

# Layers of Survival: Unveiling Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in 10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World

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## Abstract:

This research uses psychoanalytical theory and makes an attempt to understand and analyze in detail the inevitable and unsurpassable role of human needs in survival. It aptly utilizes the theory of Abraham Maslow and studies his hierarchy of needs in detail. The study put forward the relevance of its application in Shafak's novel 10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World through the main character Tequila Leila. In this research, researcher focuses in brief about the types of hierarchical needs and approach in a distinct way that reflect the relevance as well as the significance of the needs as used by the character Leila in the novel. The five-tier model of hierarchy of needs as used by the character to deal with problems in her life are Physiological, Safety, Love/ belonging, Esteem, and Self-actualization needs.

Literature and Psychology share common ground as both work on the profound intricacies of human relationship and its complexities. The rich tapestry of human experience when intermingled with creative vigour, it gives rise to a new medium where the intense thoughts, feelings, action and emotions gets new colour in rendition. Literature fosters the diverse and the dynamic nature of human experience and paves way for in depth study of the different psychological conditions and subjective experiences of characters by understanding the therapeutic value of intense emotional experience for the overall well being of individuals. Literary works undoubtedly acts as a mirror to reflect the happenings as well as provide a holistic perspective of the myriad nuances of the multifarious nature of human psyche.

In this research, the researcher analyses the novel *10 Minutes 38 seconds in this Strange World* from the perspective of Abraham Maslow Hierarchy of Needs. Shafak in her novel, brings out the plight of group of voiceless subalterns with due focus on Tequila Leila, the prostitute who heads the storyline. Born and brought up in an ordinary household, Leila as an infant had a smooth life until the death of her only brother from down's syndrome. The cold indifference of her father followed by the death of her only brother and the repeated sexual abuse of her uncle, made the life of Leila as a child traumatic. The shocking incidents soon after his abuse such as the decision to seek the hand of her abuser's son in marriage literally demean her confidence in family. The intensity of pain was unbearable for the child and she decides to flee away from her hometown to the city of dreams- Istanbul. Leila was forcefully thrown in to the field of prostitution and she was made to live in accordance with the crisis. The only way of escape for the protagonist is to seek financial stability from the money that earns from the brothel. In her midlife, she meets four social outcasts and develops a strong bond with them as they all share common ground of social injustices from the society where they live. The novel succumbs with the note of the death of Leila and the varied attempts used by the friends for a proper burial for Leila as she was dumped into Cemetery of companions, a place for the voiceless subalterns. Leila, even though, an absent figure she remains an active role model who had high influence on the lives of her friends. Although the novel had several themes from voicing women's rights to minority issues, the current research focuses on Maslow's hierarchy of needs from the perspective of psychological perspective.

Literary works are manifestation of human life in totality from the range of character's emotions, feelings, thoughts and the process of working of human mind. The varied psychological conditions of human life is studied in the creative realm and the resilient measures undertaken by it was highlighted. The prime reason behind the selection of this novel as the chosen material for the study is that, it narrates the life experience of the prostitute called Leila and it offers wide scope for the analysis meted out for the psychological reasons that motivate the behaviour of the protagonist with several limitations and setbacks.

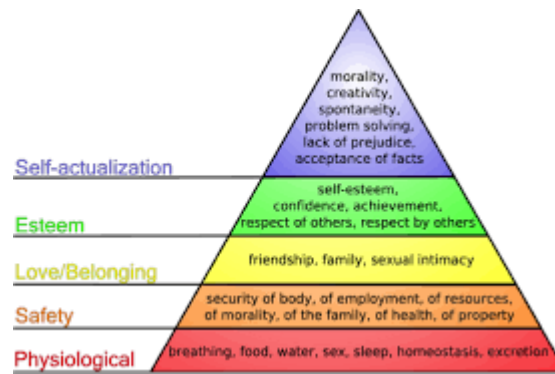
Maslow theory of Hierarchy of needs put forward a precise and very well organised, systematic approach to human survival with its five-tier model. It acts as a mirror that captures the reflection of individual progress with the satisfaction of each basic needs that ranges from the most basic and necessary element like physiological to the complex self actualization need. The pyramidal structure with which he categorizes the needs acts as a guide to understand in detail about human behaviour and the element emphasizes the diverse and the dynamic nature of human needs.

**Keywords:** Physiological needs, Safety needs, Love and Belonging needs, Esteem needs, Self-actualization needs.

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### Physiological needs

In *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World*, Tequila Leila, on the verge of her death associates her past memories with tastes of food like sour, salty and bitter. Her recollections, purely based on the connectors of food, relies due emphasis to the interconnectedness between cultural and socioeconomic contexts in her life. It also showcases the intricate relationship between sensory experience and the real live events and emphasizes how the framework of existence is deeply connected with the essence of physiological needs. Through the tapestry of her wide range of recollections through different tastes, Shafak brings in detail how the culinary tastes and its sensory experience transcend the basic survival needs and stresses more on the significance of social connections and embody the gratification of higher level needs. Memories either the taste of sweetness or the arid contrasting flavour of bitterness reveals the strong visceral connection between physiological needs and survival instinct. The tastes of specific foods like lemon not only fulfil her physiological need but it also emotional experience related to the character. In her words, “As the tastes of lemon and sugar melted on her tongue, so too her feelings dissolved in to confusion....just as the sour could hide beneath the sweet or vice versa, within every sane mind there was a trace of insanity, and within the depth of madness glimmered a seed of lucidity” (44).

### Safety needs

In *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World*, Shafak unfolds the story of Tequila Leila from child to adult reflecting the hardship that she had to endure in the form of challenging circumstance physically and emotionally. The morbid instances around her life ranging from the mistaken identity of her mother to the cold attitude of her father, soon after the irreparable loss of his only son, made her to question the real meaning of a stable and reliable environment. Safety needs relies more on the emotional security and in the case of Leila, when she encounters a distressful situation her family where the one who bluntly rejects her, leaving her to question the pivotal role of reliable relationship in one's life. She remembers the aftermath of the bitter incident in her life for which the entire family stood against her including her father. Shafak masterfully evokes the moral pang of Leila in her words, “Never in her life had she felt as lonely as she did now.”(95) Leila encounters her first experience of feeling unsafe environment around her and the impact of which leads her to carry on repercussion throughout her life as well on her relationships. In another instance she remembers, “Just because you think it's safe here, it doesn't mean this is the right place for you, her heart countered. Sometimes where you feel most safe is where you least belong” (98). Even after being forced to be a prostitute under the control of Bitter Ma, she works hard day and night to earn more and make ample efforts to be stable and be financially independent. The confidence to stand alone financially springs from the fact that deep within her she yearns for a safe, secure environment where there will be a chance for fundamental need for esteem.

### Love and Belonging Needs

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs encompasses a set of distinct aspects that favour the smooth functioning of human life by satisfying certain needs at a particular period of time. Love and belonging needs occupy the third tier, and it specially focuses on the indomitable and the inevitable element called love and its counterpart, the sense of belonging in one's life. Leila, known as a prostitute, among the people of Istanbul, experience love and solace from her friend's network rather than from her real family. The source of strength and confidence that she acquires from her new found family provides her paramount emotional support to tread on the path of life where social injustices crush out individual and demean them in to nothing. As a child, she deeply yearns for human sympathy especially when she was rejected from her family for being pregnant at the tender age and finding fault with her uncle, the man who repeatedly uses her body as a site of sexual violence. The deep longing to rely on someone who can understand the child and show unconditional love for her, involves her to pursue in a journey to find out the true meaning of acceptance and authenticity. Leila, in the due course of her life acknowledges the importance of love and her words echoes it in a different way. She says, “the world is no longer the same for the one who has fallen in love, the one who is at its very centre, it can only spin faster from now on”(146). The loyalty and the paramount support that she gains from her friends circle provides her with an opportunity to learn the power of belongingness and to know more about the significance of emotional fulfilment in life. The intimacy shared within a group of marginals paved her, an arena to know more about the commonalities and the variations inside the same society where the rich and the poor lives and the multifaceted manifestations of social

injustices done in the form of race, religion, class and gender. The division of the chapters inside the novel reflects the fragmented nature of the life of the protagonist Leila and in due time emphasises the extent to which she longs for true human love and acceptance.

#### Esteem needs

Esteem needs occupies the fourth level in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The need for respect, recognition and acknowledgement form the crux point of the fourth level. The innate desire to overpower and rise above one's limitations becomes the focus of every individual's quest for authentic existence. Leila intellectually approaches and transforms her stigmatized life as prostitute by directing her attention from external judgements to her pursuit for competence and mastery inside the sex industry. Throughout her life she was motivated by the motto, "We must do what we can to mend our lives, we owe that to ourselves – but we need to be careful not to break others while achieving that"(271). These lines reverberate the importance of recognition and respect in society. The attempt to create a positive self image increases her self- worth and adds confidence within her and induces the tendency to strive for betterment in her life. In addition to this, the knowledge of being a great influence in the life of marginals like her, adds to her self esteem. Leila, emerges as a resilient individual in the face of adversity and the numerous challenges that she was subjected to from her early childhood constantly reminds her about her need to recognize and acknowledge the fulfilment of self esteem. The act of seeking social acceptance from a group of people who share the same plight foster healthy environment for Leila because it teaches her of the meaning of true self and promote overall well being.

#### Self Actualization Need

The credulous and the profound journey undertaken by Tequila Leila to break free from the constraints imposed by the socio-political condition prove her to be an authentic individual with the credibility of self actualization. The journey characterized by constant striving for personal growth, moulded her to be a rebel, who has the willpower to walk out from the labyrinth of conformity and emerge as a transformed individual capable of finding true meaning and realizing true potential of life. The traumatic childhood of Leila as the victim of repeated sexual violence from her family member, forces her to seek solace outside her familiar circle and the decision paved the way for the initial step of her actualization. Self – actualization, the term signifies continuous growth. The theory of Maslow that aptly align with the life struggle of Leila resonates in detail the rapid transformation that had happened in her life both physically and emotionally. Her harsh experience inside the sex industry and the acquaintance of people at the margins, portrayed as "chosen family" in the novel opens up new avenue for her, where she realizes the power of life with all its uncertainties and complexities. The multifaceted challenges that she had to face and the need to learn from her experience reflect her approach for self improvement adding enough strength for herself actualization. In a conversation with her friend Humeyra, Leila proudly acknowledges the strength that she had shown enough to cross all the struggles in her life. In her words, "She assured her friend that she was one of the lucky ones, the resilient ones, and, like the walls of the monastery she had grown up looking at, like the cat they had saved together that fortuitous night, she was, despite all the odds stacked against her, destined to survive"(160).

Maslow's hierarchy of the needs aligns and cope up well with the life struggles of Leila in Shafak's novel *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in this Strange World*. From the most basic physiological need to the gratification of the higher level self actualization need, Leila unravels the tremulous journey of hers and proves herself to be authentic individual capable of finding true identity. Leila reconnects with her past memories with tastes and thus emphasizes the need and the importance of physiological needs. In her attempt to reconnect with her friends, at times of distress, she becomes resilient individual where she enjoys safety and security in the hands of her companions and thus satisfies the third tier love and belonging needs. The poignant and motivating part of her story emerges in the last tier where she proves herself as a bold woman capable of facing dire situations and taking authentic moves in her quest for self discovery. The social relevance of the theory extends further as it surpasses the narrative structure and it has the ability to help individuals to re-access and unlearn the limitations and the failures in order to define and mould themselves in to proactive and reflect on their aspirations and assist them in the quest for self discovery.

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