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Bumpy Road to Attainment of Self-Actualization in Jessica Jung's *Shine*

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Abstract

Life is an amalgamation of both positive and negative experiences. Such experiences crush the zeal and the optimism of an individual resulting into inner demise of a vibrant soul. The sole objective behind this research paper is to reach to an individual self-actualized state despite the on-going upheavals in the female protagonist Rachel Kim in the fiction *Shine* by Jessica Jung. A self-actualized person has a total regeneration in his thinking process and visualizes life with a renewed lens and transformed energy. The Korea-America girl, Rachel Kim in *Shine* moves to Seoul, Korea, and makes hard endeavours to accomplish her childhood goalmouth of becoming a singer in the K-pop industry. In this research ordeal, Rachel is seen from the lens of Abraham Maslow's Pyramid of Needs of Hierarchy. The research paper touches on a universal plane to every human being, who wishes to attain the state of self-actualization- the level of quality, acceptability, and readability in one's public life by incorporating multifarious abilities and talents in diverse aspects of life.

Keywords: Acceptability, Attainment, Hierarchy, Optimism, Regeneration, Self-actualization



Life is a series of events in this drama of existence. A few happenings give solace to the mind whereas others lead to depression, yet every experience occurs for bringing a transformation in the life of a human being. A human being lives his life at five different stages as stated by Abraham Maslow in Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid. It is a model for utter comprehension about the motivations for human behaviour. It is a pyramid shaped structure showcasing five stages of motivation mapping with each level representing a different human need. These stages encapsulate physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization.

Self-actualization is a notion that pertains to the process in which any individual attains the glory of his full potential. In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, self-actualization is the utmost level of psychological development par excellence, where personal potential in every arena of life is effusively apprehended. This uppermost level is attained only after basic bodily and ego needs have been duly accomplished in life. The accomplisher of self-actualization stage can experience multiple advantages like contentment, jubilation, tranquillity and inevitable confidence to tackle any circumstance of life till the reaching of the Doomsday. In the words of Maslow, a homosapien is always “becoming” and never glues him to fixation during the attainment of self-actualization state. At this level, a person becomes an explorer of life and realises his true worth and importance in this humdrum mechanized world.

The research paper in hand is centripetal on the Korean-American singer Jessica Jung for her *Shine*, a 2020 young adult romance novel. Jung's *Shine* is based on her self-exploratory experiences while being in the Korean music industry. The protagonist of the romantic fiction is Rachel Kim, who simply aspires to reach the topmost stage of self-actualization with a psychological approach and the theory of the Hierarchy of Human Needs by Abraham Maslow.

Kim plays the protagonist in *Shine* who with her sincere endeavours and consistent approach reaches self-actualization. She crossed the stages and barrier of basic needs referring to physical needs of food, clothing, shelter provided at the end of her biological parents, love and belonging needs, validated by her kith and kin and boyfriend, Jason Lee. Next, she happened to acquire Safety needs by securing her position as a senior trainee and debut. Followed by esteem needs, which is the fourth stage in Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. This



esteem need in the life of Kim was duly bestowed by the appreciation of friends and family that she received on her successful promotion to Toronto & New York. Lastly, the attainment of the most privileged need of the self-actualization came in the life Rachel Kim when she managed to procure her vision as a singer.

In the accomplishment of the fifth stage of self-actualization in the Hierarchy of Needs Pyramid, Rachel encountered challenge at the end of internal and external factors. Numerous traits and disposition in Rachel Kim's attainment of self-actualization comprised of acceptance of self, others and nature as it is. She gained spontaneity, simplicity and naturalness in life. Not only this, she developed better critical thinking, but also her capacity of problem solving sharpened. She realized the need for privacy in life and staying in an autonomous and independent culture. She nurtured strong interpersonal relationships with fresh appreciation of life and people around her. Rachel became more creative and she was very well able to integrate her means and goals for a jubilant and successful outlook towards life and things.

Every human being has been innately blessed with the ability and potential to create a utopian life despite this dystopian set up. Person should steadily make striving efforts to build and nurture his potential in the direction of his life goals. The struggle of Rachel commenced when she was ten decades and one and joined one of South Korea's established infotainment agencies as a training student. Throughout the romantic fiction, Rachel Kim has been portrayed as an artistic, yet clumsy young Korean, who is highly zealous to accomplish her dream. As every human being in this world knows that life is not as easy as an ABC, similarly for Rachel, the life's ordeal to attain her desiring position was also not as easy as she had imagined. At one stage, Rachel even decided to abandon her dream of becoming an accomplished singer.

Throughout the novel, various instances depicts that reaching her dream was a real cumbersome affair for Rachel. She has been the constant scapegoat of several types of bullying that even includes verbal bullying. Despite all the traumatic experiences, she celebrates the level of quality, acceptability, and readability among the society. The fiction touches the heart of every female, who encounters many hardships before she accomplished



her desire. Rachel encounters numerous struggles of being a trainee aspiring to debut as an idol.

Jung's *Shine* depicts an autobiographical touch. Jung herself has experienced a long trainee period that she beautifully portrays in Rachel Kim. Though, even after becoming an artist, the life of an idol in Korea has never been comfortable. Rachel is also symbolic of women empowerment at a global level. She also confronted the issue of racism because although she is a Korean girl but resides in America. Americans considered Rachel too Asian, while staying in Korea, her country of origin, Rachel is considered too American. "I'm not half White, but I feel the same way being Korean American. Sometimes it's like Korea doesn't fully accept me as Korean because I'm from America, but on the flip side, America doesn't fully accept me as American because of my Korean heritage. It's weird. It's like I exist in the in-between." (p. 56)

It took a long investment at the end of Rachel to reach the level of self-actualization. Rachel finally accomplished this topmost level when she has met with the previous four needs in the pyramid of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. At this stage, she paid least attention and was not bothered by problems pertaining to food. Rachel was no longer overlooked by security threats and any kind of disease. She had the circle of intimate network of loving buddies and she also had the feelings of being valued in the world.

In the self-actualization process of Rachel Kim, this fact is inevitable that the fulfilment of needs commences from the basic level of the hierarchy of human needs. Rachel at the age of seventeen headed for Seoul, South Korea, and joined a renowned entertainment agency in Korea named DB Entertainment. She was of the conviction that she will experience a good training day with all the fellow trainees holding similar fantasy. But to her utmost bewilderment, she got bullying with the title of 'Princess Rachel' as she resided in America, although her biological parents were from Korea. But Rachel was a determined soul. She did not abandon her dream and made striving endeavours of becoming a debut as a K-pop singer. Throughout this tedious journey, she experienced an assortment of turmoil and elation.

Rachel's achievement is a sheer display of five hierarchal needs of Maslow-physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs.



Physiological needs refer to the most basic requirements of air, oxygen, water, food, shelter, steady temperature, resting, sleeping, and reproduction. These needs constitute the basis of human life and its existence. Rachel Kim is the denizen of Seoul, South Korea, belonging to a middle class family background together living in an apartment. Her father was the owner of a gym cum fitness centre, whereas the mother was a linguistics lecturer at Ewha Women's University. Rachel's family were economically sound, but difficulties hit on grounds of her father's gym that was not as busy as in New York. Rachel's mother too suffered loss as she had to give up the program to become a professor and restart from scratch on shifting to Seoul. In order to combat the economic crisis, Rachel's father sans updating anyone in the family, enrolled in law school. Rachel's father made sincere efforts to meet the physiological needs of the family and procure more income for daily needs by becoming a lawyer.

The second hierarchal need according to Maslow is a long-term life defence which refers to a sense of security in the form of assurance, stability, protection, and freedom from any kind of fear and anxiety. Rachel initially joined enthusiastic as a trainee at DB Entertainment, but became the butt of ridicule at the end of fellow trainees. Rachel realized that she needs to meet a few standards to debut and join a K-pop artist group that led her to be in the state of imbalance and lost her tranquillity in the company which further drained her physical and psychological energy. Despite the on-going pessimism, Rachel consistently strived to showcase her best so as to maintain her status quo at a secure and non-eliminated level. As luck would favour, Rachel with dint of hard labour achieved her vision of debuting as a singer. She even joined a K-pop girl group 'Girls Forever' which finally rendered her permanence and contentment. With the becoming of a singer in an established firm not only gave Rachel monetary strength but also the liberty to vent out her feelings in the capacity of an artist.

Everyone wants to feel loved and acknowledged. The entire human existence is based on loveful vibes. Love and belongingness needs take as the third position in Maslow's Pyramid of Hierarchy. Though Rachel belonged to a supportive family, yet at times her mother exhibited less of compassion in fulfilling of her dream. "They would be able to see that everything they've sacrificed for me – leaving jobs, leaving friends, leaving the States – wasn't for nothing. Debating would solve everything." (p. 13) On the other hand, the giving



up of the gym business by Rachel's father and started from the very scratch in Seoul is a proof of his love and belongingness for Rachel. Rachel possesses good interpersonal skills. She likes building connections with the other trainees and befriends, Akari, a trainee from Japan. Akari says. "Go and show her and all those other trainees that you deserve this just as much as they do." (p. 23) Similarly, during school days, Rachel was friends the twins Cho Hyeri and Cho Juhyun. Apart from this, Rachel developed proximity with the trainee's head, Yujin during her homesickness and transitional phase. On top of it, Rachel also had feelings for Jason Lee, her senior at DB Entertainment, but ceased falling for Jason as her desire to debut as an artist was stronger than love instinct. Rachel's love and affection needs have been duly accomplished in all the above-mentioned connections.

Rachel's fourth hierarchy need of Maslow's esteem is met by appreciation that can be duly achieved from social standing, appreciation, fame, or even victory in the civilized world. Rachel duly received complete support and appreciation from Yujin, the head trainee. People meant for the spotlight, like you." My heart fills up as I gulp down my nerves. (p. 67) Moreover, Rachel video got viral and had a better opportune of performing in front of DB's executive, which gave her the finest chance of seeking maximum attention and appreciation for her singing efforts. "It's a strategic business move. Not to mention, the audience these days is more interested in seeing authenticity over spotlessness. Like this video – they want to see real, relatable people exhibit raw talent and discipline. And Rachel has that." (p. 72)

The core of the research paper rests on the self-actualization need, which has been the topmost in the Pyramid of Needs. Self-actualization stands for the satiation state where all desires get accomplished. In case of Rachel, she touched the zenith of his self-actualization when she is found singing on the stage and announced to become a lead vocalist artist, a Kpop singer in the K-pop group Girls Forever. In *Shine*, Rachel Kim, the protagonist attains self-actualization via the traits of an actualized person as mentioned during the research paper.

Jessica Jung's Rachel Kim in *Shine* acts as a role model for all human beings. We should give more valuable insights into the hierarchy of human needs, self-actualization characteristics, and the finesse process of accomplishing self-actualization. God, Himself the omnipotent has blessed each creation of His with unbeatable potential to reach the crowning position of



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quality of life. This is one of the plausible processes through which humans can transform to be the better version of their self. In the transformation of this process, an individual can attain psychic needs, as per the visible changes in the level of human needs, ranging from the fulfilment of physical needs to that of the fulfilment of psychic needs.

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