



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## EXPLORING MAUGHAM'S "*THE RAZOR'S EDGE*" THROUGH VICTOR FRANKL'S IDEA OF LOGOTHERAPY

Sanjana Sahoo

### ABSTRACT

Logotherapy, a form of existential therapy, focuses on helping individuals find meaning in their lives. It's based on the idea that the primary human motivation is to discover a purpose, even in the face of suffering. People have a fundamental drive to find meaning in their lives, which can manifest in various forms, such as creativity, love, or service to others. Shifting the focus away from the individual's symptoms and problems and toward their interests, values, and goals, helping them to find meaning outside of themselves. The quest to answer "what is the meaning of life?" has been around since the beginning of time. To find meaning in life can be seen as the primary motivation of each person, and the concept of logotherapy is based on that proposition. This article explores Somerset Maugham's timeless novel "The razor's edge" through the lense of victor frankl's logotherapy - the new age therapy of survival.

**Key words-** logo therapy, meaning of life, individual motivation, existentialism

### INTRODUCTION

#### PHILOSOPHY

According to A. K. Rogers, Philosophy is "an attempt, in a reasoned way, to answer the question, what is the meaning of life". This highlights the centrality of the issue of the *meaning of life in philosophy*. The modern man is riddled with the meaning of his life withstanding numerous scientific and technological breakthroughs. People are still haunted by a sense of meaninglessness even amidst great wealth, pleasures of life, social securities , etc.

## LOGOTHERAPY : THE WILL TO MEANING

Here we see the landmark of Frankl in the study of man through his posit of 'dimensional anthropology'. While Freud posited the 'Will to Pleasure' as the root of all human striving, and Adler a 'Will to Power'; Frankl postulated the 'Will to Meaning' as the primary motivation in the person. For him, man can never settle with mere pleasures or power (superiority) but that which satisfies his higher nature and status as a *spiritual being*. Through Frankl's logotherapy that strives to uphold a comprehensive view of man as a composite of *body, mind and spirit* who has a freedom to responsibility and strives to attain meaning in his life through work, love and suffering. Frankl describes it as "*the third Viennese school of psychotherapy*" along with Freud's psychoanalysis and Alfred Adler's individual psychology.

*Logos*: Ancient Greek word that in its basic sense means "*word*." However, the term has taken on complex philosophical and theological meanings. For Frankl, the word was used to mean "*meaning*" or "*purpose*." Frankl defines it more fully as "the world of meanings and values." It is "the objective correlate to the subjective phenomenon called human existence. Man is free to be responsible, and he is responsible for the realization of the meaning of his life, the logos of his existence". Logotherapy and existential analysis: the comprehensive theory and therapy developed by Viktor Frankl. The term is the English translation of the subtitle of Frankl's first monograph on the topic ; *The Doctor and the Soul: From Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, was published in 1955. Finding meaning enables a person to say "yes to life," even in the face of great difficulties. Frankl identifies these difficulties also as a triad: the "tragic triad" of pain, guilt, and death. People who are searching for meaning may come for counseling because their struggle with one aspect of the tragic triad has unsettled them. Frankl would use people's present difficulty to help them find future meaning in either work, relationships or their attitude toward suffering. The goal then is to develop what Frankl called "tragic optimism" in the face of pain, guilt, and death. The positive view is rooted in the belief that there is potential meaning to be found even in the most miserable of circumstances. "What matters," noted Frankl, "is to make the best of any given situation." To make the best of pain is to "transform a personal tragedy into a triumph" by facing it with dignity and honor. "In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning.

## RESEARCH PROBLEM

Frankl "made the problem of man and meaning the focal point of his research and teachings" . This is evident in the preface to *Man's Search for Meaning*: I do not at all see in the bestseller status of my book an achievement on my part but rather an expression of the misery of our time: If hundreds of thousands of people reach out for a book whose very title promises to deal with the question of a meaning to life, it must be a question that burns under their fingernails.

Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning (whose initial German title appeared as *Trotz Allem Ja zum Leben Sagen*) which translates as "Despite all say yes to life". The aim of this study or interrogation is to highlight Frankl's contribution in psychotherapy and philosophy, in the human person's quest to achieve meaning in life. This is because, logotherapy—Frankl's brand of philosophy, regards its purpose as that of assisting the individual to finding meaning in one's life'. He set it as his goal to balance the physiological view of man, with a spiritual perspective, and saw this as a significant step towards developing more effective treatment. He called for a 're-humanization of medicine' and a 'de-neuroticization of psychotherapy.' Suffering and pain must not be looked upon as the end of the road in one's life. Other estimated or supposed impacts of this work in the field of study of philosophy is to foster a better appreciation of the human person in one's metaphysical nature of body, mind and spirit where each work in co ordination and consonance with others without separation, so that whatever affects one positively or negatively will affect others. As a neurologist, Frankl was aware of the danger of reductionism, which entire generations of doctors and scientists were being indoctrinated with. The patient (individual) is seen as a machine to be worked-upon or fixed together. He set it as his goal to balance the physiological view of man, with a spiritual perspective, and saw this as a significant step towards developing more effective treatment. He called for a 're-humanization of medicine' and a 'de-neuroticization of psychotherapy.' Suffering and pain must not be looked upon as the end of the road in one's life. Often, it could be a channel for fulfilling meaning in one's life. The sick should not be made to feel ashamed of their suffering but to be made to feel worthy of it. And life never ceases having meaning till the last minute. 'Lack of use, does not signify lack of meaning' as if human dignity depends on usefulness. Since psychotherapy has paid too little attention to the spiritual reality of man, this been the case, logotherapy which Frankl calls 'psychotherapy in spiritual terms' aims at 'bringing out the ultimate possibilities of the patient to realize his latent values Frankl argues that human reality – man, is not only a psychophysical entity but has a spiritual part. In order to arrive at a complete anthropological vision of man, logotherapy posited a dimensional anthropology: the total psycho-physical-spiritual entity which is man.

## METHODOLOGY

This research work involves elements of the reflective, interpretative and historiographical approaches in order to present a rich understanding in the study of man and his quest for meaning following the thoughts or

philosophy of Frankl and the spiritual journey of Larry the character in *The razor's edge*. Maugham's approach to understand meaning of life through his spiritual journey to India.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

As much as psychotherapy in general, Viktor E. Frankl's logotherapy and existential analysis has been the subject of empirical behavioral research since its emergence within the field of psychiatry and psychotherapy in the first half of the past century. Frankl's early works do not only document the formation and progression of logotherapy and existential analysis, but also reveal a connection between theoretical development and efficiency research evidently existing from the first hour, thus illustrating the position of logotherapy "in the tension between the 'empirical' and 'existential' camps as a philosophically-grounded psychological model which allows itself, and even demands, to be subjected to empirical scrutiny and clinical outcome studies" In the light of this, one article in particular, published together with another paper provides an excellent summary of the main principles of Frankl's theories and thus takes an exceptional position among early reports on the practice of logotherapy: *Results Drawn from the Clinical Application of Logotherapy* by Kocourek could be considered the first "modern" research report on logotherapy and existential analysis, one which is not only listing case studies, but also describes the results of a statistical analysis of the efficiency of the logotherapy treatment applied at the Poliklinik of Vienna. This outset initiated the development of research on logotherapy, which resulted in a long history up to the present. In their annotated bibliography, Batthyány and Guttmann present a systematization of the historical progression of research on logotherapy, its initial point marked by the publication in English of *The Doctor and the Soul* in 1955 and *Man's Search for Meaning* in 1959. Batthyány and Guttmann identify three consecutive research periods. The first is primarily based on case histories, with the central research question focusing on the clinical effectiveness of logotherapeutic interventions and lasted until around 1964. Then the focus shifted to questions regarding the operationalization of the main concepts of logotherapy.

## DERIVATION OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF LOGOTHERAPY

### 1.FREUD'S CONCEPT OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

Psychoanalysis was founded by Freud as his psychotherapeutic method in psychology. In the words of A. S. Reber, "it is a doctrine associated with human behavior which explores the underlying motivations of human behavior." It is unique in highlighting the unconscious dimension of human psyche. Freud talked of the preconscious dimension of the psyche also, but he still maintained two major divisions of the psychic part, as the conscious and the unconscious dimensions. The later is the repressed material of the psyche, which owes its origin to disapproved experiences of the past, particularly of early childhood with heavy emphasis on the sexual. For him, these unconscious repressed sexual materials constitute the basic motivating force in human beings. The sexual instinct, Freud calls the '*libido*', which according to him is the most forceful instinct in man. Freud denied all teleological theories as influential to the mind or action. Instead, those human actions moral or immoral are derived from the 'pleasure principle' which gears towards the satisfaction of the sexual urge. Elaborating on the three Freudian components of human personality, an individual succeeds in gratifying his sexual urge according to Freud, depends on the interplay of the id, the ego, and the superego.

- a) The id ; contains the unconscious which is irrational.
- b) The ego is the conscious part that controls the demands and claims of the id to the world.
- c) The superego or ego-ideal is a mixture of the conscious and the unconscious that oversees the ego's control over the demands of the id.

The father of psychoanalysis maintained that the superego is as a result of *parental and societal* influences on the person especially at the *childhood*. In practice, 'psychoanalysis strives to conquer new territory for the 'ego' from the dark domain of the 'id'. That is to say, consciousness shall be redeemed by the overcoming of 'repression'. For Frankl, "*Psychoanalysis is therefore concerned with undoing the consequences of repressionreversing that is the process of making psychic material unconscious.*"

In reality, psychoanalysis rests on the recognition of two basic concepts, *repression*, and *transference*. While repression is seen as the cause of neurosis, transference should be understood as the cure. Hence, one who accepts and upholds this should see himself as a psychoanalyst.

Psychoanalysis in its alleged goal of bringing about a compromise, between the demands of the unconscious on the one hand and the requirements of reality on the other hand, argues Frankl, seeks an adjustment of individual's private drives to the outer world, to reconcile him to reality. It is by this "reality principle" which decrees that certain drives be entirely renounced. From the foregoing, one observes that neurosis from the Freudian perspective, "Is a result of unsuccessful collaboration of the id, the ego and the superego, cure can be obtained through psychoanalysis, a process by which the analyst tries to get to the repressed materials of the psyche." This mechanical view of man for Frankl "atomizes, anatomizes and consequently, depersonalizes man. This reification of the human being becomes "the original sin of psychotherapy."

#### ADLER'S VIEW OF INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY

Adlerian psychology shifted the grounds of psychological determinance from sex and libido, the Freudian standpoint, to *environmental factors*. For Adler, a person has to combat or confront three forces: *societal, love-related and vocational forces*. These confrontations determine the final nature of a personality. He based his theories on the *pre-adulthood* development of a person. He laid stress on such areas as hatred, children, physical deformities at birth, birth order etc.

#### PERSONAL PSYCHOLOGY OF GORDON ALLPORT

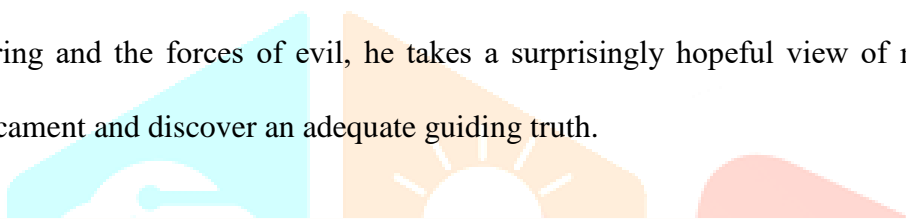
In his book: *Pattern and Growth in Personality*, Gordon Allport recounted his experience of meeting the founder of Psychoanalysis –Sigmund Freud, in 1922, when he travelled to Vienna in order to have a direct contact and exchange with his ideas, The trait approach to personality suggests that individual personalities are composed of broad dispositions. After compiling a list of 4,500 different traits, he organized them into



three different trait categories- *cardinal traits*, *central traits*, and *secondary traits*. Cardinal traits are traits that dominate an individual's entire personality to the extent that the person becomes synonymous with them. Central traits are the common traits that make up our personalities. Such traits like kindness, honesty, friendliness etc. Secondary traits are traits that are only present under certain conditions and circumstances like some phobia.

Allport appreciates Frankl's Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy and in his preface to, *Man's Search for Meaning*, he wrote: Unlike many European existentialists, Frankl is neither pessimistic nor anti-religious. On the contrary, for a writer who faces fully the ubiquity of

suffering and the forces of evil, he takes a surprisingly hopeful view of man's capacity to transcend his predicament and discover an adequate guiding truth.



#### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF VICTOR FRANKL

Viktor Frankl grew up in Vienna at a time when great advances in the field of psychology were being made there. His interest in the subject developed early, and as a medical student. In 1938, during the German occupation of Austria, Nazi leaders forbid Frankl, a Jew, from seeing non-Jewish patients. Two years later, Frankl became the head of the neurological department at the Jewish Rothschild Hospital. In 1942, Frankl, his wife Tilly, and Frankl's parents were arrested and sent to Nazi death camps. Frankl's wife and parents died in the camps, but Frankl survived three years in four camps, after which he wrote many books and served as a professor at a number of universities. He is best known for his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, and for developing the fields of logotherapy and existential therapy. Frankl remarried several years after his liberation and had one daughter. He died of heart failure at the age of 92.

Viktor Frankl's theory and therapy grew out of his experiences in Nazi death camps which became 'a living laboratory' for his theory. His concentration camps' experiences of who did and did not survive led him to conclude with Friedrich Nietzsche's maxim: "He who has a way to live for can bear with almost any how". His studies and lived experiences especially the death-camps of the Nazis, led him to uphold the *spiritual characters of the human person* seen in his conscience, his capacity for self-transcendence and self

detachment. These are the essential ingredients of his *Will to Meaning*. Frankl wrote many other books during his career, including *Psychotherapy and Existentialism* (1967), *The Will to Meaning* (1988), and *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* (1997). His text references the psychological theories of Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler, as well as the philosophical writings of Friedrich Nietzsche, Søren Kierkegaard, and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, among others. *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy* Written in 1946.

Frankl ends his book by saying that “man is that being who invented the gas chambers at Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those gas chambers upright, with the Lord's Prayer or the *Shema Yisrael* on his lips.” Frankl believes that while man is certainly capable of doing evil, no individual human *must* be evil. Every human has the capacity to change his behavior and attitude in every possible situation. In his postscript, Frankl reaffirms this belief as the basis for his tragic optimism, or belief in the importance of saying “yes” in spite of everything.

#### WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM'S THE RAZOR'S EDGE- A SPIRITUAL INSIGHT

William Somerset Maugham is known as "England's Maupassant". His three masterpieces, *The Chains of Life*, *The Moon and Sixpence*, and *The Razor's Edge*, all revolve around Maugham's whole thinking about the meaning of life. There are many characters in the book, in which each has a story that Maugham tells vividly.

*The Razor's Edge* takes place at an era of losing faith. After the death of his friend, Larry begins to doubt God's mercy and question his existence, eventually leaving for India in search of spiritual support. Isabel, her uncle Elliot and her husband Mathurin are not as lucky as Larry. They are inevitably struggling with the world, but in the different degrees. As for Sophia, she had the opportunity to become a "pure" girl with a noble soul, who bravely fights with traditional

values and old morals. But she cannot resist Isabelle's temptation, with her drinking; she returned to the previous erosion of life, waiting for her is the fate of death.



In the opening pages of the novel, Maugham begins with the statement “The sharp edge of a razor is difficult to pass over; thus the wise say the path to Salvation is hard,” a verse read in the Sanskrit writings *Katha Upanishad*, echoing the book’s title and giving some level of indication of that which the reader is about to experience “ Rise, wake up, seek the wise and realize. The path is difficult to cross like the sharpened edge of the razor (knife), so say the wise.”

.THE RAZOR’S EDGE published in 1944 is probably the first book you think of in relation to British novelist, W. Somerset Maugham’s encounter with an Eastern guru and his fictionalized protagonist, Larry Darrell’s search for the meaning of life. Profoundly moved by his encounter, Maugham used the experience to compose some of the most beautifully moving passages of *The Razor’s Edge*, in which Larry Darrell recalls his meeting with “Shri Ganesha” of “Trivandrum” in conversation with the narrator, Maugham

“From the first time I saw him I never doubted that he was a saint. It was a wonderful experience.”

‘And what did you gain from it?’

‘Peace.’ He said casually with a light smile.”

—Somerset Maugham, *The Razor’s Edge*

Three years after his momentous meeting with Bhagavan, Maugham visited Hollywood, where he met the novelist, Christopher Isherwood, who many believe was the real-life inspiration for the character of Larry Darrell, despite being fervently denied by Isherwood himself. The hero of the book, Larry Darrell, is a young American drifter who wanders around the world in an attempt to find peace of mind and answers to some of the fundamental questions that have traditionally perplexed spiritual seekers. He comes to India and finds what he is looking for in a South Indian ashram that is presided over by a Guru who is clearly Bhagavan masquerading under a different name. After staying several years at the ashram, a contented Larry Darrell returns to America at the end of the book with the aim of living, so far as it is possible in the West, the life of a *sadhu*.

## THE CHARACTER 'LARRY'

It has been suggested that Guy Hague was an important influence in the character of Darrell, although it now appears that he was not at Ramanasramam when Maugham visited. The English poet and translator Lewis Thompson is thought to be a more likely candidate. David Haberman has pointed out that Ronald Nixon, an Englishman who took monastic vows and became known as Krishna Prem, served as a fighter pilot in the First World War and experienced a crisis of meaninglessness that was "strikingly similar" to that experienced by Larry. However no clear evidence have been suggested by Maugham himself . Rather we should metaphorically conclude the character Larry is all within us our all the perspectives and at the end as Larry concluded with *happiness the highest art of life*, we shall achieve the same.

This tie proves important for the development of the book, as it sharply criticizes that which, to all accounts of propriety, would be considered salvation, utilizing the modernist tendency to challenge tradition in favor of a less socially acceptable pursuit. Each character depicted within this novel represents a different existence and, as such, represents a different idea they find themselves searching for and separate resolutions which they desire and encounter. Despite whatever unpleasantness might arise, or how others may feel, in a modernist fashion, Maugham asserts that, against expectation and tradition, this is not always unsatisfactory. At the end of the book we can make a remark of the final destinies of the character so far-"*Elliott social eminence; Isabel an assured position...Sophie death; and Larry happiness.*"

## CONCLUSION

Shri Ramanasraman asked "Path of peace? Path of good works ?the path through knowledge to wisdom?" is where we find the real goals of our lives. Victor frankl proposed the psychotherapy which shall work wonders with an addition to the spiritual journey of W.S.Maugham. His works are best of the example for logotherapy through a spiritual journey whose combine effect is the autonomous approach to the present world of restlessness, meaninglessness , rather his works are a literary example to the theory of logotherapy. We can embrace the impermanence of life and cultivate a deeper sense of gratitude.

## REFERENCES

- Benvenga, N. (1998). Frankl, Newman and the meaning of suffering. *Journal of Religion & Health*, 37(1), 63-66
- Boeree, C.G. (1998). Personality theories: Viktor Frankl. Retrieved from <http://webpace.ship.edu/cgboer/frankl.html>
- Cowen, S. D. (2005). Viktor Frankl: person, philosopher and therapist. *Journal of Judaism & Civilization*, 7(56), 1-22.
- Crumbaugh, J., & Carr, G. (1979). Treatment of alcoholics with logotherapy. *The International Journal of Addictions*, 14(6), 847-853.
- Frankl, V. (1959). *Man's search for meaning*. New York: Random House
- Frankl, V. (1955). *The doctor and the soul*. New York: Random House
- Frankl, V. (1997). *Viktor Frankl recollections: An autobiography*. New York: Plenum.
- Gelman, Hoffman, E. (1995). Victor Frankl at ninety: A voice for life. *America*, 172(9), 17-22.
- P. Barry, *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*, Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009.
- W. S. Maugham, *The Razor's Edge*, New York: Doubleday Doran & Co, Inc, 1944
- Y.X. Dong, "Maugham on Razor's edge and the problem of theodicy: A reading of Maugham's self-perfection road through Weber's sociology of religion," *Foreign Languages and Literature*, vol. 27