Chapter VI - SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present investigation was mainly aimed at exploring some of the psychological variables that characterise those individuals who experience life as meaningful and purposeful. As perception and experience regarding goals or meaning in life may be conceived in the larger context of the personality pattern of the individual, a study into the personality correlates of purposefulness of life assumes great relevance. This study attempts to investigate a few of those personality variables that could be related to the experience of life as meaningful.

It was also hoped that the study, based on a sample taken from Karachi, would throw some light regarding the prevalence of existential neurosis and other related conditions which are believed to be mental health problems of modern times.
"Life, is a life-long question-and-answer period. As to the answers, we can only answer to life by answering for our lives. Responding to life means being responsible for our lives".

Victor Frankl

6.1. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

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It was also hoped that the study of based on a sample taken from Kerala, would throw some light regarding the prevalence of existential neurosis and other related conditions which are believed to be mental health problems of modern times.
The sample of the study comprised of 300 individuals within the age range of 17 to 59. There were 200 males and 100 females. The sample could be further divided into four subgroups which were expected to differ in the main variables under study. These included 80 college students, 55 seminarians, 102 professional students and 63 individuals representing the general population in the study. Subjects were drawn from varying socio-economic strata. Differences in educational status, religious denominations, rural-urban background, etc., were also adequately represented in the sample.

The personality variables taken for the study included self-esteem, locus of control, maladjustment and the values (theoretical, religious, aesthetic, political, social and economic). Apart from these, work satisfaction, age, sex, familial variables such as size of the family, birth order, marital status, relationship among family members, and certain demographic and socio-economic factors such as area of residence, financial status and educational qualification were part of the variables explored.

The study was oriented to test the general hypothesis that the different dimensions of purposefulness and meaningfulness of life would have significant relationship with all the personality variables, family variables and demographic variables mentioned above.

All these variables were measured using reliable and
valid tools in the local language (Malayalam). The tool to measure purpose in life was constructed by the investigator since the available tests to measure this variable were all developed in the western countries and were found to be culturally biased and unsuitable for the population of the study.

The data obtained from the subjects were subjected to various statistical analyses to ascertain the relationship among the variables.

The results thus obtained are summarized below:

6.1.1. Dimensions of Purposeful Life

The main test measuring purposeful life was factor analyzed using the principal axes factor extraction method and varimax rotation to produce three factors:— (1) Existential vacuum (2) Purpose and (3) Contentment. These three factors were used along with the total scores to analyze the rest of the variables.

In an attempt to validate the newly developed measure of purposeful life, the scores on the different factors were related to a verbal description regarding the important aim of life given by the subjects. It was found that significant correlation exist between the strength of commitment to goals (obtained by content analysis of the description) and the various dimensions of purposeful life. Similarly, it was found that greater meaning, purpose and contentment in life was experienced by those who had goals
related to service (to man or God). They were followed by those who aimed at actualizing their potentials (excelling in one's field of interest). These two groups were found to score higher than those with materialistic goals in life (such as a good job, happy family life, money and security, etc.) in all the indices of purposeful life. Those who reported no particular aim in life were found to score the lowest in all the indices of purposeful life.

6.1.2. Correlates of the Indices of Purposeful Life

(a) Purposeful Life Index:

Total score on Purposeful Life Index was found to be related positively and significantly with self-esteem, work satisfaction and harmonious relationship with family. At the same time, it was found to have strong negative relationship with external locus of control, aesthetic value and maladjustment. In addition, religious value, social value, and age was found to have low but significant (at 0.05 level) correlation with the Purposeful Life Index.

A multiple regression analysis using all the variables considered in the study showed that the variables self-esteem, locus of control, work satisfaction, aesthetic value and maladjustment (arranged in the order of importance) entered into the equation. The multiple correlation was found to be 0.74, which meant that together, these variables could account for 54% of the variance of the PLI scores.
(b) **Existential Vacuum**

Scores on existential vacuum (absence of) were found to be positively related to self-esteem, work satisfaction, educational level and harmonious relationship with family. It also showed significant negative correlation with external locus of control, aesthetic value and maladjustment.

Multiple regression analysis using stepwise method revealed that after accounting for intercorrelation among the variables, only three variables, viz., self-esteem, locus of control, and maladjustment were retained in the final equation. The multiple correlation was found to be 0.57 and the percentage of explained variance, 34.

(c) **Purpose**

Scores on the dimension purpose was found to be positively and significantly related to work satisfaction, religious value and self-esteem. Strong negative relationship was found with external locus of control, aesthetic value and monthly income of family. Maladjustment and social value too had low but significant relationship with the factor.

Multiple regression analysis of the correlates considered in the study using purpose as the dependent variable showed that seven variables, viz., work satisfaction, aesthetic value, locus of control, educational level, religious value, monthly income and self-esteem
entered into the equation. The multiple $R$ was 0.56 which explained 31% of the variance in the dependent variable.

(d) **Contentment**

Strong positive relationship was found between the scores on contentment and those variables that related to the harmony of the person with self and others, such as self-esteem, satisfaction with work and relationship with family. Negative relationship was found with external locus of control and maladjustment. Age was found to have a low positive correlation with the factor contentment.

When the variables were subjected to multiple regression with contentment as the dependent variable, it was found that four variables—self-esteem, maladjustment, work satisfaction and marital status entered the equation. The multiple $R$ was found to be 0.48, indicating that 23% of the variance in the scores of contentment could be predicted by these variables.

In general, the correlational and multiple regression analysis revealed that the variables self-esteem, locus of control, maladjustment, religious value, social value, aesthetic value, relation with family and work satisfaction are important correlates of purposeful life. These variables are seen to correlate significantly with almost all the factors of purposeful life. At the same time, a few variables included in the study failed to show significant correlation with any of the dimension of purposeful life.
They are: political value, economic value, theoretical value, birth order and area of residence.

The relationship of the factors with variables like age, sex and educational level was generally low and hence inconclusive.

6.1.3. Differences Among The Sub Groups

The four subgroups in the sample which were taken on the presumption that their orientation to life would be reflected in the measure of purpose in life, did indeed differ significantly on their scores on the PLI and its three dimensions. As expected, the seminarians scored high on all the indices of purposeful life. But the group of professional students did not score as high as expected. The non-professional college students generally scored lowest on the different factors, while the professional college students and the general group occupied middle positions.

The differences in the groups on the measures of purpose in life could be linked to their standing on the other variables taken up in the study.

The seminarians who scored the highest in all the indices of purposeful life were also the highest in its positive correlates such as religious value, social value and self-esteem, and lowest on the negative correlates such as maladjustment, external locus of control and aesthetic, political, theoretical and economic values.
The non-professional college students who scored the lowest in the various factors of purposeful life, scored very low on the positive correlates such as self-esteem, religious value, and social value and very high on the negative correlates such as locus of control, maladjustment and aesthetic value.

The professional college students were high on the dimension absence of existential vacuum which could be explained in terms of their high scores on self-esteem and the political value.

The group comprising the general population occupied the middle positions in all the indices of purposeful life and its correlates as expected.

6.2. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study has investigated into a few psychological variables and some socio-demographic variables pertaining to an individual that could be related to the feeling of meaningfulness or purposefulness of life. Almost all the personality variables such as self-esteem, locus of control, maladjustment and some of the values such as religious value, aesthetic value and social value showed significant relationship with the different dimensions of purposeful life subjected to study.

The nature of the relationship found between the variables self-esteem, maladjustment and locus of control
with the Purposeful Life Index was as predicted which confirms the importance of these variables in the development of a sense of meaningfulness in life.

It is of great significance to note that the role of these variables with regard to the different dimensions was differently brought out in the multiple regression analysis. The three variables mentioned above were found to be the most important ones in the dimension of 'existential vacuum', while they were of lesser importance in 'purpose'. This finding indicates that the psychological make-up or the personality pattern of the individual is the major determining factor in the feeling of meaninglessness in life. In other words, the origin of the feeling of existential vacuum is to be searched within the individual rather than in his external circumstances. This lends credence and support to the optimistic idea that whatever be the circumstances that man finds himself in, it is within his capacity to transcend them and find meaning even in situations that may look devoid of any positive prospects.

At the same time, the finding that the variables such as religious value, aesthetic value, educational qualification and monthly income are the major determinants of the dimension 'purpose', points to the undeniable role of the social conditions in determining the nature and extent of goal orientation of an individual. It may be noted that the religious value which is an important positive correlate of 'purpose' is also found to be negatively related to
demographic variables such as small family size and monthly income. Aesthetic value which is a significant negative correlate of the factor, purpose, is also related negatively to age, internal locus of control and religious value.

It is interesting to note in this context, that certain negative impact of modernization are slowly creeping in the Kerala society also. For example, as a correlate of modernization, one finds the emergence of small sized nuclear family, low emphasis on religious value and high emphasis of economic value. The younger generation who are members of this type of family are also higher on education and aesthetic value.

The finding in the present study that high scores on religious value and low scores on aesthetic value are linked to high purpose implies that the present younger generation who are subjected to the effects of modernization are more likely to suffer from a lack of purpose and meaning in life.

6.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Albert Einstein believed that the man who regards his life as meaningless was not merely unhappy but hardly fit for living.

The present work as well as several other studies in the related areas support the contentions that whether a
person finds life meaningful and purposeful or not depends not only on the environmental factors but also on the person himself and his approach to life. Frankl is of the opinion that even if traditions and societal values are breaking down, as they are now, man still has himself to turn to make life meaningful and give it purpose. Psychology therefore has a greater role in helping man cope with life, especially in this era where the values of society are changing and is in a state of flux.

For such a goal, it would be beneficial if it were possible to study in more detail the personality and behaviour patterns that help an individual to view and live his life in a healthy and meaningful manner. Research can help explore more of those variables that go hand in hand with a healthy approach to life. Some of the variables that can be explored are spirituality, sensitivity, thinking (convergent-divergent), acceptance of others, intelligence, integrity of personality, conformity-nonconformity, altruism, capacity for intimate, healthy, interpersonal relationship, time perspective, etc. Satisfaction with one work and family relation are two variables in the present study that was found to be very significant and requires further exploration. This information could be of use to common man, especially parents, and also in therapy where the therapists could encourage the adoption of an approach to life that would be helpful.
A small sample study, comprising of people of both extremes - i.e., those who find life very meaningful and those who suffer from existential vacuum - could bring out further details to complement the results of the many large sample studies. The small size of the sample would permit in-depth interviews, which could be a better source of information in this area. Questionnaires do plumb a lot of information, but they have their limitations. The topic of meaning or purpose in life is of such a nature that not everyone might have considered it in depth. Even if they have, a questionnaire may not be able to tap it well. The respondent may be constrained by the forced choice questions as they do not give the option to qualify or elaborate the answers. Some people may be reluctant to write about it when confronted with a direct question. Questionnaires also do not have the scope to gauge the intensity and the emotional response to a topic, which is possible to some extent in interviews.

It would be especially interesting to study those suffering from meaninglessness, on a long-term basis and also to explore their common personality characteristics if any, the role of their circumstances and if there are different varieties of existential neurosis based on different causes. Long term study would also make it possible to follow the course of their condition, and find out whether they come out of the phase and if they do, how, when, and why. It would be also be interesting to study the before/after changes in the personality of these people.