

Chapter IV

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Effect of Social Support on Psychological Distress

Man is classified as a social animal because he prefers living in a society and cannot thrive when left all alone. Human beings are dependent on others to lead a comfortable life and the motivation behind every man's achievement is always attributed to someone else. Viktor Frankl in *Man's Search for Meaning* divulges that the memory of his wife and the prospect of being reunited with her someday in the future had helped him to pull through the dreadful life in the concentration camp and motivated him to continue living:

The salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way- an honorable way- in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment. (49)

In *The Unheard Cry for Meaning*, Frankl stated that an individual who is forced to live in a hopeless situation manages to survive only when he has someone or something that would entice him to continue with his struggle and carry on with life. A person, who is loved and has someone to care for, is seldom likely to commit suicide when an unforeseen catastrophe strikes, compared to someone who has no one to live for. Even in cases of terminal illnesses, people who have strong ties with other people are bound to battle against the disease more successfully compared to those who lack meaningful relationships because

there is no motivation available to fight and continue living: “To speak of suicide rather than homicide, there are cases of depression who commit suicide, and there are cases who manage to overcome the suicidal impulse for the sake of a cause or a person. They are too committed to commit suicide, as it were” (49).

The characters in the novel *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* give an insight into the concept of ‘self-transcendence’. Despite having numerous problems in their lives, the characters depicted in the novel assisted others in their times of need. By doing so, they momentarily forgot their troubles and woes and employed their time in easing others’ pain.

Juliet Ashton, a major character in the novel, is portrayed as a writer residing in London. She was orphaned at the age of twelve and was thereby sent away to live with Dr. Roderick Ashton, her great-uncle who resided in London. He unfortunately turned out to be a man who remained preoccupied with his studies to such an extent that he became impervious to everything around him and hence, proved to be an incompetent guardian. Juliet ran away from her home twice and was thus, sent away to the boarding school where she might have companions of her age and find solace and happiness. However, she was extremely unhappy and was seething with rage after having arrived at the boarding school and began to chalk plans to escape. Sophie was the first girl to welcome her and Juliet informed her that she would flee the moment she got hold of the railway timetable. Sophie acted as an accomplice to her plan and fetched the timetable and that incident endeared Sophie to Juliet so much that they got along as a house on fire:

I am happy to tell you Juliet thrived there- she found her lessons stimulating, but I believe the true reason for Juliet’s regained spirits was her friendship

with Sophie Stark- and the Stark family. She often went to Sophie's home at half-term, and Juliet and Sophie came twice to stay with me and my sister at the Rectory. What jolly times we shared: picnics, bicycle rides, fishing. Sophie's brother, Sidney Stark, joined us once- though ten years older than the girls, and despite an inclination to boss them around, he was a welcome fifth to our happy party. (Shaffer and Barrows 42)

The friendship offered Juliet with the strength to savour life and she transformed from being a cantankerous girl to a vivacious young woman who was loved by all. She was given writing assignments by Sophie's brother and between her work and friends she managed to surpass all the problems that came her way during the dreadful war.

The inhabitants of Guernsey Island led a rather quiet and lonely life. Dawsey in particular, was an introvert who had not exchanged anything more than a customary greeting with his neighbours for years together. Moreover, he had a problem with his speech and had a slightly deformed foot which made him socially awkward and he withdrew himself from the society. The advent of the war changed all the equations once and for all. Food was rationed and doled out in minimal quantities. It had been ages since the islanders had tasted anything delicious and an invitation to feast on a roasted pig inveigled Dawsey into accepting the tempting offer that he found impossible to resist:

I didn't talk much while I was growing up- I stuttered badly- and I was not used to dinner parties. To tell the truth, Mrs Maugery was the first one I was ever invited to. I said yes, because I was thinking of the roast pig, but I wished I could take my piece home and eat it there... It was my good luck that my wish didn't come true, because that was the first meeting of

the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society, even though we didn't know it then. The dinner was a rare treat, but the company was better.

(Shaffer and Barrows 25)

It was in Amelia Maugery's home, that the first meeting of the literary society took place. She was the most respected lady in the island and most of them sought her advice or approval before taking any important step or decision in their lives. When Juliet wrote to him and asked him to enlighten her about the workings of the book club, he referred her to Mrs. Maugery as she would be able to give her a more educated opinion compared to him. He then went out of his way to convince Mrs. Maugery to write a letter to Juliet which was so unlike him. However Mrs. Maugery found this change rather endearing and she willingly complied with his request.

Though she acceded to Dawsey's request, she took the precaution to find out Juliet's intentions behind writing the story of the Book Society and the islanders, because she did not want her people to become the object of fun and ridicule for the educated urban readers. She had read Juliet's work *Izzy Bickerstaff Goes to War* and was a little uncomfortable with the frivolous way in which Juliet had handled the subject of war. She thereby suspected that Juliet might adopt the same vein while writing about the islanders. Mrs. Maugery considered the islanders akin to her family and did not want them to be ridiculed by anybody and thereby took the precaution to obtain recommendations from Juliet's references before divulging any information about the literary society.

Mrs. Maugery gave Juliet an account of how the interpersonal relationships they shared benefitted them. She said that books had been instrumental in bringing them together and in due course of time they came closer to each other like never before.

Their relationships made them oblivious to the extraneous circumstances as they revelled in the happiness that their close-knit group brought to them: “We read books, talked books, argued over books, and became dearer and dearer to one another. Other Islanders asked to join us- we could almost forget, now and then, the darkness outside. We still meet every fortnight” (Shaffer and Barrows 46).

Mrs.Maugery had secretly concealed a live pig and requested Dawsey to kill it and give the pig a quick and silent death. She then invited the islanders over, to partake in the delicious feast, which was a rarity during the Second World War as all the requirements of a good meal were taken away by the Nazis and the islanders were to sustain themselves on bland food that was devoid of every nutritional value. Her invitation unintentionally turned out to be the day of the inception of the book club, which acted as a panacea in the life of the islanders.

Many of the islanders realized that all they required was the healing presence of each other, more than anything else and they had been wasting their time by looking out for comfort in all the wrong places. The delicious food that they ate in the company of each other warmed the cockles of their hearts to a great extent, and that day remained etched in the collective consciousness of the islanders. They were so inebriated with joy that they lost track of time and remained at Mrs.Maugery’s home even after the time at which a curfew was imposed. The partying group therefore had to break the curfew, to get back to their respective homes but was caught by the German officials. They were saved by Elizabeth’s presence of mind as she lied that they were members of a book club and were so immersed in the book that they lost track of time. She chose this particular reason because she was aware that the Germans were ardent admirers of literature and

they would certainly overlook any transgressions that were unintentionally committed while one was in the grip of a literary fervour.

Thus was born the literary society which bound most of the islanders together and cemented their relationships to such an extent that they lived like the members of the same family even after the war was over. The books that they read and shared with each other was an added asset and the islanders were metamorphosed into better versions of themselves in the process. Dawsey was one of those who underwent a very significant change. He emerged from the cocoon he had built around himself and became a very popular person in the island as a result of the selfless service he rendered.

During the war, when salt was denied to the islanders, people resorted to the use of sea water as a substitute for salt. However, the older people were not in a position to undertake this arduous walk to the sea, fetch the required quantity of seawater and tread back home. It was Dawsey who volunteered to fetch water for the old and invalid despite having a slightly malformed foot himself. It was during this errand that a bond of friendship developed between Dawsey and a German field surgeon named Christian. A German was considered to be a sworn enemy and even the exchange of a simple greeting was considered as a transgression by many. The Germans who were forced to be in the island and did not have a say in anything were also despised by the islanders and were looked upon with suspicion. Christian was one such German but he managed to win the friendship and trust of Dawsey with his caring, helpful nature and above all, by the mutual love they harboured for Charles Lamb.

The friendship had a very refreshing effect on both Dawsey and Christian, as their conversation never lingered around war and strictly remained restricted to topics of great

interest to both of them which elevated their state of mind and steered them away from the negativity and hardships that permeated the very atmosphere of the place: “After that, he would often help me carry up water, and then he’d offer me a cigarette, and we’d stand in the road and talk- about Guernsey’s beauty, about history, about books, about farming, but never about the present- always things far away from the war” (Shaffer and Barrows 85).

Before the literary society was formed, the islanders had been mere acquaintances to each other and did not share a special relationship with anybody. Elizabeth was the only binding factor in the island as everybody was known to her and it was she who had insisted that Mrs.Maugery should invite the islanders over to her home for dinner. Sharing the sumptuous dinner during a period of scarcity would appear as a foolhardy decision for an onlooker. However the togetherness they enjoyed at that moment and the happiness they experienced turned out to an invaluable asset during the period of war as the event had managed to solder their weak connections into a strong everlasting bond and they stuck together through thick and thin even after the culmination of the calamitous war.

Dawsey had done a simple act of kindness by making soaps for the ladies during the war. However, this little gesture had an overreaching impact in their minds and he earned their eternal gratitude, especially that of Mrs Dilwyn’s. She was so touched by the deed that even after the war was over and things had gone back to normal, the very memory of that day used to make her eyes brim with tears. Her husband, who was a lawyer, was prepared to be of any service to Dawsey as a token of his gratitude. A small deed had thereby gone a long way in bolstering the interpersonal relationships and establishing a permanent feeling of mutual respect and gratitude.

Dawsey Adams wrote to Juliet about the outing the Literary Society had planned for the weekend. They were going to watch a play enacted by the members of the Society and they were all rehearsing for the event. This description created a picture of a perfect bonhomie. The members were so closely knit that they planned their recreation activities together and acted as one single unit.

Will Thisbee, a member of the Literary Society was another person, who reaped the benefits of the interpersonal relationships shared by the islanders. He had never been a religious man because he was unable to connect himself to religion or be more faithful irrespective of how hard he tried. However, things changed when he entered into the fold of the Literary Society. Initially, he attended it perfunctorily but when Isola forced him to contribute his reviews and thrust Carlyle's *Past and Present* into his hands, he was forced to read it. The author offered him a very refreshing perspective of religion and this experience enabled Thisbee to get a grasp of religion and faith:

Did I find solace in reading? Yes, but not at first. I'd just go and eat my pie quietly in a corner. Then Isola got hold of me and said I had to read a book and talk about it like others. She gave me a book called *Past and Present* by Thomas Carlyle, and a tedious thing he was- he gave me shooting pains in my head- until I came to a bit on religion... I was not a religious man, though not for want of trying. Off I'd go, like a bee among blossoms, from church to chapel to church again. But I was never able to get hold of faith- until Mr Carlyle put religion to me in a different way.

(Shaffer and Barrows 88-89)

Will Thisbee found a great friend in Dr Thompson Stubbins who was a psychiatrist in London but eventually he was ousted from the group named 'Friends of Sigmund Freud Society' as his views were at loggerheads with that of the other members of the group. He thereby shifted to Guernsey and eventually became a member of the Literary Society too. He argued with Thisbee when he discussed Carlyle and unlike his earlier experience, his dissent only made him more popular in the group and a deep friendship was born between Thisbee and Stubbins: "Sometimes he drives around with me in my cart and we talk about Man and God and all the in-between. I would have missed all this if I had not belonged to the Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie society" (Shaffer and Barrows 89).

Eben Ramsey, another islander recounted the bleak experiences of wartime to Juliet. He had lost his daughter Jane to death and was forced to send his grandson Eli to London. Had it not been for Elizabeth and the Literary Society, he should have suffered miserably during the war and undergone the trauma alone. The only things that offered respite from troubling thoughts and gnawing hunger were books and friends. Eben as well as the other members of the society realized that they managed to endure their hardships so bravely only on account of their interpersonal relationships. The Nazis had projected the worst aspect of human beings and in order to retain their faith in humanity, it was quintessential to have good companions and the members of the Book Society were blessed exactly with that: "Days were grey with hard work and evenings were black with boredom. Everyone was sickly with 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).

Eben had also been present in the dinner party hosted by Mrs. Maugery and that day remained fresh in his mind just the way it had entered the collective consciousness of the islanders. He shared the wonderful experience he had on that eventful day with Juliet. He explained how a seemingly ordinary everyday affair of having a hearty meal has turned into a grand event that would linger on in his memory forever. Even the horrors of war and the German Occupation disappeared into the oblivion when they enjoyed the sumptuous food in each others' wonderful company: "With the curtains closed against the sight of the German battery, and food and friends, at the table, we could make believe that none of it had happened" (Shaffer and Barrows 68).

Juliet expressed her desire to go away to Guernsey and sought Sidney's permission to do so. She had fallen in love with the islanders merely after having read their stories. She wanted to meet them personally and know them better so that she would be able to do greater justice to her work. She sensed the camaraderie that emanated out of their letters and yearned to go to their island and enjoy their company to get a first-hand experience of their love and hospitality. She also wanted to experience the pure air of the island and admire the picturesque landscape of Guernsey after having read and heard so much about it.

Isola is another prominent member of the Literary Society who breathed life into every activity with her vivacious nature. When she heard about Juliet's arrival she was extremely elated as she had grown to love Juliet very much because she had written a book on the life of Anne Bronte. Isola was partial to the books authored by the Bronte sisters and it was a treat for her to know more about them. Isola requested all her

acquaintances to write a letter to Juliet about their experiences during the Occupation so that Juliet would have more material to work on her book.

An islander by the name Adelaide Addison was someone who vehemently disapproved of the Literary Society as she felt that except Mrs.Maugery and Eben, none of them were respectable people. She thereby wrote a letter to Juliet asking her to refrain from writing the story of the Literary Society and glorifying it as they were people without scruples. She then gave a brief account of Elizabeth's character, who was the cause of the inception of the Literary Society. She described how Elizabeth had given birth to a child outside wedlock and was assisted by the members of the Literary Society to deliver it.

Juliet however maintained an unwavering resolve to write a book about them and did not abandon her project. Her respect for Elizabeth only increased after she learnt about Christian Hellman from Dawsey and Mrs.Maugery and she empathized with Elizabeth. Mrs.Maugery, who was like a mother to Elizabeth, told Juliet that she too had been suspicious about the intentions of the German man initially. She feared that it might be a ruse to trap the islanders and disapproved of the match. Elizabeth however managed to convince her by introducing Christian to Mrs.Maugery, as she was very anxious to win her approval.

Juliet realized that she had taken the right decision to visit the island and write about the Literary Society because the people of Guernsey were wonderful. They welcomed her into their fold as if she was one among them and did not hold back their affections for her in any way. More than the people, the idyllic beauty of the landscape affected her deeply and the experience was so exhilarating that she wanted to forget her suitor Markham V.Reynolds. She had accepted him half-heartedly out of a feeling of insecurity about her

future rather than out of love. The life in the island eventually inspired her to take the appropriate decision and end her relationship with Markham.

Though Elizabeth does not appear in person in the entire novel, all the islanders talk about her at some point in time or the other which is a measure of her popularity. She has done everything possible to make the life of the islanders comfortable despite having to endure several hardships herself. The love she had for Christian had provided her with the strength to carry on with her life during the war. Even after his death, her daughter Kit provided her with the reason to live and she never stopped participating in life as vivaciously as she used to do in the past. Even when a spy reported that she was nursing a Jew which resulted in her being sent away to the concentration camp, she never lost hope. The hardships of the concentration camp failed to tame Elizabeth's fiery spirits. She became a beacon of hope for the other inmates of the camp. Remy was an inmate with whom Elizabeth was particularly close with. Remy believed that it was her friendship with Elizabeth that allowed her to retain her sanity and look forward towards the future with hope:

I know that she cherished you as her family, and she felt gratitude and peace that her daughter Kit was in your care. Therefore I write so you and the child will know of her strength she showed to us in the camp. Not strength only, but a *métier* she had for making us forget where we were for a small while. Elizabeth was my friend and in that place friendship was all that aided one to remain human. (Shaffer and Barrows 155)

Elizabeth's optimism and lively spirit during trying times can be attributed to the love and support of the islanders. She was also aware that her daughter Kit was waiting

for her and that never allowed her to grow weary of life. She had also managed to infuse that spirit into her friend Remy and gave her a beautiful vision of life, clinging on to which Remy had managed to overcome all her trials and tribulations in the camp and later in the hospice.

Mrs.Maugery and Dawsey decided to fetch Remy from the hospice and take her away to Guernsey to assist her during the convalescence. They were aware that had Elizabeth been alive she would have done the same. The scenic beauty of Guernsey was certainly an ideal spot for a person desiring recuperation. Remy was a mere bag of bones when they picked her up from the hospice, but they tended to her with so much love, care and attention that she not just managed to get physically better but also found herself emotionally stronger.

Remy reminisced about the beautiful moments she had spent with Elizabeth and narrated the same in her letter to the members of the Guernsey Book Society. She said that the beauty of nature and the peace that enveloped them while she and Elizabeth stood side by side admiring it was the most divine moment in the camp. She added that it was very difficult for a person who had not been in a concentration camp to fathom the value of that experience. Despite being in the worst place on earth, that glimpse of nature's beauty and the exhibition of brilliant hues on the sky had stirred her soul and aroused hope in her heart:

The sky showing above the walls looked to be on fire – low-flying clouds of red and purple, lit from below with dark gold. They changed shapes and shades as they raced together across the sky. We stood there, hand in hand, until the darkness came. I do not think that anyone outside such a place

could know how much that meant to me, to spend such a quiet moment together. (Shaffer and Barrows 156)

Remy was deeply affected by Elizabeth's description of the bucolic scene of Guernsey. Elizabeth's friendship was a boon for Remy as she encouraged her to dream of beautiful things and kindled her imagination. Squalid surroundings tend to have a very negative impact on the human mind. By sharing stories of the islanders and the island's endearing beauty, Elizabeth managed to kindle a renewed interest for life in Remy. The ladies thereby began waiting for the arrival of the day of their release so that they could both go to the island and enjoy whatever it had to offer.

Juliet came to the island only with an intention of writing a book on the islanders, but the warmth of human relationships had endeared her to such an extent that she was not able to detach herself from it. Juliet, who was a bachelorette, experienced a motherly love for Kit and she considered making drastic changes in life owing to it. She broke her relationship with her suitor Markham when he suggested that she must return to London with him and forbade her from directing much of her attention to Kit. She then desired to adopt Kit formally and bring the orphaned child up, as her own daughter. However, she could not make her mind up about taking Kit to London and thereby separating Kit from the beautiful island and the people who loved her so dearly. She thereby decided to consult Mrs. Maugery, as she wanted to know her opinion on the matter. Juliet was aware of the relationship Mrs. Maugery shared with both the mother and the daughter and therefore considered it appropriate to win her approval before proceeding with her plans. Mrs. Maugery consented to it as she believed that Juliet would be able to provide Kit with a good and secure life.

Juliet then took the momentous decision of settling down in the island herself and thereby decided to leave London for good, as she was not comfortable with the idea of Kit growing up in a polluted city. Her love for Dawsey was an icing on the cake as she now had a stronger reason to stay back in Guernsey and Kit would have a father too. Though Dawsey's station in life was far beneath hers, Juliet decided to tie the knot because she experienced the freedom to be herself when she was with Dawsey, a factor that was absent in every one of her earlier relationships. Juliet thereby found pure happiness in Guernsey as she got a family of her own alongside many good friends.

In the next novel *Mister Pip*, Matilda acknowledged that it was owing to the influence of Mr. Watts, that her life and that of many other children in the island had been bearable during the atrocities that they were subjected to, during the Civil War. Mr. Watts' decision to teach the children after the departure of the teachers, reestablished a routine of sending the children to school, which gave a semblance of normalcy to the islanders.

Matilda was a very young girl when the horrific civil war had taken place. At that time, she was not able to discern the full import of Mr. Watts' actions. She merely viewed him as a teacher who taught them some basics of various subjects and read *Great Expectations* out to them every day. However, as an adult she realized that he had taught them the most valuable lesson that would enable them to survive in the most deplorable condition. He had introduced them to their own individual voices and made them realize that even when everything around them was destroyed, no power on earth would be able to take that voice away from them. This invaluable lesson was deeply imbedded in Matilda's mind and she never failed to turn to her voice in times of doubt:

It has occurred to me only recently that I never once saw him with a machete- his survival weapon was story. And once, a long time ago and during very difficult circumstances, my Mr Dickens taught every one of us kids that our voice was special, and we should remember this whenever we used it, and remember that whatever else happened to us in our lives our voice could never be taken away from us. (Jones 219)

The very thought of accomplishing a project as a group had a very positive impact on the children. Their eyes shone with a sense of purpose and happiness. Matilda knew that her mother would have laughed at the worthless nature of the task that they were about to undertake, had she shared her plans with her. However, Matilda was convinced that the task would give them another world to live in altogether, which would not be battered and torn by war. She would be able to meet her fictitious friend Pip during the process and that would certainly be a delightful experience:

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)

Mr.Watts’ ingenious idea to start teaching the students was very beneficial in boosting the morale of the islanders. When the children began leaving their homes towards the school, both parents and the children felt that life was returning back to

normal. Had they sat all day at home, the unwelcome change that had rattled their lives would have become more and more conspicuous. The children also benefitted from going to school because they had an opportunity to resume their studies alongside the chance to bask in the company of peers.

The commencement of the classes set the entire island going, as the parents of the children were also welcomed to share their experiences and insights with the children. Mr. Watts thereby made the entire community come together and his class acted as a pivot around which the life of the islanders revolved. The topics they learnt were very diverse that ranged across miscellaneous topics such as tips to cook well, natural remedies to cure illnesses, songs that had the power to help get rid of hiccups or to make a tree grow better, etc. Certain stories were told to instill moral values and faith in the children. The students were thereby taught by the parents of the entire island which eventually turned them into a closely knit family.

The children learnt how to be decent human beings from Mr. Watts. This lesson was quintessential for the children who were exposed to unimaginable horrors at a very young age. There were many parents who idolized the rebels and this would certainly have inspired their children to join the rebels and engage in violence. Mr. Watts described the qualities of a gentleman and inspired the children to do the right thing, irrespective of the situation they would find themselves in, and be a gentleman.

Certain children had an improper understanding of the word and construed that the word gentleman was synonymous with social standing and wealth. The teacher delivered them out of this misconception and encouraged them to be a gentleman. He also set an example for the students by an exhibition of his own gentlemanly behaviour when the

islanders burnt his belongings. He did not bear any grudges against them and continued teaching their children as if nothing had happened. The children thereby experienced goodness in the company of Mr. Watts which added value to their lives and enabled them, especially Matilda to take the right decisions in the future course of events: “Mr Watts then talked about what it was to be a gentleman. Though it meant many things, he thought the word ‘gentleman’ best described how a man should be in the world, ‘A gentleman is a man who never forgets his manners, no matter the situation. No matter how awful or difficult the situation’”(Jones 45-46).

The redskins had wanted the names of all the islanders and ordered them to write their names on a paper. They had heard the name of Pip and when they found the name missing in the list, they demanded to know who it was. When they were told that Pip was the name of a fictitious character in the novel *Great Expectations*, they were asked to provide the book as evidence. Matilda was sent to fetch the book but it was nowhere to be found as Matilda’s mother Dolores had hidden the book away as she wanted to prevent Mr. Watts from reading that book out to the children. This was an act done in a fit of rage and jealousy when Matilda had exhibited her indifference to her own progenitors and preferred to know more about the imaginary character Pip. However, she was unable to see the terrible repercussions of her act and when the redskins demanded for the book, she could not summon the courage to bring the book from her home and turn into a petty thief in the eyes of the islanders and her daughter.

Their inability to produce the book cost them their homes and their belongings. Nevertheless, this tragedy put all the islanders together to accomplish the task of rebuilding their lives. They turned into one unit and the men went into the forest to chop

down trees and fetch wood for their homes. Another islander, who was an expert fisherman, went to fish at the dead of the night in order to avoid being caught by the redskin patrols and dropped his snares in the right parts of the sea and hauled a large quantity of fish to satiate the hunger of the entire island. They had thereby managed to rebuild their lives within a short time: "Within a week we had built new houses. These were not as good as our old ones. We didn't have milled timber or wooden floors. But they were as good as we could make with what we had. We stitched and wove them together. Everyone has seen a bird build its nest- well, that was us too" (Jones 104).

After the death of Mrs. Watts, the entire community had congregated to attend the funeral and shared the memories they cherished about her. It was a very heartening experience for Mr. Watts to know that his wife Grace was loved by the islanders and that gave him the strength to endure his loss, as he had the sympathies of all the islanders and she was not buried as an outcast. Their support also gave him a reason to remain in the island as he realized that he was not alone: "For a while I had the impression Mr Watts would prefer to join his wife in the ground, but now I saw him happy to remain with us. Especially after hearing all those fragments to do with Grace. It was like adding kindling to a fire. We wanted to keep that thin smile on his pale face" (Jones 123).

The redskins returned again and this time they had held the rambos, who were the rebels, hostage. They repeated their desire to know who Mr. Pip was and one of the rambos pointed out to Mr. Watts, assuming that he was the one, based on what Mr. Watts himself had told him. The redskins were offended as they assumed that the islanders had deceived them and went on a killing spree. They hacked Mr. Watts to death, chopped him into pieces and threw it to the pigs. However, since he was a White man, they were keen

upon concealing this barbaric crime, as they did not want the Whites to be displeased with them. Dolores however refused to comply and stated that she would act as God's witness as they had murdered a good man.

Her bravado cost her a great deal as she was raped by the redskins as a mark of revenge. However, when she did not relent even after that, the redskins threatened to rape her daughter Matilda. Dolores broke down at this point and offered to give her life in exchange of Matilda's safety. The redskins agreed to this and Dolores was put to death in the same way Mr. Watts was murdered. Matilda often wondered the reason behind her mother's behaviour. She then realized that her mother did not want to compromise on her moral values and remain silent on the death of a good human being which would be tantamount to condoning the crime. The guilt for the loss the villagers had to incur because of her, had already weighed heavily upon her soul. She thereby sought penance with this supreme sacrifice.

Matilda learnt the true meaning of being a gentleman from a lady, who was also her mother. Even during her last moments, Dolores taught Matilda the true meaning of being good and courageous. She ended up sacrificing her life for her daughter's welfare instead of going back on her words of being a witness:

But at this point I am always reminded of what Mr Watts once told us kids about what it is to be a gentleman. It is an old-fashioned view. Others, and these days I include myself, will want to substitute 'gentleman' with 'moral person'. He said that to be human is to be moral and you cannot have a day off when it suits. My brave mum had known this when she

stepped forward to proclaim herself God's witness to the cold-blooded butchery of her old enemy, Mr Watts. (Jones 179-80)

Dolores thereby met her death knowing that she was giving up her life in exchange for her daughter's safety and the preservation of her own values and thereby did not experience any qualms while dying. Despite her husband's abandonment of her and Matilda, she lived her life for her daughter and finally gave it up too, when the need arose. Her life turned out to be a lesson to her daughter Matilda and she admired her mother's worthy life.

That night after the death of Mr. Watts and Dolores, there was a heavy downpour and the area soon got flooded. The flow was so turbulent that everything that came in its way was being washed away. Matilda thought that she would not resist if the flood chose to take her away as everyone who was dear to her had been killed. The atrocities that she had witnessed were creating turmoil in her mind. Moreover, the only people who loved her and offered her solace were no more. Matilda therefore found that her life was bereft of a purpose as there was nothing to look forward to anymore.

However, when the flood actually caught up with her, she experienced a sudden desire to survive. The desire increased manifold when she imagined the pain her father would experience when he learnt of her death and that compelled her to live on. The prospect of being united with him gave her the reason to continue living: "I saw my father's head wilt as he was given the news of my drowning. And as the last of the air drained from me it was the thought of my father's pain that drove me back to the surface. An hour earlier I couldn't have cared what happened to me. That had passed. Now I felt a responsibility to live" (Jones 185).

Even after having grown up, Matilda felt that she owed whatever she was to Mr. Watts. He had played several important roles in their lives and rose up to the occasion as and when it was demanded of him. Despite being an outsider, and an unwelcome one at that, he managed to play the most pivotal role in the island by taking up the responsibility of educating every child on the island and he donned the role of a teacher. When the people were in need of someone to distract them and calm the rebels, Mr. Watts donned the role of a story teller. He finally laid down his life when the red-skinned people were thirsting for blood. Matilda revered the memory of Mr. Watts throughout her life by imbibing the values he had taught them:

He was whatever he needed to be, what we asked him to be. Perhaps there are lives like that- they pour into whatever space we have made ready for them to fill. We needed a teacher, Mr Watts became that teacher. We needed a magician to conjure up other worlds, and Mr Watts had become that magician. When we needed a saviour, Mr Watts had filled that role. When the redskins required a life, Mr Watts had given himself. (Jones 210)

She finally decided to go back to her own people instead of staying in Australia unlike what the character Pip in *Great Expectations* had done. She realized that the ones who had been with her in the most difficult phase of her life should not be cast away as Pip had done and decided to be like Mr. Watts and play an instrumental role in the service of the society.

The next novel, *An Unnecessary Woman*, portrays the role that relationships had played in the life of Aaliya Saleh, who had only one intimate friend Hannah in her lifetime. They both became acquainted with each other during Aaliya's marriage, as

Hannah was considered to be a part of Aaliya's husband's family. Hannah was in love with a lieutenant and was under the impression that the feeling was mutual. However, he did not love Hannah and wanted to clear the misunderstanding at the earliest but was unable to muster the courage to spurn her love explicitly and before he could do so, he met with an accident and died.

From then onwards, Hannah assumed the role of his widow and devoted herself to the service of his family. Aaliya's husband was the younger brother of the lieutenant and that is how they got acquainted with each other. Hannah treated Aaliya as her own sister and welcomed her into her new family. She was the first one to visit her after the wedding was over and the one who taught her all the household chores: "Of course she ended up teaching me how to brew a kettle of coffee, how many spoons of grounds, how much sugar, how much cardamom. We stumbled into friendship. She was the first person who wished to have me in her life, the first to choose me" (Alameddine 207).

Their relationship continued even after her divorce, till Hannah's death. Aaliya had nobody but Hannah to fall back on, throughout her life and the relationship they shared provided both of them with great solace as they were both lonely women placed in similar circumstances and they stepped in to fill in the emptiness in each other's lives: "We were two solitudes benefiting from a grace that was continuously reinvigorated in each other's presence, two solitudes who nourished each other." (Alameddine 208)

Hannah was the only person with whom Aaliya had managed to share a good interpersonal relation with. She credited her for having saved her from a life of complete solitude and abandonment. Had it not been for Hannah, Aaliya would have had the idea of being an unwanted woman reinforced further:

Remembering Hannah, my one intimate, is never easy. I still see her before me at the kitchen table , her plate wiped clean of food, her right cheek resting on the palm of her hand, head tilted slightly, listening, offering that rarest of gifts: her unequivocal attention. My voice had no home until her... During my seventy-two years, she was the person I cared for, the one I told too much- boasts, hates, joys, cruel disappointments, all jumbled together. I no longer think of her as often I used to, but she appears in my thoughts every now and then. The traces of Hannah on me are indelible. (Alameddine 3- 4)

A divorced woman is subjected to unofficial social boycott in a patriarchal, conservative society and Beirut was one such place. After her divorce, her neighbours, including her landlord avoided her. The only interest that her husband's family and that of her own, took in her affairs, was to force her to vacate from her comfortable home. However, this was when Aaliya experienced her neighbour's goodwill. Though her landlord Hajj Wardeh was a conservative man and was unable to digest that a divorced woman lived in his vicinity, he came to her rescue when she was coerced to evict the premises on humanitarian grounds. Aaliya thereby got an assurance from her landlord's behaviour that she would remain safe in that neighbourhood and they would back her in times of danger:

Even though Hajj Wardeh refused to acknowledge my existence in person, he took my side when it came to the apartment. My husband's family demanded it, claiming I had no right to it. My own family demanded it, suggesting that any of my brothers was more deserving to it. Hajj Wardeh

would brook none of this. The apartment belonged to my husband, and unless my husband himself claimed it, or possibly his future sons, he would not release it to anyone... As long as I paid my rent, Hajj Wardeh considered me his tenant. (Alameddine 18)

Aaliya then had to set out and look for a job to make her ends meet and it was Hannah who assisted her in this venture. A relative of Hannah had opened a bookstore and she championed Aaliya's cause vehemently till the owner relented and decided to offer her the job. That job acted as a source of livelihood and gave Aaliya the reason to carry on with life. Her work gave her immense satisfaction as she could spend her time reading and recommending books to the ones who sought her help.

Once the civil war began in Beirut, every essential commodity became a rarity. Even the grocer used to sell the stock that he had hoarded, only to a few preferred customers. Aaliya was however not the chosen one and she thereby could not dream of getting anything from his shop. It was during these trying times that her landlord's daughter Fadia, who was now the owner of her home, extended a helping hand. Fadia did not like Aaliya right from the time she was a child. Her spiteful feelings had however mellowed down with her increasing age and the experiences of the outside world. Thereby, setting aside all prejudices, Fadia ensured that Aaliya got her provisions. Sometimes she even left some deliciously cooked meal for Aaliya:

A few mornings a week, I'd wake to find on my doorstep a couple of bottles of water, maybe a sack of rice, sometimes a bag of fresh tomatoes or a few oranges. After nights when the clashes were fiercer than usual, she'd leave a dish of the same meal she offered Mr. Azari. With the first

bite, I would turn devout and pray for her welcome into Paradise or God's bosom or any beauty spa she chose. (Alameddine 29)

Despite having lived in the same building for a major part of her lifetime, Aaliya remained a stranger to most of her neighbours. This was on account of her taciturn nature and their prejudices towards her. However, the war had managed to make them more familiar with each other. They became more humane after being exposed to the cruel miseries that the war had heaped upon them. Fadia even brandished a gun and tried to fire a shot at the marauder who had broken into Aaliya's house. Despite there being a great unrest in Beirut, Aaliya experienced a sense of security because her neighbours were vigilant and protective and prevented any harm that came her way. They did not become great friends after normalcy returned, but did not go back to their old ways either: "The war forced us to be strangers no more. We helped and supported each other during the battles, though that didn't transform our relationship into any recognizable kind of friendship. Other than uttering polite meaningless words, we hardly spoke. A word here, a phrase there" (Alameddine 76).

Aaliya's brother once again intruded rudely into her life and this time it was for a different reason altogether. He could never forgive her for not giving them that home and thereby wanted to burden her with the responsibility of nursing their senile mother. Both her brother and his wife insisted that the old lady must stay with Aaliya as they had done their share of work and it was now her responsibility to take care of her as a daughter. Aaliya was however horrified by this prospect and protested as she herself was seventy-two. Moreover, it was impossible for her to tend to her mother's needs in the condition she was in, as Aaliya lived alone. However, her brother began to intimidate her

with threats and Aaliya cowered under the pressure. It was then that her neighbours decided to intervene. Fadia, who was the owner of the house, asked them to leave and take the old lady along with them, with a great deal of authority. She left them with no alternative but to leave the premises and thereby, she saved Aaliya a great deal of trouble. Aaliya was very grateful for the moral support her neighbours had provided by intervening and fighting for her cause. She experienced their goodwill yet again during a difficult time.

Aaliya's neighbours came to her rescue yet again during another crisis. This was when her translations that were boxed and stored away in the maid's room came in contact with a leaking pipe. Her lifetime's work was now sopping wet and she had no hopes of their salvage. Her neighbours however did not concede defeat. They started to remove it out of the boxes and dry them. They tried miscellaneous methods like ironing, using blow dryers, etc. Joumana, who was a professor, offered to rope in her students to transcribe the entire collection. Aaliya did not attach great value to her work and thereby considered the fuss made by her neighbours as unnecessary. She was certainly dismayed by the devastation, but did not think that drying and transcribing her translations would be worth the trouble.

Finally, Joumana suggested that Aaliya should consider changing her methods so that her work can get published and would be of some benefit to the society. This suggestion ushered in a whole range of new possibilities for Aaliya, as she was finally convinced to translate English works, a prospect that she had shied away from, throughout her life. The brief moment of companionship had a great impact on Aaliya's life, as she now got a sense of direction for the future course of action. The encouragement and goodwill of her neighbours boosted her confidence to do better translations in the future. Thus, even the

miniscule amount of social support, friendship and love that Aaliya experienced, provided her with a sense of security and direction to lead her life effectively.

The next novel *The Book Thief*, deals with the lives of Liesel and the Hubberman family, whose lives were dotted with numerous problems. However, the love they had for each other provided them with a sense of security from all the troubles and encouraged them to remain hopeful and envisage a better future, as they offered each other with a reason to live.

When Liesel arrived at her foster parents' home, it was Hans, who tried to endear himself towards her and he did that very gradually as he did not want to impose himself on her before she was ready to settle down in her new environs and accept the change. Liesel had nightmares and it gave her such a fright that she wetted her bed. Liesel was petrified about the consequences as Rosa would never take it kindly and thereby, she took Hans into confidence. He washed the sheets, and while they waited for it to dry, Hans decided to read out the *Gravedigger's Handbook* at Liesel's behest. Hans was aware that the book was a morbid one, unfit for Liesel's consumption, but they did not have another choice as it was the only book available. Though he himself found the book difficult as he was not good at reading, he decided to go through the ordeal for the sake of his foster daughter. He wanted to allay her fears and provide her with a sense of security. A strong bond was formed between them after this incident and Liesel knew whom to turn to, in times of trouble. Her nightmares continued, but she would find her Papa by her bedside every time, to comfort her. Papa had earned her trust and she began to feel secure in his presence:

He came in every night and sat with her. The first couple of time she simply stayed- a stranger to kill the aloneness. A few nights after that, he whispered, 'Shh, I'm here, it's alright.' After three weeks he held her. Trust was accumulated quickly, due primarily to the brute strength of the man's gentleness, his *thereness*. The girl knew from the outset that he'd always appear mid-scream, and he would not leave. (Zusak 43)

Rudy was Liesel's neighbour as well as her classmate. They were constant companions and provided each other with great moral support. In her early days at school, Liesel would experience difficulty in reading and when her classmates only added to her trouble by laughing at her plight, it was Rudy who encouraged her to be bold and read. Even then, she failed in her attempt to read properly and was subjected to corporal punishment by the teacher. When a boy taunted her and added to her humiliation, it was more than she could endure and she began to pummel him mercilessly. When the teacher learnt of this, she was subjected to even more severe punishment and this drove Liesel to her tether's end. However, Rudy stood by her throughout this ordeal and extended his unflinching support to her. He was thereby successful in earning the trust and friendship of Liesel which was to last till his death. They became inseparable friends and the happiness that their friendship engendered, offered them the much required respite from the gnawing problems that they had to undergo in Nazi Germany: "Perhaps it was Rudy who kept her sane, with the stupidity of his talk, his lemon-soaked hair and his cockiness...He seemed to resonate with a kind of confidence that life was nothing but a joke – an endless succession of football goals, trickery and a constant repertoire of meaningless chatter" (Zusak 220).

For a girl who had faced the worst possible trauma at the age of nine, a seemingly simple pleasure of being a part of a family and having a friend was a great source of joy. Her parents were sent to the concentration camp and her brother had died right in front of her eyes. However, she now had a family and the comfort of sharing a good relationship with people, made her forget her traumatic past and move on in her life. She learnt at a considerably young age that in order to find happiness, one needs to look beyond oneself. Obsession with one's own self and problems would only result in further entanglement in the snare of problems and it would serve no purpose other than turning life melancholic. She had learnt this from her observation of the two women who had lost their sons, namely, Ilsa Hermann and Frau Holtzapfel, who had reduced themselves to living corpses after the death of their sons:

She loved her papa, Hans Hubermann, and even her foster mother, despite the bickering, abusages and verbal assaults. She loved and hated her best friend, Rudy Steiner, which was perfectly normal. And she loved the fact that despite her failure in the classroom, her reading and writing were definitely improving and would soon be on the verge of something respectable. All of this resulted in at least some form of contentment and would be built upon to approach the concept of *Being Happy*. (Zusak 91)

Ilsa Hermann, the mayor's wife was one of the women who availed the services of Rosa Hubermann. Liesel was given the responsibility of picking their laundry and one day, the mayor's wife allowed Liesel to come into her library. Liesel had never seen a room so full of books ever before in her life and was awestruck. From then onwards, whenever Liesel had to pick laundry from the mayor's home, she used to enter Ilsa's

library and spend some time in that house, reading. The experience was a surreal and sacrosanct one for Liesel and she experienced sheer joy within the confines of that room. The daily ritual of going to the library and reading strengthened her relationship with books. Moreover, though any semblance of conversation was entirely absent during the time she spent there, a connection was born between Ilsa and Liesel, which enabled both of them to become better versions of themselves after Liesel lost her foster parents.

Another character with whom Liesel shared a special relationship was Max Vandenburg. Max, who was a Jew, was forced to hide in the basement of Hans Hubermann's house fearing persecution. It was perilous to hide a Jew because, if discovered, both the Jew and the German who helped him, would be sent away to the concentration camp. Nonetheless, Hans decided to give him shelter as he owed a moral debt to Max's father. Max however had to hide in the basement and stay there all by himself, because there was a danger of being noticed if someone spied through the windows and closing the windows was out of the question because it would arouse suspicion.

The Hubermann family thereby stole an opportunity to be with Max whenever possible. Max cherished these visits but the one he looked forward to most was from Liesel. Since she was a child, her imagination ran amok and she updated him with beautiful descriptions of the outside world that was forbidden to him. Though Max was twenty-four, he still retained the ability to fantasize and he spent his lonely hours, fantasizing about a boxing match he was having with Hitler. Liesel's vivid descriptions helped him visualize about the scenic beauty of the outside world and this activity cheered him up infinitely:

At least once a day, Hans Hubermann would descend the basement steps and share a conversation. Rosa would occasionally bring a spare crust of bread. It was when Liesel came down, however, that Max found himself most interested in life again. Initially, he tried to resist, but it was harder everyday that the girl appeared, each time with a new weather report, either of pure blue sky, cardboard clouds, or a sun that had broken through like God sitting down like he'd eaten too much for dinner. (Zusak 260)

When Max fell dangerously ill, the Hubermann family tended to him with great care. He was taken out of the basement as the temperature was lower in the basement than in other parts of the home. The elders cared for him partially for his sake and partially for theirs, as his death would reveal their secret and they would all be sent away to the concentration camp. Liesel however wanted him to wake up because she loved him. They both shared a similar past before entering the threshold of the Hubermann family and this had endeared them to each other and they shared a strong bonding. Liesel collected discarded things of some value, to present them to Max once his recuperation was complete. She sat by his bedside, reading out to him, though she knew that it was a futile exercise as he was unconscious. However, she wanted Max to have someone near him when he regained consciousness and continued this practice. She knew the value of someone's presence beside, while waking up after a nightmare or an illness, as she had experienced it in her own life. She now desired to pass on the sense of belongingness that papa had given her when she was in need of it, to Max.

When the cities were bombed during the war, everybody took refuge in the shelters that had been marked out by the officials. Max had to stay back as it was

impossible for them to take him along with them to the shelter in full public glare.

When they returned from their shelter after the raids were over, they checked on Max and he was safe. Liesel wanted to stay with him all night to make up for having deserted him during the bombing. She wanted to provide him with moral support as he had endured the worst all alone, when they were all together in a safe place. Both sat with each other, engrossed in their own work, but all the while, emanating the feeling that they were there for each other.

Liesel stopped visiting Ilsa's library when she relieved Rosa of her services. Though Ilsa told Liesel that she might continue visiting her library, she did not do so as she was appalled by the loss of yet another customer which meant grinding poverty for the Hubermans. Ilsa was downsizing despite being able to afford to employ people to get her laundry done, as her husband was a mayor and wanted to set an example to the common man that one must be frugal during times of war. However, Liesel felt that it was injustice to make the poor, even poorer by depriving them of their livelihood and she flew into a rage and insulted Ilsa Hermann.

From then onwards, Liesel stopped paying a visit to Ilsa, but continued to enter the library stealthily through the window, as she found it difficult to resist the temptation of those books. She used to steal a book from that library and used to come back for the next one, after she finished reading it. Ilsa Hermann was not oblivious to this theft, but decided to overlook it as Liesel knew her limits. She stole only one book at a time and only after completing it, came back for the next one. However, one day, when she was presented with the opportunity, she advised Liesel to come through the door instead of the window.

Ilsa never accused Liesel of stealing or caught her in the act and branded her as a thief as revenge for the insult that Liesel had heaped upon her. She handled the situation with great maturity and ignored the theft when she realized that Liesel had a conscience despite doing something wrong, and was not a compulsive thief. She advised her very politely to refrain from stealing them when she had a right to ask and take them. Thus, she tried to mend Liesel's ways without causing her embarrassment.

Hans, one day, got foolishly carried away with his emotions, and in an unguarded moment, fed the Jews who were being marched towards the concentration camps without thinking of the ramifications. He was beaten up by the Nazis for it, and it was too late when he realized that the Nazis might come after him. Max had to be asked to leave the house as there was a possibility of the Germans checking their home, because of Hans Hubermann's rash decision to feed the Jews in full public glare. After he was ousted from their home, he was caught by the Germans and taken to the concentration camp. Liesel's heart wrenched with hatred for Hitler as he was responsible for the decimation of the Jews and he attained his objective by poisoning the minds of the Germans against the Jews and earning their support. He had done nothing but spread propaganda using powerful words and thereby, Liesel held words culpable for Max's ruin. In a fit of rage, she destroyed some books when she visited Ilsa's library. However, she later apologized for her behaviour by writing a letter and begging for her forgiveness. She also promised her that she would never visit her library again as she had resolved never to read books in the future.

Ilsa was dismayed by this decision and paid a visit to Liesel. She presented her with a notebook and encouraged her to write as she had the aptitude for it. She finally advised Liesel not to be like her and ruin her life. Ilsa's life came to a standstill after the

death of her son as she had stopped participating in activities that would have made her life more meaningful. She did not want a young girl to be stuck like her in the past and be reduced into a living corpse:

‘I thought if you’re not going to read any more of my books, you might like to write one instead. Your letter, it was...’ She handed the book to Liesel with both hands. ‘You can certainly write. You write well.’ The book was heavy, the cover matted like *The Shoulder Shrug*. ‘And please,’ Ilsa Hermann advised her, ‘don’t punish yourself, like you said you would. Don’t be like me, Liesel.’ (Zusak 527)

Little did Liesel realize that Ilsa not only gave her a motive to spend her time more fruitfully but also saved her life indirectly. When Liesel’s street was bombed at night without warning, everybody in her neighbourhood and her family were fast asleep but she was in the basement, writing in the notebook Ilsa had given her. The bombing killed everyone in her street, including her foster parents and her friend Rudy. She, however, was rescued alive from the basement: “As it turned out, Ilsa Hermann, not only gave Liesel Meminger a book that day. She also gave her a reason to spend time in the basement – her favourite place, first with Papa, then with Max. She gave her a reason to write her own words, to remind her that words had also brought her to life” (Zusak 528).

Ilsa also prevented her from holding grudges and clinging on to the past, instead of participating actively in life. She encouraged her to continue doing the tasks that would add meaning to her life. The notebook she presented not only added more life to Liesel’s days but also added more days to her life as she would not have been in the basement had it not been for the notebook and Ilsa’s suggestion to write in it. Even after

Liesel lost her parents in the bombing, Ilsa took her under her protection. The relationship they shared with each other thereby added meaning to both their lives.

The death of her foster parents came as a severe blow to Liesel and it was the second time that she was losing her parents. Even Death, who is the narrator of the novel *The Book Thief*, could surmise that Liesel loved her papa the most as he had affected her life more than anybody had or would manage to do in the future. He taught her to be a good human being irrespective of the circumstances that life would put her in. She understood the value of a simple act of being with someone even if you are not able to help them in a great way.

Hans had cured her of her nightmares by just being there when she woke up gasping and his reassuring presence offered her all the solace that she required at that point in time. She had extended the same courtesy to Max when he was battling with his nightmares. He taught her to play the accordion, to enjoy the taste of champagne, to read books and to roll a cigarette. These little acts might appear trivial at the superficial level, but the happiness that she experienced at that time was unparalleled, as being with her father and doing all those tasks together was all that she required to bury the ghosts of her past and move on with her life. The life of Hans Hubermann was a testimony to the fact that having good relationships enriched life more than any luxury or wealth.

Philip Carey, the protagonist of the novel *Of Human Bondage* did not have any good friends till he met the Athelnys in his late twenties. He was orphaned at an early age and was under the guardianship of his aunt and uncle. However, since they were a childless couple, they were not adept in bringing him up. Philip was a reticent and shy boy and his club foot was a constant source of embarrassment for him. His uncle was a

Vicar and a very firm one at that. He constantly badgered the boy about moral values and upright behaviour and it was too much for Philip to endure at that tender age.

He was later sent to the boarding school where he was bullied mercilessly. He never managed to maintain any stable friendships throughout his school days. He then went away to Germany to learn the language and master a few subjects, worked in London as a clerk and went to Paris to learn art. Though he made quite a few friends in Germany and Paris, it was not a very intimate one. He had an affair with an older woman named Miss Wilkinson but later grew weary of her, but she loved him with all her heart but he spurned her love. While in Paris, a girl named Fanny Price was in love with him though she did not confess her feelings explicitly. However, he did not like her or care much about her. Only after she committed suicide, did realization dawn upon him that she had no money, friends or a supportive family. Her haughty behaviour was a facade to conceal her tragic life and the only person she cared for was Philip. He was very upset by her suicide and within no time began to consider leaving Paris, as he suspected that he had no real talent for his chosen vocation.

After his return from Paris, he introspected a lot and all of a sudden decided to enter the medical profession on an impulse, which was something that suited him the best. He had realized that despite being a failure at handling relationships, it was people who interested him the most and he believed that he would never be happy in a profession that was devoid of human connection:

‘Oh, no. I’m going to stick to this. I think I shall like it better when I get into the wards. I have an idea that I’m more interested in people than in anything else in the world. And as far as I can see, it’s the only profession

in which you have your freedom. You carry your knowledge in your head; with a box of instruments and a few drugs you can make your living anywhere.' (Maugham 361)

Philip met a waitress named Mildred while he was studying medicine and fell in love with her. This relationship turned into a bondage from which he was never able to release himself. She was beneath his station in life and was a cold-hearted woman with plain features. However, none of this mattered to him and he felt an unreasonable but irresistible attraction towards her despite being aware that she was in love with another man. Eventually she announced her wedding and Philip was left heartbroken. It was at this time that his friend Hayward, who was with him in Germany, paid him a visit and his company offered him a great solace and he was able to overcome the pangs of pain that had gripped his heart after Mildred's departure from his life. Moreover, he was also able to gain an objective view of the woman he was hopelessly in love with and was disgusted with himself for having loved her.

Philip was then introduced to Norah, a married woman who was separated from her husband. She used to write penny novelettes to earn her livelihood. She was a great human being and Philip was fond of her as well. His days with Norah gave him immense happiness as she was not only kind and caring but also stimulated him intellectually. She was all that Mildred was not and he felt relieved that Mildred had walked out of his life. Once when Philip fell ill, Norah and a man named Griffith, who was a mere acquaintance till then, nursed Philip back to health. That was the first time when Philip experienced something akin to motherly love and he basked in the company of loving people.

His life with Norah ended abruptly when Mildred returned after being forsaken by Miller. She confessed that she was not married to Miller and had merely gone away to live with him, as he was already married and thereby had no claim over him. Her aunt would not take her back after this transgression and she had no one but Philip. The inexplicable feeling that he experienced for Mildred returned once again. He was glad that she had returned and was under the impression that nothing could separate them now as she was entirely dependent on him. He knew that she was not a worthy woman and Norah was far superior to her, but he was unable to move away from Mildred for unknown reasons. He thereby ended his affair with Norah and chose Mildred over her.

Philip began to experience immense happiness in Mildred's company and started to flourish as a result. He began to devote his attention to his studies like never before because he did not want to fail in his examinations and disappoint Mildred. Viktor Frankl in *The Unheard Cry for Meaning* stated that, an individual's desire to survive despite living in dire circumstances is kindled by a person he loves or a task he desires to complete. In Philip's case, Mildred had provided him with the reason to perform better in his studies. He gave up his lackadaisical way of conducting life as soon as she returned back to him, as he believed that she would now be with him forever and wanted to give her and her child a comfortable life. This triggered him with a sense of purpose and made him more responsible as Frankl had stated:

The message- the legacy- is that survival depended on the direction to a "what for", or a "whom for." In a word, existence was dependent on "self-transcendence," a concept that I introduced into logotherapy as early as 1949. I thereby understand the primordial anthropological fact that being

human is being always directed, and pointing, to something or someone other than oneself: to a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter, a cause to serve or a person to love. Only to the extent that someone is living out this self-transcendence of human existence, is he truly human or does he become his true self. He becomes so, not by concerning himself with his self's actualization, but by forgetting himself, overlooking himself and focusing outward. (Frankl, "Unheard" 35)

Mildred however was incorrigible and had not learnt any lessons from her bitter experiences. After having enjoyed the benefits of Philip's charity, she began to have an affair with his friend Griffith, which did not last for long. He deserted her, and Mildred did not have the courage to return back to Philip. This experience left Philip emotionally drained and his financial condition was also very strained on account of the expenses he had incurred for Mildred and her child. He went back to Norah expecting comfort. She welcomed him happily without any qualms. However, he was in for a shock as she informed him that her wedding had been fixed.

It was at this juncture that Philip took refuge in his work and became friends with one of his patients, Thorpe Athelny. Philip got invited to his home and it became a practice to visit the Athelnys every Sunday. The entire family was very loving and kind and the visits he paid them always lifted his spirits. Between his social life and professional life, the deep emotional scar left by Mildred began to heal:

He found the work of absorbing interest. There was humanity there in the rough, the materials the artist worked on; and Philip felt a curious thrill when it occurred to him that he was in the position of the artist and the

patients were like clay in his hands. He remembered with an amused shrug of the shoulders his life in Paris, absorbed in colour, tone, values, Heaven knows what, with the aim of producing beautiful things: the directness of contact with men and women gave him a thrill of power which he had never known. (Maugham 466)

Mildred found her way back into Philip's life when he found her on the streets trying to attract the attention of men. He realized with horror what she was up to and asked her to share his lodgings in exchange for some domestic help. Mildred was very grateful at first but later began to expect a better position in the house. She thought that Philip was the same man and sooner or later would propose marriage. However, she was sadly mistaken as Philip was a changed man. She thereby flew into a rage and destroyed all his belongings. He had also experienced financial loss when the stock markets where he had invested all his money crashed. He was insolvent and thereby had to temporarily discontinue his studies. He was unable to pay the rent and thereby began living in the streets. He did not have enough money even to buy some food. It was at this time that the Athelnys provided him with shelter in their home. Mr Athelny also found a job for Philip and his hostess showered him with a lot of care and affection as she was aware that a man of his stature would certainly be shattered to be reduced to such a state of indigence:

She spoke in such a hearty, friendly tone, taking everything for granted, that Philip was deeply touched. He never expected people to be kind to him, and when they were, it surprised and moved him. Now he could not prevent two large tears from rolling down his cheeks. The Athelnys

discussed the arrangement and pretended not to notice to what a state his weakness had brought him. (Maugham 588)

After his uncle's death, Philip inherited some money and completed his studies with it. He decided to practice medicine in an establishment that would require him to travel to different countries. He believed that life would be more refreshing when a man is not tied down to a place. However, he had to reconsider his plans after he had an affair with Sally, the eldest daughter of the Athelny family. She suspected that she was pregnant and he was horrified. For a moment he considered abandoning the girl to her fate like most men in his circumstances did, but his conscience bid him do otherwise. He could not betray the family that had been so good to him when he had fallen into bad times and thereby decided to marry Sally. He believed that it was an act of self-sacrifice on his part and began to gloat within, at his morality.

However, when Sally realized that she was not pregnant, he fell into a state of utter confusion. He was elated for a moment, but it was soon replaced with dismay. Sally also refrained from insisting him to marry her and stated that he was free to take a decision that suited his interests and she would not be an obstacle. It was then that he had an epiphany. He realized that all his life, he had taken decisions based on what others considered as best and had squarely ignored his own inner voice, except when he decided to take up medicine. He now wanted to marry Sally unequivocally, as he understood that all he had ever craved for was love and a strong bonding with someone. He realized that having someone in life made it more worthwhile and meaningful than empty ambitions and great achievements: "He realized that he had deceived himself; it was no self-sacrifice that had driven him to think of marrying, but the desire for a wife and a home

and love; and now that it all seemed to slip through his fingers he was seized with despair. He wanted all that more than anything in the world” (Maugham 711).

This chapter has explained the importance of relationships in the lives of human beings. An individual leading a self-centered life would eventually develop doubts about the purpose of his existence. On the other hand, when a person dedicates his life for the betterment of others, he eventually improves his own self-esteem. Shifting the focus from oneself also expedites the process of discovering meaning. The characters portrayed in the novels chosen for the study, experienced security, happiness and love in each others’ company, which made them feel that life was worth living despite experiencing poverty, hunger, slavery and a constant fear of death on a daily basis.

In the subsequent chapter, the importance of maintaining an attitude that is conducive to one’s well-being, even in the midst of crisis is elaborated upon and the impact it has in promoting the right behaviour is discussed.