



# Motivation and Self Actualization in ‘Mayhew’ by Somerset Maugham

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**Abstract**— *The current paper aims to take up the textual analysis of the short story Mayhew by W. Somerset Maugham for the modern elements of motivation and self-actualization. Maugham has often been criticised for his cynical views and the negative projections of his leading protagonists, yet a closer analysis and interpretation of his characters can offer positive and redeeming characteristics which can be emulated. Most of the readings and interpretations of Maugham’s works have found the element of cynicism to be a common thread in his writings; yet on closer textual analysis of his short story ‘Mayhew’, the two elements of motivation and self-actualization related to modern concepts of behavioural science can be discerned in this story, which is a part of Vol III of Maugham’s collection of short stories.*

**Keywords**— *Motivation, Self-actualization & Textual Analysis.*

## INTRODUCTION

W Somerset Maugham is definitely one of the most widely read English Authors. His easy style and lucid narrative made it easy for the reader to comprehend the story. The lucidity of Maugham’s short stories elevated him to be ranked alongside the master craftsman of stories, the French short story writer, Maupassant. His craft is unquestionable; his easy and non-judgemental style of characterization helps the reader to make sense of the stories easily. The current paper examines the text of his short story Mayhew for the elements of motivation and self-actualization.

The story is about a lawyer from Detroit who abandons everything to take up residence in Capri one of the most beautiful Mediterranean islands. Being smitten with beauty of the island he under takes the task of writing about the history of the island. For fourteen years he plods on with his material for research neglecting all else around him but as he sits down to pen his monumental work he dies. The story would strike one as a cynical comment on the sleight of fate but the author examines it under the light of theories of motivation and the stage of self-actualization.

## MOTIVATION

The word which is derived from the Latin word *Movere*, meaning to move or instigate. Motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic driving Force which propels us to work towards the attainment of goals in human life. It is a “process that influences the direction, persistence, and vigour of goal-directed behaviour” (Passer & Smith, 2008, p.364)

Psychological research provides that factors such as emotions, perceptions, personality and other environmental play a major role in affecting motivation. However, motivation is important as behaviour will not occur unless it is energized (Huitt, 2001)

### Overview of Motivation Theories

**Drive-Reduction theory** was one of the theories that explained biological motivation. It was developed by Clark Hull during 1940s and 1950s as a way to explain behaviour, learning and motivation (Cherry, 2000). The theory was based around the concept of homeostasis, “a state of internal physiological equilibrium that the body strives to maintain” (Passer & Smith, 2008, p.364).

**Instinct theory** describes and labels behaviour. According to this theory, humans, as well as animals are behaving according to their instinct at times (Passer & Smith, 2008).

It is also known as genetic programming when we act in certain behaviour by following our instinct. Some of the instincts that we have are shyness, curiosity, jealousy, sympathy, food-seeking, escape, etc (Passer & Smith, 2008)

**According to psychoanalytic theory** which was developed by Sigmund Freud,, pleasure principle is the motivating principle that regulates life.

### Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Major breakthrough in motivation theories came with Abraham Maslow's Theory of Hierarchy of Needs which he propounded in his work ----- in 1943 and subsequently polished in 1955. According to Maslow physiological needs such as food, shelter, and water are at bottom of the needs pyramid, while the desire to realize ones dreams and capabilities was at the apex of that needs pyramid.

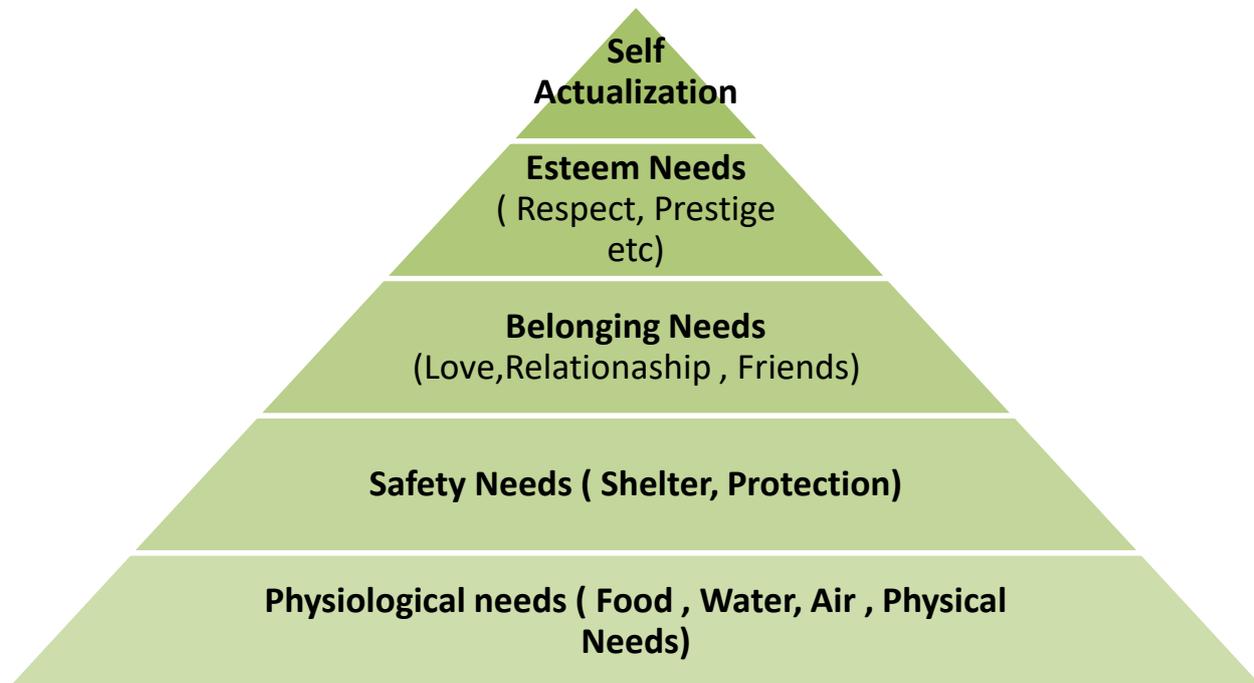


Fig.1: Hierarchy of Human Needs by Abraham Maslow

**Apart from this the other famous Motivation Theories include: Achievement Goal Theory by Atkinson & McClelland**

### Environmental Motivational Theories

Motivational theories on environment were usually derived from work motivation. A lot of studies were done on how to motivate employees in an organization. Atkinson and McClelland (1953) developed the achievement goal theory that suggested that achievement behaviour can stem from a positively oriented motive for success and a Negatively oriented motivation to avoid failure called fear of failure (Dweck,1999).

**Additionally the Theory of needs** developed by David McClelland suggested that human behaviour posits that human motivation is affected by three needs, *namely achievement, affiliation and power*. Power need on the other hand, can be divided into two, *personal and institutional*. The need of personal power always propels a person's growth.

Going by the above theories one can see that most of the theories of motivation require a stimulus to motivate an individual in attainment of their desires and goals.

If we examine the story of Mayhew in the light of these theories we will find that his decision to move to the island of Capri was a rash one, however when we examine his life on the island of Capri, we find him deeply impacted with the immense beauty of the island which was steeped in historical associations. He was able to see many places which reminded him of the Greeks and Romans. The line "past began to haunt him", can be treated as the trigger or the stimulus for his motivation. We find that his imagination is fired up and he wishes to write the history of the island.

It is worth noting that Mayhew was a lawyer by profession and did not have any training of writing History. At Capri though he probably sought leisure none the less when he came across the History of the island which was strewn in the air of the place he discovered the purpose of his life. The purpose which he dreamt of realizing was writing the history of that island. He was consumed by a desire to write

the history of the island for fourteen years when he carried on his research on the above mentioned topic. He wanted to write his magnum opus on the lines of the History of the Roman Empire. Although the story ends on a cynical point with Mayhew dying when he sits down to write the History, however there can be no denying that the fact Mayhew could carry on with his research for fourteen long years chasing a dream which was not part of his daily life's need fulfilment but an expression of his deep desires to contribute his bit in the world at large can indeed be categorized with nothing but a self-actualization need.

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