

## Purushartha: Maslow's Need Hierarchy Revisited

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**ABSTRACT** This paper's purpose is to link the Western concept of motivation and the Hindu principles of *purushartha*. We first examine how the Western model works and controversies surrounding it. We then propose a way to reconcile these controversies, using Hindu motivational constructs. We discuss Maslow's need hierarchy and *purusharta* as adaptive systems and propose how spiritual connections and relatedness may help better understand motivation. Although there is no empirical support for this proposed link, our explication of *purusharta* as an alternative adaptive system, hopefully will encourage others to further examine these other aspects of motivation and contribute to expanding the scope of Maslow's need hierarchy. This idea of conceptual similarity between Maslow and *purusharta* perhaps can be used to better understand customers' desires for designing better products.

### INTRODUCTION

Maslow's hierarchy of needs enjoys wide acceptance among academics and practitioners alike (for example, Soper et al. 1995; Poston 2009, Kurtz, 2013) and since its inception, the model has become an important tool in such professions as education and healthcare (Poston 2009; Kurtz, 2013). In many health care education awareness programs, patients are taught Maslow's need hierarchy to help them cope with their sickness (Poston 2009).

Today's consumers, with different abilities, knowledge, culture, income, and preferences (Schneiderman 2000), have many diverse needs (Khalis 2006). To address this diversity of needs, many marketers use Maslow's need hierarchy for designing and marketing products. The visual presentation of products has become a critical factor in consumers' response to the product and its eventual success in the marketplace (Bloch 1995; Pride et al 2014). Not surprisingly, more often than not, consumer judgments are based on product elegance (Coates 2004; Kurtz, 2013), functionality (Mono 1997), and social considerations (Dittmar 1992). Often, these judgments are not so much based on whether the product fulfills a par-

ticular need; rather, they are based on the perceived attributes of the product and satisfaction from using the product (Crilly et al. 2004). Thus, when designing a product, for example, a car, manufacturers often assess consumers' income, literacy, ethnicity, and even religious values. The consideration of many variables simultaneously makes marketing a difficult process (Khaled 2006).

Maslow's need hierarchy model has generated a great deal of research on consumer desires and requirements for product development (Lewalski 1988; Rutter and Agne 1988; Yalch and Brunel 1996; Gotzsch 2000; Jordan 2000; Viemeister 2001; Pride et al. 2014). It appears that once a product's utility, safety, and comfort needs have been addressed, consumers' priorities shift towards the emotional and symbolic features of the product. Therefore, depending on a consumer's motivation, a product's perceived features take greater significance than its physical attributes (Viemeister 2001; Postrel 2003).

Yalch and Brunel (1996) who used evaluation criteria based on Maslow's need hierarchy found that consumers were eager to pay 22% and 30% more for an aesthetic shaver and a toothbrush compared with their functional counterparts. Helander and Khalid (2006) also observed the success of a product is determined by its aesthetics, the pleasure it creates for the user. Emotions seem to play a central role in product design in the present consumer-led era because it affects how one feels, behaves, and reacts (for example, Desmet 2003; Khalid 2006).

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Having discussed the importance of Maslow's need hierarchy to product design, the researchers will now develop the relationship between the Hindu concept of *purushartha* and Maslow's need theory. The researchers first review Maslow's motivation theory and then explain what Hinduism has to offer through *purushartha* in regards to desire motivation. Although there is no extant literature or empirical research to support this link, the researchers suggest that Maslow and *purushartha*'s models share common features and integrating the five Maslow's five dimensions (that is, physiological, safety, love, esteem, and actualization) with the Hinduism's *purushartha*'s four dimensions (that is, physical desire, material security, social virtue, and spiritual liberation) would help develop a more comprehensive and useful model.

According to Hinduism, the goals or *purusharthas* of human life, and personality predispositions (*gunas*) is to cultivate one's attitudes, habits, and values (Salagame 2013). Salagame (2013) notes three *gunas*, *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas*, constitute the main principles of life force that gives rise to various mental and material occurrences, including consciousness. Salagame (2013) explains that mental occurrences dominated by *sattva* and material occurrences by *tamas*. Thus, in essence mind and matter, according to Salagame (2013), occurs in a continuum, not as distinct categories as understood by Western intellectuals.

However, to our knowledge, there have been no attempts thus far to understand, explain, and describe the similarities between the Eastern beliefs of *purushartha* and the Western concept of hierarchical needs. And, understanding these conceptual similarities may help advance our understanding of human motivation.

### MASLOW'S GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Helander and Khalid (2006) identified five types of pleasures derived from using a product: physical, socio, psychological, reflective, and normative. Physical pleasure refers to feeling right physically (for example, as from exercising), pleasure gained from a sense of bodily relief (for example, coughing, scratching), and sensual arousal (for example, from touching an item that pleases the senses). Socio-pleasure is gained from acceptance of persona or status from one's social circle like family, friends, and co-workers. Psychological pleasure refers to mental and emotional well-being,

stemming from activities that one engages in (for example, playing the piano, fishing). Reflective pleasure is gained from a product's aesthetics and quality, which have direct links to one's own knowledge and experience in life. Finally, normative pleasure derived from values including moral judgment, environmental care, and religious beliefs.

Helander and Khalid's model resembles Maslow's need hierarchy consisting of five motivational levels: physiological needs (for example, need for food, water, warmth, rest); safety needs (for example, need for security); belongingness and love needs (for example, intimacy, friendship); esteem needs (for example, feelings of accomplishment, a sense of prestige); and self-actualization (that is, achieving full potential). The physiological and safety needs are thought of as basic needs, belongingness and esteem needs as psychological needs, and self-actualization as self-fulfillment needs.

Maslow conceptualized the hierarchy as a pyramid, positing that progress to the higher needs can occur only after the lower needs are satisfied. But Maslow cautioned that the first four needs, referred to as *deficit needs*, are not a strict progression, as some individuals may suppress some needs and accentuate others.

Although Maslow's need hierarchy has generated much controversy and lacks empirical support, it is highly popular among academics and practitioners for its intuitive theoretical value (Poston 2009). Similarly, there is no empirical support for *purushartha*; however, the researchers attempt to relate it with Maslow's motivation theory for further examination and refinement by other scholars in the field

### Controversies in Maslow's Theory

Some scholars have argued against Maslow's upward directional needs theory by stating that individuals may regress backwards at any time in their life, depending on life circumstances. Also, safety needs may predominate during certain times, for example during a war (Dupree 1977). Poston (2009) argues if two year olds can have problems with self-esteem, then why is it that self-esteem is located at the fourth level in the hierarchy.

Scholars have also challenged Maslow's notion that self-actualizers are visionaries such as nation leaders, artists, poets, and scientists for example. Poston (2009) argues that one does not

have to be a visionary in order to self-actualize; a person can achieve self-actualization at any stage or time in her or her life and there is no one way to achieve it. Even Frankl (1997), the Austrian psychiatrist, had opposed Maslow's theory, arguing that self-transcendence (the Merriam Webster dictionary defines this concept as the experience beyond the normal or physical level) needs are to be addressed first sustained first, whereas self-actualization need not be sustained. Frankl argued that forgetting about self and seeking challenging tasks to add meaning to one's existence should be considered as the highest human needs. He also believed that self-actualization cannot be pursued, but comes only by self-transcendence.

In response to various criticisms, Maslow later admitted that self-actualization should not be at the top of the hierarchy, but it should be self-transcendence. At the self-actualization level, an individual works to realize his or her own potentials, but at the self-transcendence level an individual puts aside his or her own individual needs to serve others (Koltko-Rivera 2006). That self-transcendence comes after self-actualization may also be contested as very young individuals may set aside their needs to serve others (for example, Malala, the young Pakistani activist).

### THE PURUSHARTHA MODEL

The researchers propose that the Hinduism's four *purusharthas*, or aims of human existence (Sharma 2006) provides an alternative framework to Maslow's need hierarchy. *Purushartha* combines two concepts, *purusa* means person and *artha* means aim or goal. The four *purushartha* categories resemble Maslow's hierarchical model: *Kama* (Physical Desire); *Artha* (Material Security); *Dharma* (Social Virtue); and, *Moksha* (Spiritual Liberation). *Kama* or physical desire includes physiological and safety needs; *Artha* is a desire for prosperity and includes the need for love or belongingness; *Dharma* is associated with one's esteem, which can be achieved through a sense of accomplishment and an important urge that needs to be cultivated during one's life; and, *Moksha* is liberation from all earthly desires, possibly after they are satisfied, and efforts to realize the truth begin after achieving this liberation from earthly desires (Sharma 2006). The researchers suggest that *purushartha* views are similar to Frankl's (1997) conceptualization of self-actualization.

Yogananda (1968) argues that the three *gunas* (disposition or qualities) are relevant to the above four levels: *tamas* (obstruction or mass); *rajas* (activity or energy); *sattva* (expansion or intelligence). According to Yogananda (1998) the three *gunas* exist in all people to varying degrees to benefit humankind.

The researchers suggest that using *sattva* an individual can control his or her three *gunas* for eliminating excessive forms of desires, and contributing to a more steady form of motivation. One way to eliminate excesses is through daily meditation. If one attains *moksha* or *sattva* either intermittently or permanently through meditation, one should be able to balance other needs, and thereby, counter the possibility of regressing to a lower level.

The researchers propose if one meditates on a daily basis for 15 to 20 minutes, one is able to attain *sattva* or *moksha*, and thereby making oneself more stable in terms of a steady motivational force (Yogananda 1968). Once inner peace is attained, a person will be able to have better control of the other three *purushartha* aims (Yogananda 1968).

The researchers propose a balanced way of life is needed to control the three levels of human desire to attaining liberation from them early on in life to prevent wastage, produce environmentally safe and efficient products, and to reduce the fear of unsatisfied *deficit needs*. As such the researchers suggest that most physiological needs are rooted in the form of cravings that all humans possess (for example, for food, sex, safety). The researchers also opine more than likely when craving has set in, as for example for sex or food, the Maslow's model does not apply or explain it. It can be posited these needs or cravings can be minimized by meditation. Poston (2009) argues that the body uses homeostasis for self-regulation of a variety of functions. Poston states that the hypothalamus plays a crucial role in keeping the body regulated through the discharge of hormones known as *gonadotropins*. Meditation has been found to help reduce excessive hormone production (for example, MacLean et al. 1997; Gullin 2012), such as *gonadotropins*. Thus, it can be argued that meditation may aid in coping with excessive cravings such as desire for exotic foods, or changing smart phones on a continuous basis.

In its true sense, as suggested by Srivastava et al. (2013) *dharma* should be the key for *artha*

and *kama*. If a man were to pursue *artha* and *kama* with *dharma* at its foundation, his pursuits will surely not only aid him to evolve into a responsible human being, but also ultimately benefit the society at large. According to the authors, the Hindu system makes it quite clear that the final aim of human pursuit is to attain *moksha*. What it would practically signify is that although man may continue to seek *artha* and *kama*, but with *dharma* playing a central role in attaining these desires, one would not have to be attached with these desire states in any form.

### CONCLUSION

People can move forward or regress depending on life's changing circumstances. Therefore, life does not linear progress upwards to satisfy one need and then another. Circumstances such as wars, economic recession, or diagnosis of terminal cancer in a highly successful person can play havoc in peoples' lives and cause a downward trend in terms of what needs are to be met. However, sometimes it is difficult to go backwards to find family support when one has neglected family and friends while pursuing career related goals. If people meditate on a regular basis from their childhood, it should help them to lead a balanced life addressing and be free of excessive desires at one level or another.

Seen through a social constructionist lens, the researchers argue motivation is not just about unfulfilled desires but also about control of excessive desires. What propose that Hinduism is a truly global religion which has connections with desires, moral concepts like *dharma* (obligation) and motivation, and offers an alternative to Maslow's theory of the 5 hierarchical level desires.

In an age where the modern man has not quite mastered the universe with his technological innovation, he has lapsed behind his own sense of motivation. Although the seeking for technology has enabled man to fulfill his desires at each level of desire at a faster rate than before, the researchers still believe a spiritual orientation towards inner peace by attaining inner peace (through meditation) will enable mankind to wean of excess desires at each level.

This way the researchers argue man will have a balanced approach when in pursuit of wealth, esteem, safety and physiological needs at each level.

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