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Learning Through Movies: How Lucky Baskhar Helps Understand Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

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Abstract

This article examines Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs through the lens of the 2024 Indian film Lucky Baskhar, released on October 31, 2024. Set in 1990s India, the film tells the story of Baskhar, a bank cashier who struggles to meet his needs due to constant financial pressure. He later turns to fraud to get out of debt and humiliation. Maslow's theory explains motivation through a hierarchy of five needs that appear in an ascending order: Physiological needs, safety, love and Belonging, Esteem, and Self-Actualization goals. Previous studies such as those on Life of Pi and The Danish Girl show how films illustrate survival, belonging, and self-acceptance. This research looks at Baskhar's journey to understand the way people are motivated towards the fulfillment of higher order needs once the lower-level needs are satisfied. Unlike earlier studies, it explores how Maslow's ideas fit in non-Western cultures like India and Nepal, which share common values like duty to family. By examining Baskhar's actions and dialogues, this study shows how movies can be utilized to make complex ideas comprehensible. It proves Lucky Baskhar helps students learn motivation in a way that fits Indian and Nepalese life.

Keywords: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Lucky Baskhar, motivation, film-based learning

Introduction

Films have been utilized as effective tools to explain complex academic ideas in more engaging and relatable manner. Studies such as those by Reyes-Santias et al. (2022) found that the students often perform better academically when film viewing is combined with discussions. Mathews et al. (2012) point out that management educators should consider factors such as students' age and cultural background when selecting

films for teaching Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is an important theory that explains the progression of human motivation through five level- physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs and finally self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943).

Lucky Baskhar was released on October 31, 2024. Baskhar is attracted to financial scams. He sees scams as a way to get rid of debt and humiliation. His journey of successes and setbacks resembles the rise and fall of Jordan Belfort in the movie titled *The Wolf of Wall Street*. But, *Lucky Baskhar* is a story from the Indian context. It revolves around a common man's struggles. Therefore, it offers a unique and relevant case to study motivation.

Most of the existing studies that examined Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs with reference to films have used western films. Films such as *Life of Pi*, *The Danish Girl*, and *The Whale* have been analyzed through Maslow's framework. But, they reflect Western cultural values such as individual survival and personal identity. These values do not always match the lived experiences of students in South Asian countries like India and Nepal, where family duty, community belonging, and social reputation play a central role in shaping human motivation. This study addresses this cultural gap seen in the existing literatures.

Gambrel and Cianci (2003) argue that Maslow's hierarchy was developed and tested in western cultures characterized by individualism. So, it may not apply in collectivist societies in the same manner. Despite this warning regarding probable theoretical inconsistency, very few studies have used a South Asian film to test Maslow's model in a collectivist context. This study tries to fill this research gap by referencing to a relevant film.

To address the problem, this study has set three purposes-initially, it investigates the way Baskhar's journey in *Lucky Baskhar* represent each of the five levels in Maslow's model. Second, this study looks at how Indian collectivist values like family

responsibility and social rank give form to motivational patterns inside the film. Lastly, it investigates the way by which Lucky Baskhar can be used as an instructional tool for motivation theory in South Asian educational institutions, particularly for students of India and Nepal.

Literature Review

Several studies have used Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to analyze films and link them with the study of human behavior. For example, Truman et al. (2017) examined *Life of Pi* to see how the main character, Pi, moves through different levels of need after a shipwreck. By interpreting the dialogues and narrations, they showed that survival becomes the most dominant need in crisis situations.

Similarly, Suryani (2022) analyzed *Colette* and found that all five levels of Maslow's need are reflected in the main character. The study used dialogues, appearances, and character actions as sources of data. It also showed that films can present motivation theory through a character's lived experiences. In another study, Nila et al. (2022) explored the story of Einar Wegener in *The Danish Girl*. Their analysis showed that the character is able to meet physiological, safety, love and belonging, and esteem needs. However, self-actualization need remains unfulfilled due to social constraints. Likewise, Fajriah and Budi (2025) examined how the main character in *The Whale* struggles to fulfill different levels of need. They found that unsatisfied physiological and self-acceptance strongly influence emotional and behavioral patterns.

Most of the studies analyze movies from the western cultures. These studies suggest that the Maslow's theory may not work uniformly across all cultures around the globe. Gambrel and Cianci (2003) explored the usefulness of Maslow's hierarchy of needs in group-centered cultures, with focus on China. According to them, since Maslow's model was originally developed and tested using individuals from the U.S., it cannot fully explain how motivations happen in collectivist cultures. This finding shows the motivation dynamics are dependent on cultures. Therefore, the findings of Gambrel and Cianci (2003) have highlighted the relevance of this study. Thus, this study connects

Maslow's hierarchy of needs to the Indian film *Lucky Baskhar*, demonstrating its cultural significance as a learning tool for students in this region. The movie has an Indian setting consisting of themes related to family responsibility and societal pressure. These themes connect to Indian as well as to the Nepalese culture. As Nepal shares cultural similarities with India, especially in valuing family and community, *Lucky Baskhar* can also show how motivation develops in Nepalese people as well. This cultural link is missing in the other studies, which don't focus on South Asian contexts.

A thematic review of the studies discussed above reveals three themes. The first theme is survival and basic needs which we can find in the studies on *Life of Pi* (Truman et al., 2017) and *The Whale* (Fajriah & Budi, 2025). The characters in those movies are driven primarily by physiological and safety needs under extreme conditions. The second theme is identity and social belonging, which we can find in the studies on *The Danish Girl* (Nila et al., 2022) and *Colette* (Suryani, 2022). In that movie, the characters struggle for acceptance and recognition within their social environments. The third theme focuses on cultural context and self-actualization. Although it appears across all the studies, it is mostly discussed within Western cultural settings.

This study builds on these three themes as supported by the existing research. However, it has also introduced a fourth theme that was absent from existing literature-collectivist motivation. Studies claim that motivation in South Asian cultures like India and Nepal is created by family obligations and community expectations instead of personal desires. The journey of Baskhar in *Lucky Baskhar* shows this collectivist pattern because most of the choices of Baskhar are influenced by family duty. When Baskhar joins financial scams or when Baskhar talks with the CBI, the choices are not moved by personal ambition alone. Because the responsibility toward the family drives the actions of Baskhar, *Lucky Baskhar* becomes a meaningful case to apply Maslow's framework.

This study uses *Lucky Baskhar* to show how movies help make complex concepts comprehensible. This paper brings a collectivist's perspective that was not present in the earlier literature regarding film-based learning.

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative research design. More specifically, it uses textual and narrative analysis to explore how human motivation is represented in *Lucky Baskhar*. A Qualitative analysis is suitable for this study because the study is concerned with interpreting dialogues, character actions and key events to uncover deeper insights about motivation.

The primary source of data for this study is the Indian film titled *Lucky Baskhar*. The English subtitles available on Netflix, a movie streaming website, was used as the textual data for the analysis. Subtitles were used because they provide a written record of dialogues that can be reviewed and coded in a systematic manner.

Purposive sampling technique was followed for data collection. In simple words, the scenes and dialogues that clearly showed a character's motivation were chosen. These motivations were then linked to related level in Maslow's framework. Scenes that did not show any clear motivation were left out from the analysis.

The study uses Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) as its analytical framework. The framework comprises five levels- physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, esteem, and self-actualization. Each selected scene or dialogue was coded against these five levels. The coding process involved three steps. First, motivational contents behind the dialogues and the scenes were identified. Second, the identified scenes were assigned to one of the five need levels based on their relevance. Third, the coded scenes were reviewed again to check for consistency. In order to ensure that the analysis has followed a systematic procedure, multiple revisions of the codes and multiple re-readings were performed.

This analysis also has applied a cultural lens to add an interpretative layer which is based on the work of Gambrel and Cianci (2003). They argue that values from the collectivist culture shape motivational priorities. So, the selected scenes were also closely watched to see if there are any evidences related to family duty, social obligation and community pressures. These values highly relate to Indian and Nepalese cultures.

A key limitation of this study is that being a subtitle-based analysis, it hasn't incorporated on-verbal cues such as facial expressions, pitch and tone of actors in various contexts. That is to say, the study may not have fully captured the emotional aspects

Results

During the analysis, it was revealed that 18 scenes and dialogues were clearly reflecting motivational behaviors. After identifying the relevant scenes, coding was conducted based on Maslow's five hierarchical needs. Six scenes were assigned to the code 'physiological needs and safety needs'. These are the scenes depicting Baskhar's early struggles where financial survival needs dominated mostly. Five scenes that were reflecting Baskhar's desire for social recognition were assigned to the code "love and belonging". Next four scenes that showed his search for respect and higher status were coded under esteem needs. Out of eighteen, final three scenes were coded under self-actualization. These three scenes showed how he eventually returned to personal values. Cultural coding revealed that in collective cultures, family and social obligations can shape motivations across different levels of needs. This finding is consistent with the view of Gambrel and Cianci's (2003). The following sub-sections present the results level by level.

Physiological Needs

Baskhar starts with a struggle to meet basic needs like food and shelter. As a bank cashier earning 6,000 rupees a month with a 36,000-rupee debt, he feels trapped by poverty. He says, "I don't have money in my pocket to buy a bus ticket to go home. I don't even have a pocket. What's poverty if not this?" To provide for his family, he joins scams, like an import-export deal with Anthony, to earn quick money. This shows how basic needs drive his early actions.

Safety Needs

After meeting his basic needs, Baskhar pursues financial security. This aligns with the safety needs in Maslow's Hierarchy. He desires to get a promotion to the post of

Assistant Regional Manager. The promotion would stabilize his family's future. But he feels insecure when he's denied the promotion due to favoritism, as hinted in the dialogue-"They are both Bengalis belonging to the same caste. They say he must have taken a bribe". This drives him toward taking bigger risks like manipulating bank funds so as to gain control over his financial condition. This shows why safety needs influence in making highly risky choices in South Asian cultures where jobs are considered major reason to ensure family stability.

Love and Belonging

Many of Baskhar's actions are influenced by 'love and belonging' need. In one scene, his wife Sumathi is hurt by the disrespect which, according to her, was a result of poverty. She said, "They don't even like to feed our kid.....only because we are poor, right? Money brings respect, love, and everything. "Baskhar organizes a lavish party on the occasion of his son, Karthik's birthday. Karthik says, "My friends used to make fun of me...but no one will tease me after today." This shows the importance of fulfilling family respect and belongingness need in south Asian countries like India and Nepal, where community bonds are very strong.

Esteem

Baskhar's desire for self-respect and respect from others become evident when a shopkeeper makes fun of his middle-class status by throwing a remark, "They drive a Maruti 800, wear Bata shoes, and use HMT watches.....can they buy diamonds?" Deeply hurt by the insult, Baskhar later spends a large amount of money and admits, "I wanted to buy his arrogance. "His reaction reflects a strong need for social respect and recognition. But his wife, Sumathi is concerned by the changes in his behavior. She dislikes this change and she tells him, "I want the old Baskhar, I want our old life. "This moment highlights the struggle between gaining social respect and remaining true to one's honest identity. This type of tension is frequently seen in many South Asian societies where social status is of great importance.

Self-Actualization

Baskhar's journey toward his self-actualization is not straightforward. In the beginning, his efforts seem genuine where his goal was to provide a better life to his family. But those efforts gradually transform into an intense pursuit for wealth and success. His father recognizes this change and makes him cautious with a remark-"The intoxication of the game makes you forget the very family." This warning reflects how Baskhar's ambitions have begun to overshadow his previous values. Later, he wants to stop this chase and tells his wife- "I can't bring back our olden days, Sumathi. But I am ready to offer you the Baskhar of old times,". With this statement, he acknowledges the risks and costs associated with his choices and how he wants to go back to his former self. This moment shows Baskhar's renewed appreciation for relationships and family values. Yet, his decision to move to the United States also indicates that his search for personal growth and financial success has not entirely ended. Rather than presenting self-actualization as an ultimate achievement, the film portrays it as an ongoing struggle between material ambitions and the desire to live a meaningful, authentic life.

Cultural Influence

In collectivist cultures such as India and Nepal, family duties are often prioritized over individual desires and ambitions. Strong sense of family responsibility is clearly reflected in Baskhar's choices throughout the film which can be seen in the scenes like-providing funds for his brother's education and sister's wedding. Similarly, his willingness to cooperate with the CBI despite potential risks demonstrate the extent to which family priorities can determine his choices. These examples suggest that Baskhar's motivation cannot be fully captured by individual needs alone and therefore, family obligations should be incorporated as well. This is because, family obligations operate as a powerful force across different stages of his life, shaping decisions that might otherwise appear irrational from a purely personal perspective. This observation supports the argument that Maslow's hierarchy may need some changes to adapt to collectivist cultures, where family and community interests often hold equal or even greater importance than individual needs.

Discussion

This section compares the findings of the study with those reported in earlier studies. Direct comparisons are made where similar themes were available and where such similar themes were not available, findings are discussed by linking them to the most closely related theme.

The findings related to physiological and safety needs are broadly consistent with the findings of Truman et al. (2017) where he presented that the protagonist in *Life of Pi* is primarily motivated by the need to survive after a shipwreck. Similar pattern is seen in Baskhar's early action of joining scams to pay off debt and support his family. It can be said that those scams-related early actions are guided by the same basic survival concerns. However, the nature of survival differs in two stories-Survival in *Life of Pi* is individual and physical whereas *Lucky Baskhar* presents survival as economic and family centered challenge. This difference highlights the influence of collectivist cultural context where family survival is preferred over those of individuals.

The findings on the theme love and belonging are similar to that of *The Danish Girl* by Nila et al. (2022) where they found that the main character seeks to get acceptance and recognition in a social environment. Baskhar's situation is directly comparable to that because his family is looked down upon because of their poverty and he strongly desire to earn respect and social acceptance. Despite this similarity, the sources of belonging need are different in these two studies. Einar's belonging need is closely related to personal identity whereas Baskhar's needs are rooted in family honor and reputation. This distinction further highlights the significance of collectivist values, where an individual's sense of belonging is closely based on the status and acceptance of the family as a whole.

The findings related to esteem needs are also consistent with those reported by Suryani (2022) in the analysis of *Colette*. The author found that the main character in *Colette* wants recognition and respect in a society where she was struggling with the gender-based restrictions and limitations placed upon her.

Although not gender-based, Baskhar's pursuit of esteem follows a similar pattern. He sees wealth as a tool of gaining respect and recognition. This is evident in the dialogue by him- "I wanted to buy his arrogance." Although the circumstances are different, characters in both cases rely on external means to satisfy their esteem needs. The comparison suggests that individuals frequently seek esteem through achievements that are valued and recognized by the society they live in.

The findings on self-actualization are more complex. Fajriah and Budi (2025) found that the main character in *The Whale* struggles to achieve self-actualization due to unresolved issue of self-acceptance. Baskhar, however, faces a different kind of barrier. He begins to move towards self-actualization when he decides to return to his old values. However, his move to the United States suggests that this process is not fully complete. In both cases, self-actualization remains unfinished. It is blocked either by self-rejection or by continued material desires.

Across all four need levels, the findings of this study support the arguments of Gambrel and Cianci's (2003) that collectivist cultures can reshape Maslow's hierarchy of needs. In *Lucky Baskhar*, family obligation is seen as a motivating factor at every level. It is evident in actions- from earning money for basic needs to seeking respect for the family name. This pattern is not observed in the Western films discussed in earlier studies, where motivation is largely portrayed as basically individual rather than collective.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings support Mathews et al. (2012) that both the age and cultural background of students must be considered when selecting films for classroom use. *Lucky Baskhar* is particularly suitable for students in India and Nepal because the motivational patterns in the film closely reflect their own cultural experiences. Reyes-Santias et al. (2022) further suggest that post-viewing discussions can further improve learning outcomes. Baskhar's morally complex choices such as fraud, manipulation, and negotiation with authorities provide rich material for this kind of classroom discussion.

Conclusion

Lucky Baskhar can be an effective tool for teaching-learning Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. The film depicts clearly how the character progresses through different levels of needs- from basic and safety needs to love, esteem, and finally towards self-actualization. Dialogues like "I don't have money in my pocket" and "I want the old Baskhar" make the theory easy to understand and more relatable. The Indian setting of the film is also worth noting as it highlights the cultural context showing how motivation is influenced by family and social pressures. This further suggests that Maslow's theory may need some adjustments so that the cultural nuances of countries like India and Nepal are better reflected.

Films are not only a source of entertainment but have educational importance as well, particularly to those students who can relate and connect to their own culture and society. Movies can be utilized as a bridge between theoretical complexity and practical understanding because movies make learning engaging for students who can connect. Thus, this study shows that culturally relevant films have educational values. Future research can extend this approach to explore more regional films through the lens of other theories- like Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory or Victor Vroom's Expectancy Theory of motivation.

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