



***'Eat Pray Love: One Woman's Search for Everything'* by Elizabeth Gilbert: A memoir manifesting the quest for self-actualization in the light of Maslow's 'Hierarchy of needs'**

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Abstract

Woman being a jewel shines from within. She is beyond comparison, unique, and unparalleled. So instead of scrutinizing her social role especially in the male dominant society, this paper wishes to critically explore her estimation as an individual. Elaine Showalter has unfolded various stages of woman's literature from Victorian to modern times, feminine to feminist and next to female stage including current stage of self-awareness. In keeping with the self-awareness stage the researcher aims to explore *'Eat Pray Love: One Woman's Search for Everything'* by Elizabeth Gilbert. The critical appreciation would be based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which includes physiological, safety, belongingness and love, esteem, and ultimate self-actualization

Keywords: woman's literature, maslow's hierarchy of needs, memoir, and self-actualization

Introduction

Women's literature has often been defined as a set of writing done by women. Though obviously this is true, many scholars find such a definition oversimplified. Historically women's writing in many ways is a new area of learning. The practice of women's writing has been much overlooked as a result of her inferior position in male-dominated societies. Still women used their literary expression to communicate their inner world. Women have been playing vital part throughout our history whose ideas, beliefs, thoughts, struggles and lives, in general, have shaped the contemporary worlds. In the initial stages women tried to assimilate themselves into a society of male dominating tradition, which appears in many of their writings. Then gradually women started writing social observations and explaining their own sufferings voicing their sense of injustice through their works. Then further women's literature is regarded as expression of self-discovery and freedom. Women writers end up turning inward during the subsequent search for identity. Self-actualization, the term was firstly introduced by organismic theorist Kurt Goldstein for the motive to realize one's full potential. According to humanistic psychology each one of us has deep rooted drive headed for self-actualization. Self-actualization, Maslow defined as achieving the fullest use of one's talent and interest the need "to become everything that one is capable of becoming."

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The undertaken research explores the ways the character Liz of the memoir *Eat Pray Love* leads her way to self-actualization. The exploration is done in the light of the Hierarchy of Needs pioneered by Maslow. American psychologist Abraham Harold Maslow propounded a theory of psychological well-being based on gratify innate human needs in priority, culminating in self-actualization. He has presented five stages of needs in the form of pyramid. The physiological needs at the bottom include

food, water, sleep, sex, homeostasis, excretion. Next stage is safety-a need which necessitates establishing security of body, employment, resources, morality, health and property. The third stage embodies friendship, family and intimacy representing the need of love and belonging whereas confidence, achievement, respect for and by others are the constituents of the fourth need of self-esteem. The fifth level classifies morality, Spontaneity, creativity, problem solving, and lack of prejudice and acceptance of facts. Self-transcendence is yet another phase that has been supplemented by Maslow which is manifested at 'very highest and most holistic levels of human consciousness.' The Hierarchy of needs answers why people behave the way they do. It enlightens the reader with the principle that one's behavior is motivated by the desire to meet successions of basic human needs.

Eat Pray Love: One Woman's Search for Everything by Elizabeth Gilbert

Biography or autobiography tells a story of the individual. Whereas memoir can be summed up as a touchstone event and turning point in the life. A memoir is precise and intensive telling of the story of somebody's life that focuses on a significant event that occurred at a specific time and place of the writer. *Eat Pray Love* is one such memoir in the life of Elizabeth Gilbert while on the tour. The author Elizabeth Gilbert even though being successful writer, who had home and husband feels unhappy within. The discontent leads her to divorce off with her husband. The loneliness drives her to hop on a rebound relationship with David that too fails when she realizes she clung to him just to escape her unhappy marriage. The distressed and deserted Elizabeth then spends her next year travelling Italy, India and Indonesia searching for what she exactly wants from life. She spends four months in Italy eating and enjoying life i.e. 'Eat' from the title. The next three months she spends in India devoting to spirituality i.e. 'Pray' from the title and ends her travel in Bali, Indonesia that helps her balance,

enjoyment and spirituality and fall in love i.e. 'Love' of the title.

Elizabeth Gilbert had everything. She was an accomplished, motivated and established woman but still shockingly grief stricken, panic and chaotic. That makes her fall out of the frying pan of her marriage and falls straight into the fire of rebounding with David. So to recuperate from this turmoil she takes a radical step just to discover who she really is and what she really wants from life. Consequently she leaves everything behind and undertakes a solo trip for a year. In Rome she seeks the life of pleasure learns to speak Italian gains the happy weight by consuming appetizing meals. In India she walks the path of devotee at the ashram of native guru where she is shown the path of devotion and learns the art of meditation. In Bali she becomes a pupil of an old medicine man. There she falls in love with Felipe. In Bali she studies the arts of balance between worldly enjoyment and divine transcendence, in a way manifesting this memoir as self-discovery and hence fulfilling the need of self - actualization.

This inward journey manifests the fulfillment of the needs rendered by Maslow. To researcher's surprise Maslow's hierarchy simplifies the decision of the leaving of everything by Gilbert. A basic physiological need which is the lowest level of the pyramid is the first thing that motivates our behavior. Once this level is fulfilled and satisfied, the individual wants for the fulfillment of further needs. So is the reason Gilbert writes that she does not want to be married anymore and gets divorce. Further she is led to her journey of self-actualization as she recognizes what she doesn't want but is still confused about what she does want from life. Her all biological requirements like food, shelter, clothing, sex are fulfilled but her drive of self-actualization makes her restless. The second level of safety need indicating security, freedom from fear has its manifestation when while taking toughest decision of her life she tells herself to be strong enough so that when tempest arrives she could deal with that fearlessly and powerfully. She writes "The four virtues a person needs in order to be safe and happy in life: intelligence, friendship, strength and poetry." The quote "Fear...who cares" indicates her stepping up from the second hierarchy of safety needs. She overcomes the fear factor of loneliness, depression as she successfully frees herself from mood altering drugs. Moreover she doesn't fear about putting on weight, the fears her friends have concerning idea of losing their beauty.

Thirdly the need of love and belongingness has the reflection in the memoir where social and interpersonal relationship motivates writer's behavior as she states that her mighty travel talent is that she can make friends with anybody. However many times our relationships become our obstacles and addictions wanting to overcome. Gilbert recalls her painful relation while meditating in India but then the contemplation gives her a new idea of compassion when while in the meditation her heart roars:

"YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW STRONG MY LOVE IS!!!!!!!!!" (EPL-P166)

While initially chanting of 'Gurugita' was a tedious, sonorous and insufferable for her, transformation happens when she finds something or somebody to whom she could devote the hymn, in order to find a place of pure love within

her. Hence the hymns are dedicated to Nick, her nephew whom she loves deeply and protectively. For her prayer becomes relationship. When she has the depressing thoughts about her lover David, Richard from Texas, a Yogi tells her that she has the capacity to love the whole world. He suggests her to send her love and light every time she thinks about him that will vacuum her mind just to fill it with more love. While initially contemplating on her relationship with men she feels like being a victim of her own optimism. Later she realizes the relevance of her relationship as she writes:

"Soul mates, they come into your life just to reveal another level of yourself to you, and then leave..." A soul mate's purpose is to shake you up, tear apart your ego a little bit, show you your obstacles and addictions, break your heart open so new light can get in, make you so desperate and out of control that you have to transform your life, then introduce you to your spiritual master..."

Self-Esteem need is the next level of hierarchy, the self-esteem in the eyes of our own and others as well. In Italy Gilbert stops taking antidepressants and tries to search the root cause of her depression. She meditates on her mental, genomic, cultural, horoscopic, or hormonal, dietary, philosophical or even seasonal and environmental conditions. Socked in grief-stricken mood she asks herself whether she could do something to change that depressing scene in her life. And here she writes:

"...And when those officious women's magazines kept telling me that my low self-esteem wasn't helping depression matters at all, I got myself a pretty haircut, bought some fancy makeup and a nice dress. When a friend complimented my new look, all I could say, grimly, was, "Operation Self-Esteem—Day Fucking One"." (EPL-P52)

As reflected in the quote self-esteem is an internal quality but we are affected by the external factors as well. Social acceptance and approval from others is important in case of self-esteem. But internal acceptance of who we really are is essential for external validation. So the self-esteem stage is a key element which leads one to the self-actualization as according to Maslow Self-actualization is the utmost order that determines our true potential and help one achieve 'ideal self'. The topmost hierarchy of self-actualization is showed when the author appreciates her full potential, self-fulfillment and growth when she writes:

"Yes—grow! Change! Evolve!" (EPL-P345)

Conclusion

To conclude, Elizabeth Gilbert is driven to the stage of self-actualization. Right from the beginning of the memoir it is projected how an individual takes efforts to satisfy one's needs to manifest the real self in a true sense. The travel and experience the author undertakes does render the progression of transformation of her initially confused, sad, depressed self into the efficient, perfectionist, profound, compassionate, loving and fearless self-actualized being who is comfortable in solitude. As stated by Maslow self-actualization is not an automatic outcome of the character. However in case of the author the transformation is the outcome of various mini lessons. The self-actualization of the author is an outcome of the experiences throughout

life and her travel from Italy to India and then to Indonesia as well.

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