

Tribhuvan University

September 2023

Tragic Optimism in Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat Pray Love*

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**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U.
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts in English**

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Central Department of English

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

September 2023

Letter of Approval

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Mr. Laxman Bhatta, Assistant Professor in Central Department of English, and my instructor for providing the required academic and moral support during the course of this thesis. Without him this research would not have been possible. I would also like to thank Dinesh Bhandari sir for his constructive suggestions and motivations that helped me refine this paper. My gratitude goes to Pro. Dr. Jib Lal Sapkota, Head of the English Department of English, for accepting my thesis proposal and academic comments to conduct this research. Also, I extend my heartfelt thankfulness to all the respected faculty members at the department who made me more curious to critical reasoning. Besides, I am immensely thankful to my senior colleagues, Mr. Ghanashyam Subedi and Homnath Bhattarai, Under Secretaries at Department of Commerce, Supplies and Consumer Protection, for providing me a conducive environment at office and necessary leaves to carry out this research.

I am indebted to my parents Late. Mr. Krishna Prasad Kandel and Bishnu Maya Kandel for their unwavering belief upon me and consistent financial and emotional anchorage in every step I have taken so far. Moreover, I would like to thank Smriti, Jitendra, Mumaya, Binu, Pappu and other friends for all the positive energies and encouragements they have showered upon me during the course of my thesis.

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Abstract

This research examines Elizabeth Gilbert's Eat Pray Love: One Woman's Search for Everything through the lens of tragic optimism. The core concern of the research is to probe how 'will to meaning' helps Gilbert, the protagonist of the memoir, to overcome trauma that she undergoes. It pays close attention to Gilbert's distress and existential vacuum in the light of logotherapy as proposed by Victor Emil Frankl, working-through propounded by Dominick LaCapra and 'will to power' postulated by Friedrich Nietzsche. Logotherapy assumes that even in unfathomable tragedy one should keep hope and optimism to overcome the problem. Similarly working-through is a coping mechanism of trauma where victim optimizes by deciphering lessons from one's traumatic past to lessen trauma at present. And, the Nietzschean concept of will to power advances the idea that the inherent drive of accumulating power functions as creative energy in human beings by self-overcoming attitude in every problem. This research illustrates that Gilbert is both motivated and disturbed by the quest of her true self. The very 'will to meaning' assists her to deal with trauma and identity crisis and most importantly find her true self. This research concludes that the attitude of finding true meaning of oneself paves ways for mitigating trauma effects and reinventing oneself.

Keywords: immateriality, existential vacuum, selfhood, trauma, will to meaning

"If you have your why for life, you can get by with almost any how." — Friedrich Nietzsche

This research explores the issue of tragic optimism in *Eat Pray Love*. As Elizabeth Gilbert undergoes a depressed, anxious, and suicidal to liberated, happier and freer self, the idea of tragic optimism propounded by Victor Emil Frankl, a

psychiatrist and holocaust survivor, and working-through propagated by Dominick LaCapra, a historian and critical theorist and 'will to power' proposed by Fredrick Nietzsche match with the text. All these concepts are psychological and philosophical deliberations that are related to coping with traumatic experiences, tackling complexities and problems and tracing *logos* (meaning) in life.

LaCapra developed the concept of 'working-through' in the context of holocaust studies. He argues that individuals and society need to undergo the process of 'working-through' traumatic experiences by facing and processing them. His philosophy of working-through is a psychoanalytic process of re-examining and re-analyzing traumatic memories to make them part of one's sense of self. He emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and resisting traumatic incidents. For him reflective processes such as psychotherapy, critical reflection, introspection, observation, and analysis are the tools to overcome traumatic events. They facilitate trauma survivors to comprehend their own past and traumatic memories. He opines that after the broader understanding of the past and its complexities, the victim equips himself/herself with clarity to address emotional consequences of trauma.

Frankl's ideas of logotherapy center on curing neuroses. His idea of tragic optimism, a part of logotherapy, focuses on finding 'meaning in pain', and 'keeping hopes amidst despair' to overcome the very pain. Tragic Optimism indicates an attitude of hope and positivity even in unfathomable tragedy and trauma. In spite of all the tragic aspects of human life, 'saying yes' to move ahead is the main concern of tragic optimism. It means finding purpose in life. If there is no desire and purpose to live, willingness to live comes to a stop. He further opines that we can discover this meaning in life in three ways: by creating a work or doing a deed; by experiencing something or encountering someone; and by the attitude we take toward suffering.

Influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer's masterpiece *The World as Will and Representation*, Nietzsche developed the concept of 'will to power'. He contends that human beings are primarily directed by 'will to power' and all human achievements are fruits of this power. This is the inherent force which excites us to expand and explore power. It is an ever-happening phenomenon. It is a continuous struggle with one's surrounding environment or daily life which results in self-perfection, self-realization and self-growth. He emphasizes the doctrine that the whole world is the culmination of 'will to power'. His ideas rests on the principle of 'individualism' and sees everyone as 'master of oneself' and possibility of finding ultimate 'contentment'-resulting in self-overcoming.

All the concepts 'tragic optimism', 'working-through', and 'will to power' share a similar view that life's problems are surmountable and insightful. There lies 'meaning' even in oppressive and dehumanized situations. Beyond the excruciating events, post traumatic growth guarantees increased quality of life. The teachings of Frankl, LaCapra and Nietzsche regarding 'tragic optimism', 'working-through', and 'will to power' respectively proclaim that optimism and growing attitude works as a 'healing agent' to working-through trauma.

Eat Pray Love characterizes Gilbert's metamorphosis: from traumatized self to transcendent self. Gilbert's unflinching hopes even in deep despair, quest of selfhood and meaning and unwavering passion for growth assist her to transform herself. All these qualities bring her deep down to trauma and also put on top of self-actualization.

Tragic optimism is the idea of searching for a unique meaning of personal existence which helps in navigating the toughest times in one's life. It is a process of finding purpose in personal existence. Frankl developed the idea of logotherapy, advocating that finding one's true meaning is a potential solution to face human

suffering. Tragedy is a part and parcel of human existence. But marching and moving forward by refusing to succumb oneself in tragedy is what Frankl sees as tragic optimism. For Frankl "... life is potentially meaningful under any conditions, even those which are most miserable"(162).

Working-through is a coping mechanism in which a victim of trauma is able to differentiate past, present and future and does not dwell in past traumatic incidents. It is a process to understand the influence of the past on his/her present situation to acknowledge it emotionally as well as intellectually and to use the new understanding to make changes in present life. LaCapra writes:

Working-through means work on posttraumatic symptoms in order to mitigate the effects of trauma by generating counterforce to compulsive repetition (or acting-out), thereby enabling a more viable articulation of affect and cognition or representation, as well as ethical and sociological agency, in the present and future. (119)

Nietzsche's idea of 'will to power' regards it as a driving force of life. As a staunch advocate of individualism, Nietzsche contends that every individual is unique and free to choose his or her way of life. For him, 'will' is the passion of demanding more and more: a spirit of growth. It is not a destination, rather an ever moving journey. The Nietzschean concept of power marks a point of departure from conventional notion of power. For him power refers to "the impulse to dominate one's environment and extend one's influence"(Ameen and Ahmed 427). He suggests people to listen to their hearts and as per the spirit aspire greater and greater. Overall, his ideas rest on the assumptions of 'growing attitude'. By applying aforementioned theoretical insights, this research explores how Gilbert optimizes 'will to power' and inculcates the spirit of tragic optimism for working-through process. The objective of the research is to

exhume the working of tragic optimism and will to power in working-through in *Eat Pray Love*.

Eat Pray Love is a memoir written by Elizabeth Gilbert. Gilbert was born in Waterbury, Connecticut in 1969. Gilbert studied political science and writing. She began her career as a writer for magazines such as *Spin*, *GQ* and *The New York Times Magazine*. As a writer and journalist, she has a prolific career. She is a prominent American journalist and author with many acclaimed works, seminal articles and writings and laurels. Gilbert's first book, *Pilgrims*, a collection of short stories, received the Pushcart Prize and was a finalist for the PEN/Hemingway Award. Her second book *Stern Man* was selected by The New York Times as a 'Notable Book'. In 2002, she published *The Last American Man* (2002), which was nominated for a National Book Award in non-fiction. Her memoir *Eat Pray Love* earned broader popularity and was also filmed by Columbia Pictures starring Julia Roberts as Gilbert. Gilbert appeared on the Oprah Winfrey Show in 2007. She was also named one of the hundred most influential people in the world by Time Magazine.

Eat Pray Love narrates the story of Gilbert's one-year long journey to Italy, India and Indonesia after her broken marriage. This memoir includes a diverse field of issues like identity crisis, family crisis, marital discord, spirituality, depression and despair, trauma, love, and pursuit of peace and happiness. Here, Gilbert chronicles her story of depression, despair and trauma induced by existential distress and vacuum, especially her denial to execute assigned gender roles and expectations. This memoir is loaded with her bitter experiences and sufferings. As the researcher's area of interest and scope of research I tried to excavate how the text laden with existential ethos ultimately led Gilbert to realize her true meaning by overcoming family conflict and societal expectations about gender roles.

Gilbert's transformative journey starts with family discord and divorce. Divorce with her husband and immediate breakup with David came as a 'catastrophe' for her. In her divorce settlement she is not only emotionally shattered but also results into financial bankruptcy as her divorcee claims everything. Despite living a privileged life and having a lucrative job, a troubled and stressful marriage life and her feeling of loss propel her to travel. She embarks on a journey to liberate herself from the pains and agony induced by an unsatisfactory love-life. She does not feel self-worth and self-esteem. Due to her depression and anxiety, she cannot stop thinking "I don't want to be married anymore"(12). To get over the depression and melancholy she convinces her publisher to fund her travel and she chronicles the experiences throughout the journey to publish. She explains, "I wanted to explore the art of pleasure in Italy, the art of devotion in India and, in Indonesia, the art of balancing the two" (30). She narrates her story of traveling, a "voyage of self-discovery"(31) throughout the memoir.

Gilbert starts a solo journey from Italy after quitting her job, divorce settlement and getting advance for her book. In Italy she stays for four months, and she involves herself in culinary pleasure and learning Italian language. In Italy she is guided by 'pursuit of pleasure'. She befriends Giovanni, 'Tandem Exchange Partner' and learns Italian language with him to take her mind off from divorce issue. She also joins Leonardo da Vinci Academy of Language Studies. She befriends with Elizabeths, Dario, Sofie, Maria and Giulio, Luca Spaghetti, Brian, restarts her yoga practice, enjoys *bel far niente* (the beauty of doing nothing), and gains 'twenty-three happiest pounds' of her life. She gets depressed and feels lonely and again starts taking antidepressants which she had left already. This is because her underlying trauma is not dealt with.

In India Gilbert lives for three months and she is guided by ‘pursuit of happiness’. She joins Ashram, located in a remote rural village. At Ashram she practices yoga and meditation, involves herself in *Gurugita* chanting practice, learns spiritual practices like being watchful on thoughts and bodily sensation, confines herself in celibacy and moderation on food. She tries to immerse herself in spirituality and spiritual exploration. The disturbing past keeps haunting her to interrupt her ashram rituals. Especially her break up with David distracts her from completely involving herself in spiritual practices. Ultimately, she overcomes her distractions with the help of spirituality and enjoys Ashram life so much that she extends her stay in Ashram.

Gilbert then goes to Bali, a city of Indonesia where she meets Ketut Liyer, a Balinese medicine man for the second time and learns Balinese yoga and meditation; especially smile meditation and Four Brothers Meditation and other some great lessons from Ketut for lessening her trauma. There, she befriends Wayan Nuriyashi, a Balinese healer, and helps her buy a house by raising funds from her friends and relatives back home. Later, she falls in a relationship with Felipe, a Brazilian businessman whom she later married. Most importantly, she overcomes her fear of loving someone again as in the initial phase of her divorce, she used to hate all men and fear relationships with anyone. Eventually, she finds herself completely satisfied. Overall, in Indonesia she learns about the art of balance between worldly pleasure and divine transcendence.

Eat Pray Love rests on the pedestal of family discord to family disintegration and culminates in Gilbert’s transformation and self-actualization. Yet, this memoir masks her limitations and only paints rosy sides. Gilbert looks like an ultra-modernist and self-centric figure who denies the very core of family values: bearing and

nurturing. In pursuit of her existential ethos, she disagrees with giving existence to another human being. Her denial gives way to family discord which is the cause of her trauma. Mutuality and marital symphony is a source of family bliss which is absent in the family. That leads to divorce. The narrative of 'being caged bird' has exaggeratedly been highlighted in the memoir to validate her ideas of family. Yet it is difficult to agree with her. In a true sense her husband looks like a real victim. On the other hand, her husband insists Gilbert to hold on the relationship. As he cannot confine her to family roles and is eventually compelled to finalize divorce, he controls all the property owned by both. He looks very possessive, conservative and controlled. He aspires to keep the bird in a golden cage. He represents the epitome of a patriarchal figure who obsessively wants to observe gender ideology. He wants to limit the 'bird in a cage' which is exactly meant for the sky. As the memoir has been written through the perspective of Gilbert and the narration mutes his voice and agency, he has been shown as the 'catalyst' of family discord.

Eat Pray Love received reviews from its publication and the critics examined it from diverse theoretical perspectives and positions. Janani Subramanian and Jorie Lagerwey dig out the intricate relationship between food, sex, love and bodies. They write "Masquerading as a paeon to a single woman's empowerment and her right to choose not to be married, not to have children, to have her own money and ambition, to travel, *Eat Pray Love* is actually a postfeminist lesson in moderation and body discipline in order to achieve the ultimate goal of heterosexual coupling" (6-7). In Gilbert's attempt to come out of marriage, unwillingness to conceive, search of her own identity and independence look like postfeminist characters in her persona. They further opine "...relationship to food, consumption, and hunger mitigates their relationship to their own bodies and toward sex and love. Gilbert could complete her

project of the self only when she achieved balanced moderation between eating and restraining"(17). In this way Subramanian and Lagerwey view Gilbert as unruly, desiring and unwilling to integrate in restrictive norms of society and family and willing to find one's own self-worth. Hence, Gilbert as a postfeminist figure, traveling from indulgence to asceticism to social reintegration.

Likewise, Natalia Andrievskikh sees an imagery of intersectionality between Gilbert's food consumption, her unfulfilled sexuality and identity crisis.

Andrievskikh writes, "The gastronomic adventures she has while traveling provide Elizabeth with an unlikely medium for soul searching and exploration of her sexuality" (139). Andrievskikh views relationship between gastronomic and sexual pleasure in the following lines:

The narrator in *Eat, Pray, Love* does not directly indulge in sexual pleasures on her journey, yet this does not mean suppression of sexual desire. Back in "real life," sexual relationship for Elizabeth meant subordination and disappearing in the partner, rather than acknowledgment of her own needs. Now, through playful exploration of gastronomic pleasures, she is able to realize and symbolically express what it is that she wants, as well as enjoy herself in newly found independence. (97)

Gilbert's obsession with food equates with her unfulfilled sexual gratification. Even in married life her sexual life is not fulfilled. Symbolically, she expresses and ejaculates her sexual greed through food. Her changed habit of food consumption can be viewed as changed sexual contentment. Gilbert writes: "In my real life, I have been known to eat organic goat's milk yogurt sprinkled with wheat gem for breakfast"(85). But here in Italy Gilbert lavishly consumes whatever she likes. Her libertine nature of consuming foods indicates her overcoming of gendered biases and free will on her

sexuality too. As she relishes food consumption in the absence of sexual intercourse her bodily pleasure is gratified through food and thus breaks normative aspects of sexuality through food imagery.

Likewise, talking about Gilbert's quest for a new self, Shilpi Priya Saikia analyzes Gilbert's formation of new self from depressed and deluded to decisive and independent self. Saikia opines:

She tracks her journey in finding peace as well as rediscovering herself

She decides to move out of her comfort zone and risk everything only to travel across Italy, India and Bali She traveled, learned and encountered many incidents which left some lasting impressions in her mind .She reanalyzes her life and her take on relationships. The visit to India brought in her a transcendentalist view about life. (1)

Saikia portrays the image of Gilbert as a post-feminist woman who does not confine herself in so-called public expectations and imaginations, rather aspires and attempts to transcend and transgress the social demarcation and delineation imposed on the basis of genders configuration and ultimately succeeds to find her true self.

Rediscovering oneself often demands rejecting the status quo. Here, Gilbert opts for dynamism, rather than stability. Her journey from 'comfort zone' to 'challenging zone' results in identity and independence. Defining one's independent identity comes only through defying.

Richard Voeltz, on the other hand, analyzes this memoir through an identity perspective. For Voeltz the memoir presents an orientalist, rose-hued picture of a vibrant India and a fragrant Indonesia as lands full of enlightened souls—the ideal place for a thirty-two-year-old woman to find her balance”(58). Voeltz further states, “The neoliberal rhetoric of spiritual empowerment found at the heart of *Eat Pray Love*

comes across as revolutionary on the surface and seems to fly in the face of a traditional patriarchal vision of submissive femininity”(58). For Voeltz, the portrayal of East is biased and hyper romanticized. It ironically devalues East and Eastern cultures. The stereotypical presentation of East misrepresents and further assists to build up an anti-East narrative by promoting neocolonial ethos.

Similarly in an opinion article Mia Mask makes a critique on Gilbert’s portrayal of east. Mask claims, “In *Eat Pray Love*, Bali serves as Elizabeth Gilbert’s hallowed sanctuary. It’s an enchanted land where she finds emotional healing. But if her journey may in fact have been life-changing, . . . the story she told in her best-selling book is filled with stereotypes about the East.” Though he is not specific on how and where Gilbert’s portrayal of east is biased and ‘western centric’, his argument cannot be completely discarded as in the memoir there are many references where western view can be found being aggrandized by ironically belittling East.

In the same way, sarah knudson makes an analysis of causes behind ‘self-searching’ journeys like Gilbert. knudson states:

Key social structures that have, in the past, provided individuals with guidance on their relationships and general life direction (such as the church) have lost cultural potency. Moreover, families, intimate relationships, jobs, and career trajectories have become increasingly insecure or unclear. Women have experienced the most significant changes most directly, so they may also be the most likely to wrestle with issues of identity and life purpose. (66)

Obviously, changing economic and socio-cultural milieus have accelerated the search of identity-struggling to find oneself and one’s position in the world. Now passion for self-discovery similar to Gilbert has become a global issue. The issue of identity is largely a matter of personal choice and taste. How one expects to define and be

defined is largely contingent on how much sacrifice s/he invests. For Gilbert, realizing the meaning of life and coming out of a toxic relationship are determining factors for her identity. She finds herself trapped in the beginning and establishes herself as a liberated self at the end.

Likewise, another critic Shilpi Priya analyzes Gilbert's travel as a journey of finding her true self and self-discovery. Saikia contends:

. . . the theme of self-discovery is evident in the three memoirs. The freedom to live which these writers seek in their journey makes them realize their worth. They liberate themselves from all social constraints and emerge as the 'independent woman'. The urge for individuality and introspection is further enhanced in their memoirs. The soul seeking journey makes them explore themselves in tranquility. They meet, explore, travel and learn. The impulsive liberation of these writers from the cocoons and inventing their identities in the world raises the concept of the new woman. This colossal idea of solo traveling, intruding into new places, experiencing love, reminiscing past and then changing oneself for a better life is a worthy assignment one can partake in her life. (1091-1092)

Saikia's opinion about Gilbert is the concept of a new woman who succeeds in coming out of social 'cocoons' to establish and exercise their own agency and authority. By shattering the concept of the American dream Gilbert finds herself in 'renewed and reincarnated self' which is important for reclaiming her 'social existence.' In an orthodox culture where a female's outing is seen as unnecessary, her solo journey is a bold blow. It emanates urgency to redefine the established configuration and codification of gender imagination.

Ms. Camilla P. Tossy explores the importance of geographical situatedness in

Gilbert's emotions, behavior and psychological health. Tossy opines:

Gilbert's memoir represents a contemporary quest where the traveler searches outward for everything she lacks inward, which results in the process of constructing the identity. Thus, the argument of this paper has proved that there is a huge relation between one's identity and the geographical condition in which he or she lives. A self-formation in terms of the factors of psycho-geography can be seen as an extension of self. So, the role of psycho-geography in creating identity has a significant role. (86)

Place plays a decisive role in creating and deconstructing one's identity. Different psycho-geographical state in Gilbert's life is evident as she feels different emotions being in Italy, India and Indonesia. As spatial belonging shifts, different psychological identities stand. As identities are constantly created and recreated in a continuum, geo-psychological identities are also part of the traveler that also applies to in the case of Gilbert.

Gilbert's journey to India and Indonesia introduces her to Eastern living. Describing any place also implicitly or explicitly brings out the perspective of that place. Roksana Badruddoja approaches Gilbert's memoir through oriental perspectives. Badruddoja observes:

Here, the Eat, Pray, Love peace and sanctuary model effaces the specificities of how travel between the "Global North" and "Global South" is constructed through guarded nation-state borders and citizenship. In this model, the search for sanctuary à la spiritual awakening is tethered to the discourse of "finding oneself" through transatlantic travels—which requires freedom of mobility across nation-state boundaries—between the "West", e.g., America, England, and Canada, to the "East", e.g., India, Tibet and Nepal. In this "white

imagination" (hooks 1992/2015) of sanctuary, the travels to find oneself often include falling in love—and perhaps even finding an orgasmic cup of coffee—as a confirmation of enlightenment. The model clearly perpetuates Orientalist stereotypes. (1)

Badruddoja visualizes Gilbert's picturization of East in terms of 'colonial eye' and 'oriental gaze'. Over romanticization of East not only devalues the East, but rather perpetuates and percolates western values and ideas in the readers and viewers. It is a kind of tenet of neocolonialism.

The review of existing literature reflects that different critics and scholars have approached and analyzed *Eat Pray Love* from various theoretical points and perspectives, be it food imagery to sexuality, quest of new self to new woman, feminist approach to spiritual approach, confessional mode of writing to postmodernist approach. But the issue related to tragic optimism is nonexistent. Though the theme of trauma, especially the issues of tragic optimism and working-through are prevalent across the memoir. These issues have not been well explored and analyzed so far. This research tries to explore the trauma recovery process by using the theoretical insights of tragic optimism and working-through.

Gilbert undergoes a divorce which is very painful and psychologically impactful for her. *Eat Pray Love* not only chronicles her geographical journey from Italy to India, India to Indonesia, but also her journey from pessimism to optimism, despair to hope, devastated self to rejuvenated self. In short Gilbert is guided by tragic optimism. No matter how difficult life is for her, she hopes for better and firmly marches ahead. She embarks on a journey from caterpillar to butterfly. Her capacity to creatively turn life's negative aspects into something positive or constructive is commendable.

Gilbert has almost everything that a middle-class family wants to have. Or the American dream nudges people to achieve. But she cannot escape from 'existential frustration'. She is not happy with her existence. A sense of frustration and anxiety is evident in the following lines:

I had actively participated in every moment of the creation of this life-so why did I feel like none of it resembled me? Why did I feel so overwhelmed with duty, tired of being the primary breadwinner and the housekeeper and the social coordinator and the dog-walker and the wife and the soon-to-be mother, and – somewhere in my stolen moments-a writer. ...?

I don't want to be married anymore. (12)

She does not feel any association with all the gains and possessions. Attachment is part of existence. When we feel attached to family, friends and relatives or any other possessions, we see the meaning of life there. Feelings detached from everything, and everyone lead either to spirituality or depression. Frankl asserts, ". . . man's search for meaning may arouse inner tension rather than inner equilibrium" (126). Beyond these things she looks for greater meaning which brings tensions and trauma to her. Her inner self is turbulent to trace the true meaning of life.

Initially, Gilbert finds herself amidst hollowness, helplessness, and hopelessness: I was hiding in the bathroom for something like the forty-seventh consecutive night, and —just as during all those nights before —I was sobbing. Sobbing so hard, in fact, that a great lake of tears and snot was spreading before me . . . (10). It shows the suffocating environment that has engulfed her. After her conflicted marriage she wants to get out of it. She says, "I just wanted to slip quietly out the back door, without causing any fuss or consequences, and then not stop running until I reached Greenland (13). This shows her 'will to power' to resolve the problems. Here,

Greenland indicates her destination of finding true self. Unstoppable determination has emboldened her. This excerpt shows her discomfort being in marriage and determination to cross the marriage barriers. She does not want to limit herself in her present life and desires more than that. As Frankl states, “ There is nothing in the world . . . that would so effectively help one to survive even the worst conditions as the knowledge that there is a meaning in one’s life” (126). As the memoir is about a search for meaning, no matter how difficult a time it is for her, she does not stop to hope for better.

Generally, we often aspire for a tensionless, well settled life with luxury and comfort. Gilbert has all the luxury and ease but is not satisfied and longs more from life. As the proverb goes ‘necessary is the mother of all inventions’, Gilbert feels urgency to invent and reinvent herself. Desiring more is a prerequisite for progress as declared by Nietzsche in *Will to Power*. Frankl asserts:

What man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather the striving and struggles for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen task What man needs is not homeostasis but what I call “noöynamics,” i.e., the existential dynamics in a polar field of tension where one pole is represented by a meaning that is to be fulfilled and the other pole by the man who has to fulfill it. (127)

Frankl exposes the fundamental traits of sapiens. Gilbert’s tense life propels her to peep outside. It compels her to give wings to her wider and higher dreams.

Ultimately, she succeeds to locate herself “happy and healthy and balanced” (344). In Frankl words she finds ‘meaning’. Frankl sees will-to-meaning as a panacea to cope with existential distress and existential frustration. And the same person who is feeling existential distress and existential frustration is responsible for getting over it. Frankl puts his view regarding that:

As each situation in life represents a challenge to man and presents a problem for him to solve the question of the meaning of life may actually be reversed. Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather he must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible. (131)

Frankl thinks the very people who feel existential frustration are responsible for coming out of it. For Gilbert there is no one to nudge for moving forward. Even her own self is confused whether to embark on a new journey or limits herself in present condition. But eventually she dares to disagree with existing norms and values that time and again dictate her to compromise and continue her life with her husband. In the case of Gilbert, she herself gives agency for her metamorphosis. She opines, “. . . I was not rescued by a prince; I was the administrator of my own rescue”(344).

Influenced by the reading of Nietzsche’s ‘will’, Jacob Boehme illustrates, “The will is a magical force, a desire that leads the bottomless to foundation, and the nothing into something”(qtd. in Stoeber 29). ‘Will to power’ has greatly influenced Gilbert. By giving an analogy of growth of oak tree —“. . . it is the oak tree that created the very acorn from which it was born.”(345) — Gilbert assumes everyone responsible for their journey to come out of existential frustration as “It (logotherapy) says that man is . . . always free to choose among alternatives It charges each individual always to be aware of this freedom, and therefore of the contingency of his destiny upon his own choices”(Crumbaugh 4).

Gilbert does not find her meaning with her husband. Furthermore, she takes conceiving and baby nurturing as a meaningless task. As every individual is unique and his/her perspectives are different from one person to another, her views regarding

pregnancy and motherhood cannot be discarded at face value. What is praiseworthy is she does not compromise with her unwillingness and unflinchingly devotes herself to find true self. Aviad and Malka opine “Meaning in life is an underlying condition for maintaining mental health, coping with and protecting oneself from crises and hardships, and leading a satisfying lifestyle”(5).

Frankl contends that to discover the meaning of one’s life, one should search outside. Frankl opines, “By declaring that man is responsible and must actualize the potential meaning of his life, I wish to stress that the true meaning of life is to be discovered in the world rather than within man or his own psych, as though it were a closed system” (133). Similar to Frankl’s idea, she goes outside to decipher her purpose and meaning. Hence, her journey to Italy, India and Indonesia is a voyage of ‘meaning discovery’.

The issue of ‘finding one’s true meaning’ has been discussed and deliberated since the time immemorial. Even the sacred mantra *Aham Brahmasmi*, meaning I am myself Brahma, is very famous in Hindu religion. But how to achieve the true meaning has always been a difficult and debated issue. Many theorists advocate for spiritual significance in trauma coping. Julio F. P. Peres et. al. opine:

When people become traumatized they often look for a new sense of meaning and purpose in their life. Spiritual or religious beliefs and practices are important components of almost all cultures. Religiosity and spirituality are strongly based on a personal quest to understand ultimate questions about life, meaning, and relationships with the sacred or transcendent (Moreira-Almeida & Koenig, 2006). Religious framework and practices may have an important influence on how people interpret and cope with traumatic events.

(5)

Religiousness can provide an outlook that helps give purpose and meaning to suffering, besides hope and motivation. Search for metaphysical power in problems beyond oneself is a common tendency in human life. Spirituality is usually, although not always, beneficial for posttraumatic growth. When victims realize that God's power can be channelized for his/her problem, such thought patterns assist in trauma coping. But religious coping may collide or further aggravates the trauma when victims feel being 'God against him or her'.

Frankl opines, "The more one forgets himself – by giving himself to a cause to serve or another person to love – the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself" (133). Similar to Frankl's idea Gilbert serves God or sacrifices for spirituality. Regarding religious coping, Julio F. P. Peres et. al. argue:

Examples of positive coping include benevolent reappraisal (seeking a lesson from God in the event); seeking spiritual support (searching for comfort and reassurance through God's love and care); active religious surrender (doing what one can and then putting the rest in God's hands); seeking spiritual connection (thinking about how life is part of a larger spiritual force), and seeking religious direction (prayed to find a new reason to live) (Pargament et al., 2004). (7)

This quote enumerates many spiritual ways of coping trauma. Spiritual attachment works as strength to ameliorate traumatic memories. Asking for spiritual power to navigate traumatic present is often found in trauma survivors. 'Spiritual surrender' and 'spiritual connection' provide 'support and direction' to positive coping.

On the basis of this argument, we can view Gilbert as an epitome of 'meaning seeker' through 'spiritual dive'. Gilbert's quote "In every religious tradition on earth, there have always been mystical saints and transcendents. . . . I think very highly of

them. . . . “I believe in a magnificent God””(15). Her acceptance reflects her theistic worldview. Her earnest request to God: “Please tell me what to do. Please tell me what to do. Please tell me what to do . . .”(16) reflects ‘benevolent reappraisal’. She asks for a lesson to deal with her problem. Gilbert says “. . . I begged like someone who was pleading for her life”(16).

She writes letters to God asking for help to end her divorce. Throughout the memoir spirituality guides her. In India she finds herself with God: “sat upon God’s palm for a few unforgettable moments in India”(344). Gilbert’s faith on spirituality gives strengths to face trauma as Kent D. Drescher et.al. ’s idea: “Spirituality . . . enhances a person’s ability to assimilate and process traumatic events in an adaptive and beneficial manner”(3). All her spiritual attachment and realization makes her vision full of God’s presence: “I looked around the darkened valley and I could see nothing that was not God”(213). That spiritual succor and spiritual self navigate her through trauma.

In a letter asking help from God’, Gilbert requests, “Dear God. Please intervene and help end this divorce. My husband and I have failed at our marriage and now we are failing at our divorce. This poisonous process is bringing suffering to us and to everyone who cares about us”(34). Divorce is much more than a family detachment or a division in married life. It is also a division of hearts. It often brings untold pain, tragedy and trauma. When one feels powerless and clueless, one often prays for God or expects some sort of miracle. In trauma studies, asking for help is also a process of relieving trauma. For her, getting over the marriage relationship seems like a ‘poisonous process’. Being unable to resolve the conflicted marriage relationship she appeals to God. Being unable to wield power and appealing to some other forces shows that she lacks agency. She seems feeble, emasculated and

enervated. She argues:

As my marriage dissolved and my drama with David evolved, I'd come to have all the symptoms of a major depression - loss of sleep, appetite and libido, uncontrollable weeping, chronic backlashes and stomachaches, alienation, and despair, trouble concentrating on work, inability to even get upset... It went on and on (50).

When victims learn how and when his/her problems began, it opens the door of working-through. There are traumatic symptoms on her, but she also understands her problem. It is a part of getting better.

In India, she involves herself in yoga, mantra chanting and meditation to relieve her. In Ashram she learns spiritual lessons which immensely help in getting over trauma. As she lands in Indonesia, she finds herself hugely balanced and bold. She says, "I have been here (Indonesia) only a few weeks and I feel a rather mission-accomplished sensation already"(272). From the beginning Gilbert is on a mission to get over her trauma and find balance in her life. The word mission-accomplished demonstrates remarkable improvement in her life which is indeed successful working-through.

Liz helps Wayan Nuriyasih and Tutti to have their own house. Her compassionate attitude is laden in these words, "I wanted to help this single mother with her daughter and her extra orphans. I wanted to valet-park them into a better life"(285). Gilbert invests herself 'to a cause to serve' Wayan and provides her a house. She loves Wayan and her family immensely. Similarly, she devotes herself in the service of God at Ashram in India. Even in *Bhagavad-gita*, sacred book in Hinduism, the idea of devoting oneself selflessly to the betterment of others leads to finding true meaning of life (salvation) and ultimate peace is there. Gilbert also finds

herself more peaceful and meaningful in doing selfless tasks.

Frankl describes three values of finding a meaning in life: attitudinal values, creative values and experimental values. These three values help find meaning in life.

Creative values are those involved in production, in a job or hobby, or a task to be completed. Experimental values are those found in experiencing life's phenomena, such as in appreciation of the fine arts or contemplating the wonders of nature. And attitudinal values are those found in adopting an attitude or stand on something about which we can otherwise do nothing: that is, in taking a moral or ethical position that reflects the meaning we attribute to life. (Crumbaugh 11)

Gilbert involves herself in all these three values to find meaning in her life. The plan of writing this book, learning Italian language, appreciation of arts and aesthetics in Italy, romances with Felipe and her forgiving attitude facilitate to unearth meaning to her. As Frankl contends, "The second way of finding a meaning in life is by experiencing something – such as goodness, truth, and beauty – by experiencing nature and culture or, last but not least, by experiencing another human being in his very uniqueness – by loving him" (133-134). Similar to the ideas of Frankl, Gilbert is also involved in experiencing culture, food, meditation and spirituality, Balinese ancestral culture. Furthermore, to validate the idea of Frankl, Gilbert's involvement in lovemaking with Felipe can be more relevant. In the words of Gilbert herself, she says, "I have never been loved and adored like this before by anyone, never with such pleasure and single-minded concentration. Never have I been so unpeeled, revealed, unfurled and hurled through the event of lovemaking" (308). These lines show her passionate involvement with Felipe. As Frankl asserts "the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities" (134), Felipe helps her to overcome

her trauma and realize her true meaning.

Trauma is a broad and diverse concept. First emerged in psychology and medical science, later it got prominent attention in literary criticism and critical literary theories too. "Trauma means "wound" in Greek, often the result of an overwhelming amount of stress that exceeds one's ability to cope or integrate the emotions involved with the experience" (Caruth 3). Trauma is not a simple healable event like some physical ailments. As per the definition mentioned in Oxford Advanced Learner Dictionary, trauma is defined as "a mental condition caused by a severe shock, especially when the harmful effects last for a long time." It means haunting memories for a long lasting is called trauma. In other words, trauma can be defined as an emotionally shocking experience that leaves the coping power of an individual dysfunctional and results powerless. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as:

... an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century.

(181)

When one is traumatized, they are literally overwhelmed by emotions. Decision making power is lost. Past events such as rape, murder, abuse, accidents and even disease can traumatize which impact is overwhelming. Trauma is simply a response to events. Amnesia and dissociations are part of trauma which pose difficulty to fictionalize and symbolize traumatic feelings. Another scholar Debarati Sanyal defines trauma as:

Trauma is an experience which, because of its unthinkable, shattering nature, is not available to immediate and conscious understanding. Instead, the event (or history) is belatedly and repetitively recorded by the psyche. Hence it is dis-located from a specific historical event, since the experience only emerges in its displaced, symptomatic afterlife within the fractured individual or collective psyche. It is precisely the unmooring, or dislocation, of the traumatic experience. (305)

Experience of trauma is generally beyond complete comprehension, beyond absolute description. It comes in repetitive form and is very unpleasant for the victim to experience traumatic symptoms. Given its amorphous, ambiguous, and slippery nature, Christa Schönfelder writes:

The concept of trauma has departed from its original disciplinary ground and crossed boundaries between various fields and discourses; as a result, it has become increasingly, even notoriously, complex and slippery. Like many trauma critics, Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allué conceptualize trauma as inherently “open and undecidable,” asserting that we should never think of trauma as a “stable and immobile notion[.]” (“Between the Urge” 12-13) (28).

Explaining the multidisciplinary approach of trauma studies, Schönfelder views trauma as an open ended issue. As articulating the experience of trauma is itself beyond expression, trauma always comes with ineffability. It is like trying to speak unspeakable; trying to express inexpressible. It is never final and finite, rather always ‘open and undecidable’.

Dominick LaCapra, by deriving the concept from Freudian reading, postulates two fundamental forms of remembering traumatic events: ‘working-through’ and ‘acting out’. These are the two concepts of trauma healing. The first, which LaCapra

considers the desirable one, results in the process of 'working-through'; the other is based on denial and results in 'acting-out'. According to him, what makes it different from the acting out to working-through is the victim's ability to distinguish past and present. S/he can elaborate what makes an overwhelming experience and what is happening now. One desirably repeats the past frequently. The victim of trauma goes through these two stages in chronological order. LaCapra argues:

Acting out is compulsive repetitive. Working-through involves repetition with significant difference –difference that may be desirable when compared with compulsive repetition. In any event, working-through is not a linear, teleological or straightforward development (or stereotypically dialectical) process either for the individual or for the collectivity. It requires going back to problems, working them over and perhaps transforming the understanding of them. Even when they are worked through, this does not mean that they may not recur and require renewed and perhaps changed ways of working-through them again. In this sense, working-through is itself a process that may never entirely transcend acting out and that, even in the best of circumstances, is never achieved once and for all. (149)

These words illustrate that acting-out is compulsive repetition whereas working-through is desirable. Acting out leads to problems and working-through gives relief and soothing effects to the victim. In acting out, the victim is overwhelmed by traumatic events. Symptoms like hallucination, fear, insomnia, pessimism, anxiety, low self-esteem, and obsession surface in this stage. When a victim enters 'working-through' s/he grasps and understands the symptoms causing abnormal behavior. Working-through gives victims a sense of moving forward by understanding the symptoms.

Memory plays a significant role in both relapsing and recovering from trauma. Memory brings victims back to traumatic incidents which often induce pain and problems and the same memory also facilitates to differentiate past, present, and future which provides a disengaged view regarding temporality that forms the basis of victim's recovery and betterment. By defining the value of memory, LaCapra points:

In memory, as an aspect of working-through the past, one is both back there and here at the same time, and one is able to distinguish between (not dichotomize) the two. In other words, one remembers perhaps to some extent still compulsively reliving or being possessed by- what happened then without losing sense of existing and acting now. This duality (or double inscription) of being is essential for memory as a component of working over and through problems. At least in one operative dimension of the self, one can say to oneself or to others: "I remember what it was like back then, but I am here now and there is difference between two". (90)

According to LaCapra, the mind or memory is the main instrument of working-through. By means of memory one goes to the past, able to differentiate between past, present and future, try to understand past and present and succeeds to heal oneself and move forward from any trauma. Memory helps differentiate between past, present and future and gives ways to a kind of understanding and acceptance about traumatic past and victims feel like they have to do something to cure themselves.

In *Eat Pray Love* both two concepts of acting out and working-through are evident. After her two break ups one after another, Gilbert suffers major depression, insomnia, sobbing and crying, guilt and regret, low self-esteem, self-harm attitude and abnormal craving for food in Italy. These all are the symptoms of trauma. Once an organic eater turns into a foodie. She eats abnormally. She loses herself in pizza,

pasta, cappuccino, Mozzarella and Gelato as if eating is the only purpose of her life. After she is again consumed by depression that compels her to take pills in Italy, she acknowledges and understands her fragile mental health. As she knows the debilitating state of her mental health, she feels necessary to fix the roots of the problem.

LaCapra gives high importance to articulatory practices in reliving trauma memory. Articulation eases trauma and expedites working-through. He defines 'working-through' as a process of articulatory: "LaCapra's concept of "working-through" which he defines as an "articulatory practice" whereby the traumatized individual is enabled to "distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or to one's people) back then while realizing one is living in the here and now"(qtd. in Pabel 5). Cathartic effect that Gilbert finds in praying to God, association with Felipe, Wayan, Ketut and other friends, learning Italian Language can be seen to illustrate the cathartic effect that trauma theorists such as LaCapra and Caruth ascribes to articulatory practices. Gilbert's 'cathartic friendship' with Felipe, Wayan and Ketut paves the way for psychological respite and recovery.

Working-through opens when the victim realizes his/her problem. In Italy she could not balance her mental state. So, she flies to India realizing that spirituality will help cope up. As spiritual strength is taken as a source of realizing meaning in logotherapy, Gilbert feels the need for spiritual shadow for her recovery. Gilbert's realization of her problem and acceptance of her responsibility to well-being is evident in Gilbert's following lines: "I sit down to meditate, and I say to my mind, "Listen—I understand you're a little frightened. But I promise, I'm not trying to annihilate you. I'm just trying to give you a place to rest. I love you""(149). Gilbert's

words reflect her self-given agency for improvement and changed attitude. Once the victim of suicide and self-injury thoughts turning into self-love illustrates working-through process.

LaCapra contends that the symptoms of trauma can hit any moment. These symptoms come but do not overwhelmingly impact, rather leave with a more clarity about past events. In this regard, Caruth points out: “[T]rauma involves a continual reliving of some wounding experience in daydreams and nightmares, flashbacks and hallucinations, and in a compulsive seeking out of similar circumstances” (184). As the ideas of Caruth and LaCapra, the past memories of trauma attack Gilbert time and again. Even though she aspires to recovery, the past keeps haunting. This is evident in the following lines: “The next morning’s meditation is a disaster. Desperate, I beg my mind to please step aside and let me find God, but my mind stares at me . . . and says, “I will never let you pass me by.””(156). Exactly as Gilbert mind says the past of traumatized victims never stops to repeat without the victim's consent. But the density and momentum of the haunting of the past obviously lessens.

Working-through is a logical and intellectual phase. When a victim is able to understand one’s problem logically and succeeds in differentiating underlying causes of one’s problem, then the process of working-through starts. LaCapra states, “[T]he person tries to gain critical distance on a problem to be able to distinguish between past, present and future”(60). Critical lenses should be focused on the problem to successfully get over trauma. Gilbert attempts to understand her problem. As she is frequently disturbed by her past she does not want to be further entangled with the past, rather dissect and decipher what is underlying in her problem. Gilbert says: “My sense of helplessness was overwhelming. What I wanted to do was pull some massive emergency brakes on the universe I wanted to call a time out, to demand that

everybody just STOP until I could understand everything”(160). Eventually her sense of ‘understanding’ aids to expedite working-through.

Narrativization is always an essential and equally impactful means of healing trauma. Narrating, scriptotherapy and logotherapy are the core processes of narrativization. Writing this memoir and narrating the whole incident and experiences works as means of working-through. Writing and Narrating help the victims to transmit their painful stories, a healing process. Kali Tal opines, “The healing process is located in the acts of storytelling, and of listening to stories” (205). Similar to the ideas of Tal, when Gilbert finds none to share, she narrates her traumatic experience with God. Not only oral narrativization, even textual narrativization plays a significant role in trauma coping. Pederson opines “victims’ textual narratives of trauma—which are possible according to McNally—have healing power. Speaking trauma pulls it from the realm of painful obscurity and hastens the process of rehabilitation” (7). As Gilbert has already the idea of writing about her journey, that textual anticipation also works to alleviate her trauma. In broader sense, *Eat Pray Love* is about textual narration of Gilbert’s trauma to remake her true self as McNally views narrating: “Narrating memory . . . is an act on the part of the narrator . . . that defuses traumatic memory . . . establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self”(qtd. in Pederson 8). Gilbert’s sharing her problem with God, maintaining her journal and eventually writing this text alleviates her trauma and assists in inventing her newer self in much the way McNally describes it. When Gilbert feels pangs of unbearable psychological turbulence, she writes journal. In a similar situation she writes: ““I need your help.” Then I wait. After a little while, a response comes, in my own handwriting: *I’m right here. What can I do for you?*” (55). As in Anne Frank’s diary where Frank creates Kitty as an imagined

friend, Gilbert configures her “private notebook” as a supporting friend. She says about the notebook “In this most private notebook . . . I talk to myself. I talk to that same voice I met that night on my bathroom floor when I first prayed to God in tears for help Even during the worst of suffering, that calm, compassionate, affectionate and infinitely wise voice is always available for a conversation on paper at any time of day or night”(55). This way Gilbert finds reinventing power co-habited with scriptotherapy. This reflects writing in discovering oneself.

By sharing her thoughts with God she finds soothing feelings. She says to God, “Hello, God. How are you? I’m Gilbert. It’s nice to meet you”(15). The conversation with God fills her hope and lessens her trauma. Gilbert herself accepts that. Gilbert says, “I had finally noticed that I seemed to have reached a state of hopeless and life-threatening despair, and it occurred to me that sometimes people in this state will approach God for help” (15). Spiritual associations not only pave the way of finding meaning of life as said by Frankl, it also eases the purgation of trauma. Later she finds Ketut Liyer, Wayan and Felipe to share her grief and sorrow.

Gilbert goes back to her past frequently, tries to understand and grasp her past and differentiate her present and past and enjoys her better present. This sense is evident in the following lines “Until - as often happened during those first months of travel, whenever I would feel such happiness - my guilt alarm went off. I heard my ex-husband's voice speaking disdainfully in my ear: So this is what you gave up everything for? This is why you gutted our entire life together? For a few stalks of asparagus and an Italian newspaper?”(67). Furthermore, her journey and jostle over to recover from the trauma that hurts and hunts for a long time is evident when she confesses, “Still, when I look at myself in the mirror of the best pizzeria in Naples, I see a bright-eyed, clear-skinned, happy and healthy face. I haven't seen a face like that

on me for a long time”(85).

When Gilbert sees her sisters with baby on their lap and happy married life, that sight works as a traumatic trigger that pushes her back to her days when she was struggling against her husband and trying to escape from a nuptial ‘knotty life.’ Memory of the conflicting relationship with her husband and unsuccessful relationship with David comes her time and again, “The Next morning in meditation, all my caustic old hateful thoughts come up again...I brood about my divorce, and all the pain of my marriage, and all the mistakes I made, and all the mistakes my husband made, and then (and there's no return from this dark topic) I start brooding about David...”(164-165). Gilbert oscillates between past and present. That to and fro for past and present is a condition of working-through. As the present and past is evident, that exhibits the inconsistency in the mind of Gilbert. She is not engrossed in the present rather being governed by the past too. Such a condition of revisiting the past and living in the present despite her ability to identify what is going on is the process of working-through. She describes her past-visiting situation in the following way:

“One of the hardest things about this divorce was the fact that my ex-husband never forgave me for leaving, that it didn't matter how many bushels of apologies or explanations I laid at his feet, how much blame I assumed, or how many assets or acts of contrition I was willing to offer him in exchange for departing” (192).

These lines prove how difficult it is for females. As she herself is a victim, laments and repentance also kill her. All the accusations and charges of broken marriage are directed and targeted towards females in a patriarchal society and males are hardly found on the radar of even introspection of responsibility for broken marriage. Such

attitudes further exacerbate trauma.

Trauma continues to prevail over her during her conflicting condition with her husband and later with David. Gilbert picturesquely narrates her pain:

I was hiding in the bathroom for something like the forty seventh consecutive night, and -just as during all those nights before- I was sobbing. Sobbing so hard, in fact, that a great lake of tears and snot was spreading before me on the bathroom tiles, a veritable Lake Inferior (if you will) of all my shame and fear and confusion and grief. I don't want to be married anymore. (10)

Marriage is not her choice. She does not want to confine herself to marital assigned aspirations and expectations. She further says, "I don't want to be married anymore. I don't want to live in this big house. I don't want to have a baby"(10).

Even her attempt to overcome the trauma is evident in the use of the word '*Attraversiamo*'. The word repeats many times in the memoir. It is an Italian word that translates to "let's cross over" or "let's cross." It is often used as an expression or a command to encourage someone to cross a boundary, obstacle, or transition physically or metaphorically from one place or situation to another. It can also convey the idea of moving forward or exploring new experiences. Moving forward from the trauma, she uses the word as a symbol and inspiration for overcoming trauma. She aspires to get over the 'knotty life' and says to herself "This was my moment to look for the kind of healing and peace that can only come from solitude"(8). Gilbert completely discards the stereotypical notion of the society of hanging in a broken marriage and puts feet into a world of freedom. Gilbert ceaselessly attempts to find her true self, which is ultimately a quest of meaning in the words of Frankl.

Her travel acts an act of working-through, as a transforming agent. She sojourns in Italy, India and Indonesia to recover from the trauma. The end of the

narrative revives her from the painful traumatic past to the present with the new hope for life ahead. In this way a much matured, meaningful and happy life at the end reflects travel as an agent of transferring trauma into strengths.

Her act of coming out of “knotty life” and traveling across the globe as per her will is an act of defiance against current existence and shows her utmost search for meaning of life. Travel has been a source of healing. Importance of traveling for working-through the painful experience, especially trauma, is vividly expressed in the memoir. After her husband appears abusive and her married life turns out to be a curse and a disaster, she transcends the boundary of nuptial knot and travels across Italy, India and Indonesia for a year to define and design her own existential value; becoming master of her own life in words of Nietzsche. By doing that she recuperates and rediscovers her newer self which gives identity, existential meaning and power over herself. The memoir emanates the message that the opportunity to express through travel helps individuals to lessen the pain and find a cause to live a worthy life.

One of the interesting things in trauma is that traumatized people often visit their past. Here, Gilbert also goes to her past time and again. She says:

What I had wanted for so long was to have an actual conversation with my ex-husband, but this was obviously never going to happen. What I had been craving was a resolution, a peace summit, from which we could emerge with a united understanding of what had occurred in our marriage, and a mutual forgiveness for the ugliness of our divorce. (195)

Visiting and revisiting the past is common in trauma. What is more important is being able to differentiate between past and present. In life there might be some trauma triggers. But deriving lessons and devising ways forward is necessary to overcome

trauma which is explicitly shown in Gilbert's case.

The attitude of forget and forgive is an act of working-through. It helps traumatized people to draw hopes - meaning of life. When someone who is under trauma feels like forgiving and forgetting, this is the process of coping up. Here Gilbert explores her forgiving power. When a traumatic person can deal with the trauma, then only forgiveness comes. Gilbert forgiveness is evident in the following lines:

Nothing was fighting in my mind anymore. I looked into my heart, at my own goodness, and I saw its capacity. I saw that my heart was not nearly full, not even after having taken in and tended to all those calamitous urchins of sorrow and anger and shame; my heart could easily have received and forgiven even more. Its love was infinite. (343)

She does not hold any grudges towards anyone. She easily forgives and gives relief further. The proverb 'to err is human; to forgive is divine' aptly applies to her.

Sometimes Gilbert hates all 'men being'. Due to her conflicted and turbulent relationship with her husband, she gets disenchanted with the whole 'Men being'. Time and again, she thinks about her husband and her relationship with him. Furthermore, she goes to the future and dreams about a would-be boyfriend. Gilbert says, "The agitation gets more jagged at the thought of that word (Man), turning into a minor panic assaultment" (282). She feels meaningless in association with her husband. So, she finds herself meaningful and full of existence being with Felipe. In regard of romantic relationship with Felipe, Gilbert says, "The only Romance language Felipe doesn't happen to speak is Italian. But I go ahead and say it to him anyway, just as we're about to jump" (346). This thought indicates that Gilbert is happy with Felipe and able to fill up the existential vacuum that she had experienced with her husband.

Going back and forth is a process of working-through. It shows that the victim is able to differentiate between past, present and future. Dominick LaCapra writes in his book *History in Transit*:

Working- through means work on Posttraumatic symptoms in order to mitigate the effects of trauma by generating counterforce to compulsive repetition (or acting-out), thereby enabling a more viable articulation of affect and cognition or representation, as well as ethical and sociopolitical agency, in the present and future. Hence, at least as I am using the term, working-through does not mean total redemption of the past or healing its traumatic wounds. Indeed there is a sense in which, while we may work on its symptoms, trauma, once it occurs, is a cause that we cannot directly change or heal. And any notion of full redemption or salvation with respect to it, however this-worldly or deferred, is dubious. (119)

After her stay in Ashram, she obtains clarity in understanding of her trauma. Coming to the last part of her stay in Indonesia, she finds herself healthier and more balanced. She says:

And now I'm coming back to Gili Meno under notably different circumstances. Since I was last here, I've circled the world, settled my divorce, survived my final separation from David, erased all mood altering medications from my system, learned to speak a new language, sat upon God's palm for a few unforgettable moments in India, studied at the feet of an Indonesian medicine man and purchased a home for a family who sorely needed a place to live. I am happy, healthy and balanced. (108)

Her long journey gives her power to overcome trauma and at last finds herself very 'happy, healthy and balanced'. Even she herself acknowledges her power of

recovering herself and finding a newer self. She says, “Yet what keeps me from dissolving right now into a complete fairy-tale shimmer is this solid truth, a truth which has veritably built my bones over the last few years-I was not rescued by a prince; I was the administrator of my own rescue” (344). Here, in the lines she asserts her agency. She respects herself for overcoming the trauma and metamorphosed into a more confident, liberal, and peaceful self.

A journey from engrossed in suicidal thoughts to reclaiming identity and agency is an epitome of actual working-through. Travel has been a therapeutic tool to her to overcome her trauma. From the beginning she is “choosing happiness over suffering” (89). This is what she thinks after she got the email from David agreeing with her suggestions of separation and ending it once and for all. She further easily accepts her detachment from David. She narrates, “Something about my recent joy in Naples has made me certain that I not only can find happiness without David but must. No matter how much I love him (and I do love him, in stupid excess), I have to say good-bye to this person. And I have to make it stick”(88). Once panicked and depressed due to the very ‘love’, eventually she capacitates herself with objective understanding and turns herself undisturbed. It is indeed a remarkable achievement in working-through that pushes her further ahead in exploring her meaning.

Metamorphosis in terms of Gilbert’s personality is evident in *Eat Pray Love*. The idea of self-transformation and self-actualization builds tension in the memoir. That ultimately reconfigures Gilbert as a converted self. Frankl opines “. . . self-actualization is possible only as a side-effect of self-transcendence” (133). In Gilbert’s life also self-transcendence is apparently clear. First, she uplifts from family tensions and turbulence. Then, she comprehends her true meaning. Gilbert retrospects and compares her past and present. She says:

I think about the woman I have become lately, about the life that I am now living, and about how much I always wanted to be this person and live this life, liberated from the farce of pretending to be anyone other than myself. I think of everything I endured before getting here and wonder if it was me—I mean, this happy and balanced me, who is now dozing on the deck of this small Indonesian fishing boat—who pulled the other, younger, more confused and more struggling me forward during all those hard years. The younger me was the acorn full of potential, but it was the older me, the already-existent oak, who was saying the whole time: “Yes—grow! Change! Evolve! Come and meet me here, where I already exist in wholeness and maturity! I need you to grow into me!” And maybe it was this present and fully actualized me who was hovering five years ago over that young married sobbing girl on the bathroom floor....” (345)

Here, we find a grown-up, more matured, peaceful, and happier Gilbert. From sobbing in the bathroom to an independent and happy lady is actually a miraculous journey for Gilbert. It is her reincarnated self, from traumatized to transcendent self.

Through the lens of Nietzschean’s perspective of ‘will to power’, Gilbert is seen as a character guided by strong ‘will to power’ in overcoming problems and predicament to expand her power, identity, influence and well-being. She is striving and sweating for self-improvement. As Nietzsche opines that ‘will to power’ drives for dominance, be it in image or status or recognition or influence, she looks like an exemplary of exercising will to power. Across the entirety of the memoir Gilbert is guided by unstoppable struggle and a powerful will to overcome her setbacks and draw success. Evolving spirit and nonconformist attitude is Gilbert’s personal credo for life that reminds us of the working of what Nietzsche declares as ‘will to power’.

Frankl's ideas of logotherapy and tragic optimism are highly influenced by Nietzsche's philosophy and as Frankl gives high regards to invention one's true self and meaning, idea of 'will to power' is a quest of selfhood: "very intense and philosophically specialized form of quest for selfhood" (Ellmann and Feidelson 803). Gilbert's problems arise at failing to find out her identity and self-worth with her husband. That's why she sets foot to define herself by divorce. Her memoir is charged with the spirit of self-growth. Similar to Gilbert, life means growing and growing for Nietzsche: "Life is to me an instinct for growth, for permanence, for the amassing of force, for power" (qtd. in Williams 377).

'Will to meaning' and 'will to power' drive a self-overcoming attitude. Such types of thought patterns lay the course of overcoming every problem in life. Will to power and will to meaning are the drives to overcome obstructions and resistance. Both Nietzsche and Frankl take will to power and will to meaning respectively as the fundamental forces to navigate even the most difficult situations. Similarly, working-through is the process of facing and dealing with unresolved psychic wounds and traumas. And, it is indispensable for personal growth and development. In essence, all these three concepts share the idea that every trauma and tragedy are surmountable and essential for posttraumatic growth. This idea applies in characterization of Gilbert perfectly.

Gilbert does not overcome problems easily. She courageously resolves them. Hence, meaning does not fall at our feet; it is our duty to walk towards and discern it. Gilbert's story signifies that every person is subject to determining conditions, yet s(he) has a capacity to rise above them. Of course, life can have meaning even in the darkest hours; value is detectable even in void. Sense of 'will to meaning' and 'will to power' guides any existential vacuum.

Gilbert finds herself drained and emptied. Hopelessness and helplessness engulf her. Yet, she daringly fights with it. She keeps hopes in unassailable condition too. Indeed, that hope hints at helping hands to higher self. Sadly, not like Gilbert, all can assail the enormous trauma. Some do not see rays on the other side of the tunnel and succumb to the trauma. But some people happen to see the light. Despite all the hurdles and hindrances rejuvenates and revives himself or herself. All the winners are those who optimize the ideas of tragic optimism, will to meaning and ‘will to power’ successfully. Their original self is restored by working-through even in challenging circumstances.

In essence, this research paper illustrates a compelling example of how one can navigate personal complexities and crises, discover purpose and purport and grab emotional healing through an attitude of optimism, introspection, connection and collaboration with others and a spiritual quest and query. The major insight that can be excavated from this research is that we can turn our setbacks into stepping-stones as Gilbert and Frankl succeed in turning their personal tragedy, trauma and predicament into triumph, trust and achievement. Overall, the Nietzschean aphorism - what does not kill me makes me stronger – aptly applies the ethos of Gilbert’s characterization in the memoir.

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