



# From Survival to Self-realization: Analyzing Maslow's Pyramid in *Dollar Bahu*

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## Abstract

This article examines the application of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory to the critically acclaimed novel *Dollar Bahu* by Sudha Murty. The novel explores the intricacies of family relationships, financial challenge and the quest for happiness. *Dollar Bahu* explores the profound impact of love and belonging on an individual's well-being. Furthermore, it discusses the impact of Globalization on the traditional Indian psyche, the influence of materialism, changing dynamics of domestic relations in India and the cultural contrasts between East and West through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This psychological theory posits that humans possess a hierarchy of needs that must be met to attain self-actualization. These include physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs and esteem needs. The theory proposes that individuals must satisfy their basic physiological needs such as food, water and shelter, before moving on to higher level needs. Today's world revolves around money and it corrupts people. People judge each other based on the financial status and in some case, it breaks the family. *Dollar Bahu*'s journey starts from financial independence and cross-cultural adaptation to the changes of bridging diverse financial philosophies within the family unit. This article scrutinizes the experience and motivation of *Dollar Bahu* through the lens of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs that explains human motivation and fulfillment.

**Keywords:** Money, Self-actualization, Materialism

## Introduction

Sudha Murthy is an Indian author in English, Marathi and Kannada and a philanthropist. Born on August 19, 1950 in Karnataka, she is known for her contributions to literature and social work. Her books have been translated into all the major Indian languages. Many of her novels draw inspiration from real-life experiences and her interactions with people from various walks of life. Her novel reflects deep understanding of human emotions,

societal issues, and Indian culture. Her writing style is simple and lucid, making her stories freely accessible to a wide range of audience. She delves into universal themes like love, family, and human connections in her work, making it resonate with readers from various backgrounds. Her experience as a social worker and philanthropist influenced her writing, giving it a genuine and heartfelt quality. Throughout her career, she has used her writing as a medium to raise awareness and inspire social change. Her remarkable accomplishments are *Wise and Otherwise: A Salute to Life*, *The Day I Stopped Drinking Milk: Life Stories from Here and There*, *Three Thousand Stitches*, *The Mother I Never Knew*, *House of Cards*, *Gently Falls the Bakula* and *The Serpents' Revenge: Unusual Tales from the Mahabharata*. She has been awarded with the Padma Shri in 2006 in recognition of her exceptional contributions to social work and literature.

*Dollar Bahu* was published in 2007 and explores the themes of family, relationships and the clash between traditional and modern values. The novel examines the relationship between two women, their families and the contrasting values they embody. It explores the sacrifices made by the daughters-in-law along with the challenges faced by the traditional Indian family. The novel raises questions about the importance of material wealth and the impact it has on traditional family rules. It also explores the dynamics between women within families and the effects of societal expectations on their lives. The novel illustrates how relationship can be strained and damaged when materialism and ambition take precedence. The narrative suggests that true happiness and contentment reside within the connections of family and the modest pleasure of life, rather than in the relentless quest for riches and social standing. *Dollar Bahu* is a thought-provoking and culturally insightful story that highlights the complexities of cross-cultural marriages and the importance of understanding and respecting different perspectives.

### Overview of *Dollar Bahu*

The story revolves around Vinuta, an exemplary working woman who ties the knot with Girish, a bank clerk and relocates to a middle-class household in Bangalore. Employed as a school teacher, she derives immense contentment from her life. Vinuta effortlessly assumes the role of the ideal daughter-in-law, seamlessly shouldering family responsibilities.

However, her mother-in-law, Gouramma and sister-in-law, Surabhi, exhibit avaricious tendencies. They consistently prioritize the elder son of the family, Chandru and his wife Jamuna, who hail from a wealthy background and reside in the US with a green card. Gouramma and Surabhi continually extol Jamuna and Chandru, who dutifully send money to the family when needed. They fail to recognize Vinuta's significance and persistently subject her to humiliation by drawing unfavorable comparisons with Jamuna.

Gouramma nurtures dreams of visiting the US and spending a year with Jamuna to care for her grandchild. Her perspective on life and wealth undergoes a transformation as she observes the lives of various individuals in the US. She comes to realize the paramount importance of love over monetary considerations, and regrets her unwavering affection for the wealthy daughter-in-law, Jamuna, while neglecting the virtues of her own daughter-in-law, Vinuta.

### Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in *Dollar Bahu*

Hierarchy of Needs is a psychological theory proposed by Abraham Maslow in 1943. It's a framework that explains human needs into five distinct levels typically represented in a pyramid. These levels include physiological needs, safety needs, love and belongingness, esteem needs and self-actualization. Maslow's theory suggest that individuals typically advance through these needs in a sequential manner, where satisfying lower-level needs is a prerequisite for higher level ones to gain significance.

Starting from the bottom of the hierarchy, the physiological needs play a crucial role in shaping the life of the characters. By focusing on survival, food, shelter and health, the characters in *Dollar Bahu* exhibits the struggles faced by many ordinary families. In the article, "Gender Performance on the Reinvigoration via Food", the author Suganya et al. describes the optimistic role of women in facilitating the multicultural environment, the protagonist from both the novels exhibits food consumption and the offering of comfort food by women shape an optimistic multicultural environment. It paves a way to blend in culture and is made possible through the field of Gastronomy discussed in Richard. C Morais' *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (Suganya et al. 883). Vinuta, the protagonist of the novella, struggles with meeting these needs due to her family's financial constraints. This is evident when she has to make sacrifices and budget carefully to make ends meet. However, when Chandru moves to the US and becomes successful, he is being able to fulfill these needs by providing financial support to his family.

As the characters move up the hierarchy, the next level is safety needs also known as security needs, including personal security, financial stability and a stable environment. In *Dollar Bahu*, safety needs are brought to the forefront, showcasing the impact of insecurity on individual and family well-being. She feels vulnerable and uncertain about her future, both emotionally and financially. Vinuta's family experience a sense of security, with the improvement in their financial situation. They no longer have to worry about their basic survival needs. However, the safety needs of emotional security and stability are compromised due to resentment from Gouramma and the strained relationships between the kinsfolk. The members of the household are more focused on financial success and material possessions, often prioritizing personal achievements over family interactions. This leads to a sense of disconnect and alienation within the family. Similarly, the transgenders also face difficulties to survive in the society and being alienated from their own family which is evident in the article, "Communal Expectancy and the Authentic Self of Men and Transgenders - Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw and Birthday by Meredith Russo" the author Suganya et al. explains the emotional sufferings of men and transgender as,

Restricting one's emotions will lead to physical and psychological effects. Peer pressure and societal fear drags down the male victims from equity and impartial justice. Transgender individuals face significant discrimination and marginalization, including lack of legal recognition and access to appropriate healthcare, harassment and violence (Suganya et al. 882).



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The third level of the hierarchy is belongingness and love need, representing the desire for social acceptance, affection and friendships. Vinuta seek to belong and be recognized within their respective families. Vinuta's love and belongingness needs are initially fulfilled through her close-knit family in the village. However, as the story progresses, the strained relationships and desire for affluence challenges this needs. Vinuta craves love and validation from her in-laws, but she often feels rejected and unloved. She yearns for acceptance within her new family which is unattainable.

The fourth level of Maslow's hierarchy is esteem needs refers to encompassing self-esteem, achievement, recognition and respect. In "*Dollar Bahu*", Vinuta's self-esteem is initially low due to paucity of needs. Despite her modest contribution to the family and her dedicated care for them, she is often denied respect due to impoverished background and inability to match Jamuna's social status. Gouramma values the wealth of Jamuna more than the deep devotion of Vinuta. Throughout the novel, she longs for respect and recognition from her family and society. She desires acknowledgement and validation for her efforts and contributions.

The final level of hierarchy is self-actualization needs. Self-Actualization refers to the fulfillment of one's potential, personal growth, achieving goals and finding purpose and meaning of life. This is the desire to become the best version of oneself. Throughout the story, Vinuta's self-actualization is hindered by her circumstances and societal expectation. However, she eventually begins to find fulfillment and purpose by pursuing her passion for teaching and making a positive impact in her student's lives. Vinuta's aspirations to have her own house, contribute to social causes and provide better opportunities for her children depict her pursuit of self-actualization. In the novel, Gouramma's son, Chandru experiences self-actualization as he navigates the cultural differences between India and the US. He gains a broader perspective and understanding of the world, realizing the sacrifices his mother made for the family's well-being.

## Conclusion

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has been influential in fields like psychology, education and management as it helps in understanding human motivation and designing strategies to meet those needs. Through the application of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a deeper understanding of the motivations and experience of *Dollar Bahu* is gained. The various challenges and growth opportunities that the characters experience in their personal journey can be understood. It allows the readers to understand the motivations and struggles they face throughout the novel. The evolution of the characters needs from physiological and safety needs to belongingness and love, self-esteem and self-actualization needs shapes their actions, decisions and relationships. Ultimately, the novel explores the need for personal fulfillment and the importance of finding one's purpose, even in the face of adversities. While monetary success and material possessions are important, the novel suggests that true love and belongingness can only be attained through compassion, sacrifice and emotional connection within the family. Overall, *Dollar Bahu* explores various levels of Maslow's Hierarchy amidst cultural clashes and family dynamics. Sudha Murty skillfully portrays how these needs impact the lives of individuals, emphasizing the universal nature of human desires and aspirations.

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