

Research Article

**Disability Issues: A Maslowian Analysis of J. M. Coetzee's 'Slow Man'**

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**ABSTRACT**

Each culture gives the scholarly transformation to an individual, and the same scholarly transformation permits an individual to utilize his/her fundamental mental capacities to adjust to a specific culture in which one lives. The speculations of Maslow's Hierarchy of requirements assumes an endless part in a person's development; and the equivalent is precipitously applied to the novel 'Slow Man' written by J.M. Coetzee. The main objective of our study is to analyse Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs within the context of 'Slow Man' and to analyze whether the main character achieves self-actualization as per the theory of Hierarchy of Needs proposed by Abraham Maslow.

**KEYWORDS:** Hierarchy, Abraham Maslow, Slow Man, J.M. Coetzee

**INTRODUCTION**

The specially abled along with the main stream people have the right to equality. People who are disabled are often regarded as outcast people and are often excluded from the mainstream society. They are often viewed in a negative perspective and have been enduring tough and difficult situations over the years. The novel 'Slow Man' has one such person as the main character named Paul Rayment and the story more or less revolves around this character.

**Maslowian Theory**

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a thought in psychology proposed by Abraham Maslow. He put

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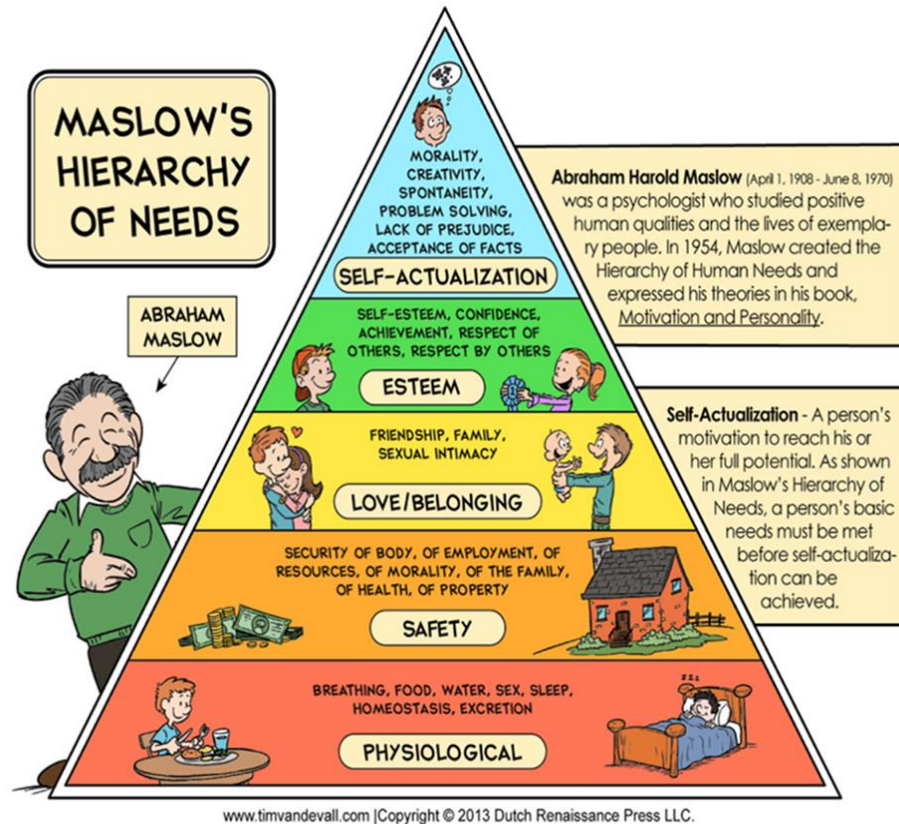
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forward this theory in his paper titled as 'Theory of Human Motive' which appeared in the journal 'Psychological Review'. This theory stresses on the fact that human motives are arranged in a hierarchy of prepotency in which higher order needs could be achieved only after lower needs are satisfied. He proposed five degrees of need priority which could lead to a better psychological health.

The hierarchy of needs starts with physiological needs then safety needs, love and belongings, esteem and self-actualisation. This original five stage hierarchy was expanded to seven stage model in the 1970's with additions of cognitive and aesthetic needs. He summarised his entire idea through the pyramid of hierarchy of needs.



- ▶ Physiological needs: Need for air, food, water, physical comfort etc
- ▶ Safety needs: Desire for freedom from fear and insecurity. Advance of harmful and painful incidents
- ▶ Need for love and belongingness: Include need to have friends, to be loved and accepted by other people, need to belong to a network of social relationship.
- ▶ Self-esteem needs: Include need to develop self-respect, gain the recognition and approval of others, and to achieve success
- ▶ Self-actualization needs: Include the need for realizing one's own individual potentialities and the need for self-fulfillment, which is the desire to become all that one can become

## SLOW MAN

The novel 'Slow Man' takes place in an Australian suburb. The protagonist of the novel Paul Rayment is knocked off his bicycle and lost his leg. The rest of the story is a contrast of his old life to a new life without a leg. Paul Rayment faces difficulties to lead a life as an amputee. Marijana replaces the dehumanizing nurse of Paul who even belittled his masculinity. But in the case of Marijana, she can consider him as a whole man apart from all his disabilities. Being a married woman, Marijana knows that Paul Rayment had an affection towards her and she left that place. A lady named Elizabeth Costello came into his life and gave a positive energy to him.

Then Costello introduced him to a blind woman in order to start his love life. The novel ends by giving the readers a hope that Paul may be able to ride his bicycle again in his life.

From Abraham Maslow's theory, we can understand that a man has to fulfil the basic needs of his life like breathing, food, water, sex and rest. Paul is an amputee and so he needs help from others in order to satisfy his basic needs. He discovers Marijana as a heavenly messenger who can consider him as an 'overall man' apart from his inabilities. Even though he is a financially settled man, he cannot fulfil his basic need of sex.

As days pass, he sinks into Marijana's routine of care. He dreams about a new life with the arrival of Marijana. Her presence made a sparkle of want to him and is uncovered as, "A man and a woman on a warm afternoon behind locked doors. They might as well be performing a sex act. But it is nothing like that. It is just nursing, just care". (Coetzee *Slow Man*33).

Margaret gave a special consideration to Paul and made unannounced visits too. She is conscious about his sexual life as it is a fundamental need of human existence. She accepts that the delight of sexual life gives him more energy and satisfaction which will assist him with beating his current sadness condition of life. She continually reminds him about this in during her visits. He needs to satisfy his cravings yet his current situation exists as a boundary. In one sudden visit, she called him "still as a stone".

This shows his absence of certainty. His inability to satisfy his sexual cravings exists as an impediment to accomplish the top level of hierarchy of needs'.

According to Maslow's theory, once the basic needs are fulfilled, other needs invariably arise. Paul's other essential basic requirements are satisfied in an appropriate manner except his sexual life. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the safety and security needs come after physiological needs. He gave wide meaning to the word 'safety' rather than mere physical security. The second tier of human needs incorporates economic, social, vocational and psychological safety. Even though Rayment is physically secure inside the four walls of his home, he is suffering psychological insecurity because he is alienated. Due to his disability, he is not able to get out of his house and interact with others, he is interacting only with Marijana and Costello. Due to this strong alienation and least interaction and also the failure in his marital life, he really felt insecure in his psychological well being. He considered himself as less confident, and gradually he developed a feeling that he is good for nothing. He doesn't even trust his abilities and considered him as a weak person. This state of mind resulted him to be dejected and which also results in psychological as well as social insecurity.

It is essential for a man to be in social relationships. Social relationships always make a man fresh and live. These relationships can be within his family, friends, relatives, neighbours and with each and every co-being. We may also say that human emotions are there for a man to express to his surroundings and these expressions are necessary for a man to keep his mind balanced and lively. Thereby these relationships and interactions are necessary for a man to make his life cheerful and enlightened.

Paul has separated from his better half; thus, he has nobody in this world. In his little estranged world enter two female characters like Marijana and Elizabeth Costello. Marijana as well as her family is brought into his life over the span of time. Marijana treats him with adoration and friendship, what he wishes in for his entire life time. He falls head over heels for her who considers him all in all. It prompted his certainty and he begins dreaming about another life. But it cannot be considered as a genuine relationship because she is a married woman and having children too.

This uncovers his condition of hopelessness and he sees his life has reached a conclusion by the distance he endured in his life. Presently he views himself as a burden to everybody thus he has no sure considerations of life also.

He is worried over his future after Marijana leaves him and which denied his psychological well-being as well. Since he has no beneficiary of his own, he chose to assist Marijana with giving appropriate training to her child Drago. Despite the fact that she denied his offer, he is prepared to protect her child. His heart is consistently looking for adoration and warmth. Marijana enquires him about his family:

You have a family in Adelaide?' 'No, not in Adelaide. I have family in Europe, I suppose, but I long ago lost touch with them. I was born in France. Didn't I tell you? I was brought to Australia when I was a child, by my mother and my stepfather. I and my sister. I was six. My sister was nine. She is dead now. She died early, of cancer. So no, I have no family to take care of me. (43).

This depicts his rootlessness and utter misery which he experiences in his life. Drago comprehends his current condition while he visits Paul's home. He gets some information about Paul's fondness towards his mother. However, Paul isn't willing to communicate his thoughts before Drago, who's the child of the lady he adores. At the point when Drago says she likes him as well, he also expressed his affection towards Marijana. His heart grows absurdly and murmurs to him that "*I don't just like her, I love her!*" (70). At certain point, he consciously becomes unconscious about her marital status in order to satisfy his desires.

The situation is absurd. What does he want of the woman? He wants her to smile again, certainly, to smile on him. He wants to win a place in her heart, however, tiny. Does he want to become her lover too? Yes, he does, in a sense fervently. He wants to love and cherish her and her children, Drago and Luba and the third one, the one whom he has yet to clap eyes on... He wishes the husband all happiness and good fortune. Nevertheless, he will give anything to be father to these excellent, beautiful children and husband to Marijana-co-father if need be, co-husband if need be, platonic if need be (72).

Paul starts to live in a fantasy world after his association with Marijana which appears to be now and then stupid to the outside world. Paul uncovers his affection towards Marijana and offers his wish to really focus on her family. Yet, Marijana denied his offer and leaves that place. He shared his depression and desolation of his life to his new companion Elizabeth Costello:

And I learned a lesson from it: that love need not be reciprocated as long as there is enough of it in the room. This girl had enough love for two. You are the writer,

the heart expert, but did you know that? If you love deeply enough, it is not necessary to be loved back (201).

Paul has no assets to describe as his own in this world. His heart consistently wishes to be cherished by individuals. Paul absolutely needs outer assistance for his essential requirements. For a disabled person, emotional support can be as important as a prospective cure. He thinks about Marijana as an alternative medium to overcome his physiological safety, love and belongings and stabilize his life.

The implications of being single and alone caused certain imbalances in his life. He considered himself as crippled and low. He doesn't need compassion from the individuals who love him, so he pulls out himself even from his friend's circle. The medical attendant enquires about his companions and told that seeing them would cause him to feel good. He says, "I am not Robinson Crusoe. I just do not want to see any of them" (14). This physical and mental state influenced his self esteem and this remains as an obstacle to accomplish a definitive desire for self-actualisation.

Self-esteem is an element of a person's reinforcement history. With reference to the disabled people, self-esteem can be characterized as a disabled individual assessing their ability to act in the general public. Individual with any sort of disability faces issues when they interact with the individuals in the general public. It will affect their self-esteem and self-confidence. They feel themselves unequal to the rest. Maslow felt that there was a clear distinction between love and respect or esteem. He felt that an ability to feel self-esteem and personal uniqueness sprung from being loved and embraced by families and communities. Self -esteem helps us to become independent and free.

Paul can't accomplish self-esteem since he is completely mindful of his condition. He views himself as disabled and weak. At specific point, Paul thinks Costello is utilizing him for her popularity. Since Costello is the alter ego of Coetzee, it portrays the point of view of writer too. In some cases, Paul has lost his control over his mind and yelled to Costello that "you treat me like puppet... You make up stories and bully us into playing them out for you" (117). Many times he despises himself which reflects his lack of self-esteem. He recognised himself worthy to be disdained or regarded with contempt and aversion. He considered himself as a person with low quality and dignity.

Look at me, your hated rival... You still have the limbs that God gave you, while I have this obscene monstrosity to drag around with me! Half the time I pee, I pee on the floor! I could not seduce your wife away from you if I tried, not in any sense of the word!(149).

The highest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is named "self-actualization". Maslow defines self-actualization in his book 'Motivation & Personality' as:

What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization... It refers to the desire for self-fulfillment, namely,

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to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming (93).

Since Paul can't satisfy his below hierarchical needs, he can't reach the stage of self-actualization. His incapacity due to his disability exists as an obstruction to achieve the ultimate goal of self-actualization.

S.NO	Motivational Needs	Character	Assessment	Examples
1	Physiological	Paul Rayment	Not Attained	He was not able to fulfil his sexual desire.
2	Safe and Security	Paul Rayment	Not Attained	He does not have psychological insecurity.
3	Belonging and Love	Paul Rayment	Not Attained	He has no belongingness to describe as his own.
4	Esteem	Paul Rayment	Not Attained	He was not interested to see any of his friends.
5	Self Actualization	Paul Rayment	Not Attained	He cannot fulfil the basic needs of his life.

## CONCLUSION

Since Paul can't satisfy his below hierarchical needs, he can't reach the stage of self-actualization. His incapacity due to his disability exists as an obstruction to achieve the ultimate goal of self-actualization. The novel under study does not solve the issue nor does it supply any solution. Instead, it just leaves a void that the reader can fill. The novel just poses a question popping straight out on to the face of humanity asking about the fates of these ill-fated handicapped human beings who have to endure all the sufferings for no fault of theirs.

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