very young age and her mother remarried her father’s brother and bore five more children after which Aaliya was relegated to oblivion. Her mother favoured her sons more and was brazenly open about it. The only thing Aaliya enjoyed about her childhood was her school. She felt at home in the environs of her school but was forced to discontinue her education and married off at the age of

sixteen. Her husband was someone with whom she had no compatibility and they were divorced within four years of their marriage.

Aaliya then began living her life in the company of books and continued doing so for the rest of her life. She worked in a bookstore, read books voraciously and translated them too. Thus her whole life revolved around books and it offered her sufficient strength to forget her worries and make her life productive. Most women in her state would have grovelled in self-pity, turned bitter and would have succumbed to depression, but Aaliya chose to breathe life into her days by directing her thoughts in the proper channel. She was aware about her status in the society but did not let that affect her thoughts and plans for her future: "It is a choice I've made, yet it is also a choice made with few other options available. Beirut society wasn't fond of divorced, childless women in those days". (Alameddine 7)

Aaliya was pestered by her family to vacate her home and give them to her brothers because they had a large family and Aaliya was a single woman. According to them, she could go anywhere as she was alone, and a divorced woman according to their perception was not entitled to live a comfortable life.

A civil war broke out in Beirut in the year 1982, and Aaliya had to live through it all alone. Fear was uppermost in the minds of all the inhabitants of Beirut and Aaliya had obtained an AK-47 to defend herself. Beirut was plagued by all the problems that are commonplace in war-torn regions. Water became a scarce commodity which made bathing and washing clothes out of the question. Everyone walked around with a decrepit look which gravely ruined people's self-esteem. Aaliya however spent her time with books which prevented her mind from running berserk during the war. Books kept her occupied to such an extent that she did not require any other external source. Her neighbours, who were inquisitive

about what she did all day commented: ““I always wondered how you spent so much time all by yourself during the war. Oh, wait. While the Lebanese were experiencing bloodlust, yours was booklust”” (Alameddine 85).

Aaliya was reprimanded constantly for being studious by her own family members. They tried to dissuade her from this habit by saying that it would create impediments in leading a normal life. They even suggested that her prospects of matrimony would be marred if she spent time with her books, but the taunts and jibes of her family members had no effect on Aaliya as she was aware of the benefits she was reaping on account of it. She strived to be special and detested the idea of nestling comfortably in normalcy. She knew that only books had the power to grant that special status to her and save her from the state of normalcy.

Aaliya had led a rather solitary life. She was not wanted or loved by anyone throughout her childhood. Her marriage ended in a divorce and her proclivities prevented her from being social and hence, she lacked friends and a good social life as well. She had also reconciled to the fact that she would never be loved by anybody and therefore, instead of lamenting on her loveless state of existence and increasing her misery, she chose to devote her attention to books which would enable her to recalibrate her thoughts, and thereby become a better version of herself: “I thought art would make me a better human being, but I also thought it would make me better than you” (Alameddine 113).

Reading had indeed rescued Aaliya from leading a tragic life. A seventy-two year old woman with no pleasant memories of the past, no familial support and nothing to look forward to could easily have slipped into a state of desperation and mental degeneration. Ruminating over the unkind way in which life had treated her and rendered

her as an unnecessary woman could have had a devastating effect if Aaliya had not sought refuge in books. She consciously chose to immerse herself in the world of books and thereby uplift her mood instead of focusing on the unfair treatment life had meted out on her, over which she had little control:

I flip delicate pages with an unhurried and measured beat, a lazy metronome timing. I lose myself in the book's languorous territories. I'm transported to a café in Trieste, become intimately acquainted with its idiosyncratic patrons. I travel along the book's meandering paths- breakfast with a young man in one village, lunch with a crone in another- salivate over beautiful sentences, celebrate holidays I'd never heard of. I read and read until I'm abruptly bashed over the head by the full weight of Esperia's story, a throwaway of no more than four pages in a three-hundred-page tome. (Alameddine 117)

Hannah was the only friend Aaliya ever had. Her death delivered a shattering blow to Aaliya as she had lost her sole companion. Before Aaliya could recover from this loss, war broke out in Beirut, offering her another major blow to deal with. Her landlord passed away as well, placing her in the danger of being evicted from her home. Aaliya once again fought against this series of misfortunes by immersing herself in books.

Death of loved ones is one of the greatest factors causing stress. Aaliya managed to overcome this situation by plunging into books. She chose not to devote her time and energy pondering over the catastrophes that have already transpired as it would only deteriorate her mental health. Moreover, she was not in a position to adopt corrective measures, as events such as war and death are beyond the periphery of human control. She therefore adapted to the situation wisely by escaping into the world of books:

Life was crazy. Hajj Wardeh passed away that year as well, and I wasn't sure if Fadia would try to evict me. My mother harped about my apartment.

My half brothers tried to break my door and my spirit. It was not pleasant, and then war, the ultimate distraction, broke out. I plunged into my books.

I was a voracious reader, but after Hannah's death I grew insatiable. Books became my milk and honey. (Alameddine 253)

Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir *Eat, Pray and Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia* (2006) can be considered as a literary parallel to the novel *An Unnecessary Woman*. Elizabeth was also a divorcee like Aaliya and in order to avoid obsessing over the unfortunate incident and deteriorating her state of mind further, she decided to expunge her grief and find her true self. She thereby began travelling to different countries as she believed that a change in the physical atmosphere would act as a catalyst and assist her to deviate herself from harbouring unfruitful thoughts. She even indulged herself with delectable food and later on, stayed in an *ashram* wherein she immersed herself in prayer and meditation to gain control over her emotions, senses and thoughts. Since Aaliya was not financially stable like her American counterpart to undertake travels and visit different places, she did that through her books.

The next novel taken up for research is *The Book Thief*, a novel set in the era of the Second World War. Leisel, the protagonist of the story is the titular book thief, living in Germany ruled by the Nazis. She had been divested of her family at the age of nine and was sent away to live with her foster parents Rosa and Hans Hubermann. She had watched her six year old younger brother die in front of her eyes. That was a very traumatic experience for Leisel and she frequently experienced nightmares as a result.

Hans Hubermann painted for a living and Rosa was a laundry woman. War was a major assault on the economy and people could no longer afford to employ people and get their laundry done. Hans' job opportunities dwindled rapidly because he was not a member of the Nazi party and had also ruined his reputation by painting the walls of Jews, which had been vandalized by Nazis with nasty slurs. Leisel thereby had to endure indigence at the home of her foster parents.

Hans Hubermann had given shelter to Max Vandenburg, a Jew, whose father had been a friend of Hans and had once, saved his life. Hiding a Jew was a crime, and therefore, the Hubermann family had discreetly sheltered him in the basement of their home. The relationship between Max and Liesel was cemented with a strong bond of friendship and she could empathize with him on account of the traumatic experiences she herself had endured in the past. Max however, had to be turned out of the house, after Hans fed the Jews being marched on the road, in full public glare. The German officials had also been present at that time and assaulted Hans for his seditious act. Hans realized that his impulsive act would cost him dearly, as his house would probably be checked for other signs of sedition. He therefore had to send Max away, because, if they were caught hiding a Jew, then the entire family would be sent away to the concentration camp. This was a huge blow to Leisel, as she lost another person who was dear to her.

Death was ubiquitous during the Second World War. People had to hide in basements when there was a danger of bombs being dropped in the city. Death dangled over the heads of people and the lack of safety or a sense of security was sufficient reason to drive people into the depths of depression, as their lives oscillated between life and death on a daily basis. The eventful day finally arrived and Himmel street, in which

Liesel's life was finally bombed. She lost her parents, and her dearest friend Rudy, all in one stroke. Such incidents generally drive people into a state of existential crisis, as she had lost almost everyone known to her on earth. In spite of that, Liesel did not succumb to the challenges that life had thrown at her, as she was armed with the technique of dereflection. Liesel sought refuge and solace in books during times of duress and it was owing to it that she managed to overcome the series of catastrophes that her life bombarded her with.

Liesel's first book was *The Gravedigger's Handbook* which she stole from her brother's graveyard. She was on her way to her foster parents' home with her brother and mother and it was then that her brother breathed his last. Her mother's whereabouts were also unknown to her and she was in a new environment with a new family. It was that book, which relieved her from the nightmares that haunted her after her brother's death. Her foster father Hans, taught her to read after one such nightmare and it turned into a secret venture between the father and daughter. Liesel's love for books and reading were also sown during these reading sessions:

There were no books in the house (apart from the one she had secreted under her mattress), and the best Liesel could do was speak the alphabet under her breath before she was told in no uncertain terms to keep quiet. All that mumbling. It wasn't until later, when there was a bed-wetting incident nightmare, that an extra reading education began. Unofficially, it was called the midnight class, even though it usually commenced at around two in the morning. More of that soon. (Zusak 46)

Liesel's books were a boon, when the raids were on and people were huddled together in the basement, uncertain of what would happen next. The very air in the basement was saturated with a sense of fear and a premonition of death. However, Liesel managed to divert the thoughts of the people and her own, by reading aloud and enrapturing them. The inmates of the basement momentarily forgot all the dangers that were lurking outside and the possibility of their imminent death:

For at least twenty minutes, she handed out the story. The youngest kids were soothed out by her voice, and everyone else saw visions of the whistler running from the crime scene. Liesel did not. The book thief only saw mechanics of the words – their bodies stranded on the paper, beaten down for her to walk on. Somewhere, too, in the gaps between a full stop and the next capital letter, there was also Max. She remembered reading to him when he was sick... Everyone waited for the ground to shake. That was still an immutable fact, but at least they were distracted now, by the girl with the book. (Zusak 389)

Liesel's life was dotted with several untold miseries. Death of family members, especially when it takes place right in front of the eyes can be very traumatic, especially to a child. Liesel was nine, when she witnessed the death of her brother and was separated from her mother. Displacement can be yet another traumatic incident in the life of an individual. She lost two of her closest friends, one to Nazis and the other one to death. Finally, she lost her foster parents who were the only ones she had in the world.

However, she overcame these traumatic experiences and did not succumb to them, as she had her books as a constant companion to distract her thoughts from the

disturbing circumstances at hand. The stories she read enabled her to transport herself into a different world from that of her own and thereby retain her sanity. Despite the horrendous circumstances in her life she experienced happiness and strongly believed that something good would eventually happen, to such an extent that she was guilty of it: “Don’t make me happy. Please, don’t fill me up and let me think that something good can come of any of this” (Zusak 525).

The next novel that has been researched upon is William Somerset Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage*, which is centered on the life of the protagonist Philip Carey. The novel is partially set during the Second World War. Philip is portrayed as a nine year old boy at the beginning of the novel and the story traces his journey into adulthood. Philip had also taken refuge in books and found succor in them during times of trials and tribulations.

He was orphaned at the age of nine and was entrusted to the care of Mr. Carey, his uncle. His aunt and uncle were childless and were thereby unaware of parenting techniques. Philip, who was bereft of parental love, suffered greatly under the guardianship of Mr. Carey, who was an overzealous Vicar. He frequently admonished and smothered Philip with his religious fervour, though he meant well. A trivial incident like playing on Sunday which God had supposedly created for rest, would impel Mr. Carey to launch a tirade against Philip. He was even forbidden from attending church on that day, because his uncle believed that he was not fit enough to meet his Maker after having disobeyed God. Mrs. Carey, as a dutiful wife, would always side with her husband but her sympathies were with Philip and she always strived to do the best for him.

Philip was born with a clubfoot which had been a perennial source of embarrassment for him. He had been mocked at, ridiculed and bullied at school on account of his

deformity and that left an everlasting scar in his psyche. The boys compelled him to show his deformed foot and expressed disgust by looking at it. They imitated his walk and made him the laughing stock of the school and called him a cripple to have the last word in an argument. His teachers did not beat him as often as they beat the other students as he was disabled and this lenient treatment intensified the shame that Philip experienced by many folds. Books were his only solace in the midst of a string of tragedies and humiliations he faced. It was his aunt who first gave him some picture books to console him and he accepted them eagerly and thus a bonding between him and his books was cemented:

When Mary Ann came in and Mrs Carey rose to help her lay the cloth, Philip took the books in his hands and hurried through the illustrations. It was difficult that his aunt induced him to put the book down for tea. He had forgotten his horrible struggle to get the collect by heart; he had forgotten his tears. Next day it was raining, and he asked for the book again. (Maugham 34)

The books transported him to a different world from that of his own and he experienced happiness over there. Instead of brooding over his orphaned state and the coldness with which his uncle treated him, he preferred to engage his thoughts with the wonderful stories that he read. He thereby saved a great deal of misery as he prevented himself from wallowing in self-pity, by entertaining self-deprecating thoughts:

One day a good fortune befell him, for he hit upon Lane's translation of *The Thousand Nights and a Night*. He was captured first by the illustrations, and then he began to read, to start with, the stories that dealt with magic, and then the others; and those he liked he read again and again. He could think

of nothing else. He forgot the life about him. He had to be called two or three times before he would come to his dinner. Insensibly, he formed the most delightful habit in the world, the habit of reading: he did not know that thus he was providing himself with a refuge from all the distress of life. (Maugham 35)

After passing out of school, Philip went to Germany to learn German as well as continue his education. After returning back to England, his uncle decided that he should go to London and become a chartered accountant. Philip had to start off as a clerk at the beginning to learn the nuances of the profession and his life in London was extremely lonely as his colleagues were beneath his class and he did not manage to make friends outside his office. He hated the drudgery that he had taken up unwittingly and spent his time looking forward to the day he would quit it. His sole companion during these dreary days happened to be books and he spent his leisure time in the evenings, reading.

After a year, he quit his job and decided to go to Paris and learn art as he believed that he had the aptitude for it. His paintings had been widely appreciated and he decided to make a career out of his talent, but his plans were vehemently opposed by his uncle as he believed that Paris was the hub of immorality and painting was not the profession any gentleman was supposed to take up. There were bitter altercations between the nephew and the uncle and finally Philip had his own way and went away to Paris. As expected, the Parisian life was saturated with temptation, but Philip did not yield to it as he was immersed in his work and books: “Philip was too much occupied with his work, the books he was reading, the plays he saw, the conversation he listened to, to trouble himself with the desire for female society” (Maugham 234).

With the passage of time, Philip however, to his dismay realized that he lacked the talent to become an extraordinary painter who would someday create an original masterpiece. He sought advice from his master who concurred with his views and he thereby decided to give up painting. However, he was in a dilemma about quitting, as he would become the laughing stock among his friends. Moreover, he was afraid that his uncle would gloat over the fact that his prediction about Paris had materialized. Philip was relieved from his dilemma when he received a letter from his uncle announcing the demise of Mrs. Carey. This was a great personal loss for Philip after the death of his parents and he realized that the sole support he had in the form of his aunt was no more. This gave him a reason to return to England and the strength to announce his decision that he would not go back to France.

His decision earned his uncle's displeasure and he was ridiculed for being flippant. However, Philip sincerely attributed his sanity to his flippant nature and thought that he would have committed suicide had it not been for his flippant nature. He then decided to read philosophy and understand himself and conceived his free time as a chance to introspect:

He thought the best thing he had gained in Paris was a complete liberty of spirit, and he felt himself at last absolutely free. In a desultory way he had read a good deal of philosophy, and he looked forward with delight to the leisure of the next few months. He began to read at haphazard. He entered upon each system with a little thrill of excitement, expecting to find in each some guide by which he could rule his conduct; he felt himself like a traveller in unknown countries and he pushed forward the enterprise that

fascinated him; he read emotionally, as other men read pure literature and his heart leaped as he discovered in noble words what himself had obscurely felt. (Maugham 298)

After giving up painting he embraced the medical profession. He decided to walk on the footsteps of his father and become a doctor and thereby, enrolled himself in a medical college in London. He was not blessed with a disposition to attract many friends and thereby had to lead a rather solitary life. However the life that he had hitherto borne with equanimity became a painful burden after he met Mildred, as he developed an unfortunate passion for her. He was aware that Mildred was not interested in him and was planning to marry the man she had been dating. He was not oblivious to his own mixed feelings wherein, he sometimes despised her thoroughly for her crude behaviour and her class. He knew that he would never dream of marrying a girl of her station but was unable to subdue his hopeless passion for her which had cost him dearly. He lost a great deal of his wealth and was reduced to indigence because of her.

Irrespective of all the troubles that life heaped upon him, he managed to carry on with his life by dividing his time between books and work. He admitted to the fact that the books that he read not only entertained him but also contributed in his quest to understand himself, alongside teaching him about the nature of life and the art of living it:

‘Partly for pleasure, because it’s a habit and I’m just as uncomfortable if I don’t read as if I don’t smoke, and partly to know myself. When I read a book I seem to read it with my eyes only, but now and then I come across a passage, perhaps only a phrase, which has a meaning for *me*, and it becomes part of me; I’ve got out of the book all that’s any use to me, and

I can't get anything more if I read it a dozen times. You see, it seems to me, one's like a closed bud, and most of what one reads and does has no effect at all; but there are certain things that have a peculiar significance for one, and they open a petal; and the petals open one by one; and at last the flower is there.' (Maugham 373)

Philip thereby attributed his emotional, moral and spiritual development to the books that he had read. According to Philip, reading was not a casual mode of gaining pleasure or a hobby to spend his leisure time or escape from the clutches of solitude. It was a source of knowledge that nourished his thoughts, enriched his life and contributed to his evolution as an individual. It became his friend in the cruel environs of his school where he was not accepted or included because of his deformity. While working in London, books once again became his friend and enabled him to get rid of his loneliness. In Paris, books prevented him from indulging in promiscuous relationships. After returning back to England, he read voraciously and that helped him to overcome the sorrow of the death of his aunt and prevented him from obsessing over the future course of actions. Finally, after a sufficient period of dereflection, his mind became stabilized enough to take a decision to which he stuck unwaveringly despite innumerable challenges.

This chapter has thereby evinced how books provided the characters with the respite that they yearned for in the midst of a gamut of crisis and challenges. Instead of wallowing in negativity and becoming incapacitated, the characters made books the fulcrum of their lives and channelized their thoughts in another direction, thereby shifting their focus from the bitter realities of life that were unavoidable. Reading not only gave

them another world to dwell in but also provided them with multitudinous cognitive benefits that fostered their minds to accept and endure the miseries with fortitude.

The focus of the forthcoming chapter would be about how the characters managed to carry on with their life and perform various tasks with a mind that has been fortified as a result of proper channelization of thoughts. The chapter would also discuss how the characters managed to overcome the daunting vicissitudes that had the potential to trounce mankind, by engaging in tasks that added meaning to their lives.