

Navigating Refugee Trauma and Identity Negotiation: A Maslowian Investigation of Hierarchical Fulfilment in Chris Cleave's *The Other Hand*

¹K. Gowri, ²Dr. S. Christina Rebecca

¹Research Scholar, Department of English

Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science & Higher Education for Women,
Coimbatore, India

Mail ID: gowrikumar2629@gmail.com

²Professor, Department of English

Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science & Higher Education for Women,
Coimbatore, India

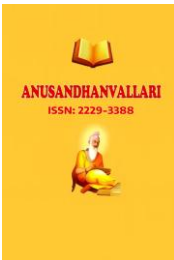
Abstract

The research article explores the character analyses of Little Bee, undocumented refugee in Chris Cleave's *the Other Hand*, through the theoretical lens of Abraham Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Human Needs.' The paper traces Bee's experiences as an adolescent African refugee, investigating her journey from premigration trauma, forced geographical dislocation to eventual deportation in the UK, by focusing on the quest for identity and self-reclamation. The article illustrates the non-linear and partial satisfaction of the hierarchy. The analysis claims that for displaced communities, sense of belongingness functions as the psychological imperatives to overcome marginalization and homelessness. Furthermore, this paper underscores the impact of socio-political context of migratory trauma in restructuring the disrupted identity among the marginalised population.

Keywords: detention, outsider, Maslow, refugee, survival.

The novel *Other Hand*, written by Chris Cleave, revolves around dual narrators, an African refugee and a British journalist. The novel centres on the journey of young Nigerian girl Little Bee, whose life is irrevocably disrupted by the armed conflict of the Oil War, which results in the destruction of her entire village and the death of her sister Nkiruka. Her illegal journey to the UK, and subsequent detention in prison-like surroundings and eventual state of non-belongingness during her stay in London frames her existence as an illegal and undocumented refugee constantly facing precarity.

The research paper explores Little Bee's challenging transition from African young girl to undocumented UK refugee, particularly investigating her struggles to attain physiological and psychological needs as she strives to overcome multifaceted nature of displacement trauma. The primary objective of the article is to examine the characterization of Little Bee through the theoretical lens of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs. His hierarchy offers an important framework of understanding individual's motivation, asserting that individuals strive to meet the five set of needs – physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-



actualization. As Maslow posited, “Our actions are motivated in order to achieve certain needs” (370). By incorporating this model, the paper sheds light on the socio-political context of forced displacement, fundamentally complicate the marginalized and victimized individual’s journey towards identity formation and self-assertion.

Physiological needs:

The physiological needs constitute the first and foundational tier of Maslow’s hierarchy of Human Needs, encompassing essential imperatives for survival – air, water, food, shelter, sleep and sexual drive. However, Maslow’s hierarchy asserts this drive as the preeminent need, as its satisfaction becomes prerequisite for the emergence of other psychological drives. For the minority populations subjected to forced migration, including illegal migrants and refugees, lack physiological requirements such as food and shelter, is a defining feature of their harrowing experience, often exacerbated by marginalization and statelessness with the host societies.

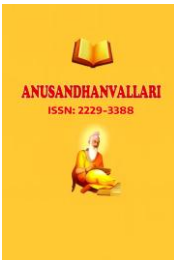
In *The Other Hand*, the protagonist Bee’s initial migratory trauma illustrates the struggle for survival. Following, Little Bee’s harrowing escape from the “Oil Company men” (Cleave 107), and two years confinement in the detention center symbolizes a life reduced to bare minimum of existence. The detention period is characterized by constant despair, result in repeated suicidal provocation and severe physical torment, maintained under white fluorescent strip light. Her act of eating whatever provided in the center, despite her trauma and distress, is not considered as the sign of recovery but an act of survival driven by pragmatic goal:

I began to eat the meals they brought me. I thought to myself, you must keep up your strength, Little Bee, or you will be too weak to kill your foolish Self when the time arrives, and then you will be sorry. (Cleave 70)

This exhibits that her engagement with such physiological need is instrumental, becomes a temporal goal, rather than positing secure fulfilment. Griffin notes that in physiological needs, the individuals crave for food, sleep, freedom of movement, and a moderate temperature. After two years in the detention center, during her stay in Sarah’s house. It is evident that Little Bee experiences symbolic recollection of native food. Tasting tea triggers a powerful nostalgic engagement for her lost homeland, transcending geographical sustenance. The aroma of tea makes her feel better about remembering her village: “Tea is the taste of my land; it is bitter and warm, strong, and sharp with memory. It tastes of longing. It tastes of the distance between where you are and where you come from.” (Cleave 184). The olfactory and gustatory experience of tea provides a fleeting connection to her origin and identity, demonstrating how a fundamental physiological act can be embedded with complex emotional and psychological significance,

we never tasted tea in my village, even though they grow it in the east of my country, where the land rises up into the clouds and the trees grow long soft beards of moss from the wet air. There is the east, the plantations stretch up the green hillsides and vanish into the mist. The tea they grow, that vanishes too. I think all of it is exported. Myself I never tasted tea until I was exported with it. The boat I travelled in to your country, it was loaded with tea. (Cleave 183-184)

Such nostalgic engagement highlights the transformation from survival-driven consumption to an engagement with food practices as a psychological anchor and channel for emotional refueling. Thus, for the displaced community, a simple act of having the native food transcends survival, resulting a powerful sensory mnemonic for the lost native sociocultural roles.



Safety needs:

Maslow's hierarchy of needs posits that safety needs can be attained only after the sufficient gratification of physiological needs. However, the safety needs encompass health, protected environment, and secure shelter. At this juncture, the drive and urgency for safety can render more significant than all other motivations. Maslow notes that "if it is extreme enough or chronic enough, a man may be characterized as living almost for safety alone" (376). Throughout the novel, it is evident that the protagonists Little Bee struggles to establish safety needs, despite meeting her basic physiological needs. The loss of safety needs is powerfully underscored through the profound trauma in premigration and detention period. For instance, in her premigration period, Bee escapes from the so-called "oil men" (Cleave 107), as her village has been burnt down and villagers are killed. Bee witnesses her sister Nkiruka being raped and killed by the military men, "When the men and the dogs were finished my sister, the only parts of her that they threw into sea were the parts could not be eaten" (188). After witnessing Nkiruka's death, her assumption towards the self and external world totally disrupts, as "Death can challenge one's assumption about the world and one's personal identity" (Worden 4).

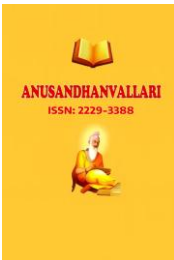
In the novel, Bee's detention period is symbolized as the profound loss of self and safety due to the treat of sexual exploitation. The novel portrays the privatization of detention center, where the centre lacks transparency and accountability due to failing protection regime under UK immigration detention system. Throughout her stay, the notion "*To survive you must look good or talk good*" (Cleave 9) echoed all over the center:

At night they kept the men in a different wing of the detention center. They caged them like wolves when the sun went down, but in the day time the men walked among us, ate the same food we did. I thought they still looked hungry. I thought they watched me with ravenous eyes. So when the older girls whispered to me, to survive you must look good or talk good, I decided that talking would be safer for me. (Cleave 9)

In order to avoid sex trafficking, Bee chooses to talk Queen's English. Cleave calls men as "wolves" (9) due to their sexual appetite and the female inmates as the sexual objects. However, Bee remains to be genderless among the inmates by making herself undesirable – hiding her breast and dressing like a boy, "I wore loose blue jeans and a man's Hawaiian shirt and heavy black boots with the steel toe caps shining through the torn leather. I went to the detention nurse and I made her cut my hair very short with medical scissors." (9) The novel also sheds light on the unsettling traumatic condition of other female detainees – "The girl with no name", "The girl in the yellow saree", and "The girl with scars on her legs" (14) Unlike Bee, survival sex as the only way for their survival, as their body becomes the site of marginality and vulnerability.

In the context of unfulfillment of safety need, "you become concerned, not with needs like hunger and thirst, but with your fears and anxieties" (Boeree 4). Such psychological inversion is traced in Little Bee's exposure to traumatic events, where she compared her status as an undocumented refugee with the British people, in the case of security in the UK. Her comparison explicates the inequity of belongingness and mobility, by question herself that why an African girl cannot not reside peacefully in the United Kingdom. This comparison is powerfully articulated through her longing to be a mobile, inanimate thing – British pound, while it holds safety comparing to a refugee girl. She wishes to be a coin instead of an African refugee,

A pound can go wherever it thinks it will be safest. It can cross the deserts and oceans and leave the sound of gunfire and the bitter smell of burning thatch behind. How I Would love to be a British pound. A pound is free to travel to safety, and we are free to watch it go. This is called the human triumph. This is called *globalisation*. (Cleave 2)



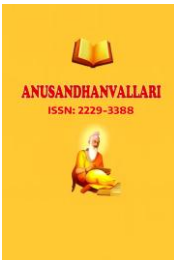
Despite having temporary shelter from Sarah, Bee is exposed to pervasive emotional and psychological harm, unable to escape the trauma inflicted during her premigration and detention period. Her profound insecurity results to a deep sense of fear about deportation, “I do not know. I am illegal, Sarah. The men can come anytime to send me back to my country” (196). Her subsequent consideration of self-harm to avoid being caught shows the intensity of the existential threat. Thus, throughout the novel, Bee’s safety needs remain unsatisfied.

Love and Belonging needs:

Maslow asserts that, once an individual is well gratified with their fundamental physiological and safety needs, the drive for belongingness, love and affection become prominent, “If both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified, then there will emerge the love and affection and belonging needs, and the whole cycle” (381). He argues that the individuals in these needs would try to seek meaningful connection with family, peers, and community – a place of belongingness. Failure to achieve this fundamental need can resist an individual from advancing to higher stages in the hierarchy such as self-esteem and self-actualization. Similarly, the characterization of the protagonist Little Bee explicates the devastating consequences of unfulfilled Love and Belonging needs. Her trauma stems from witnessing her sister Nkiruka’s death, a horror that permeates her existence and manifests as a persistent longing for her lost family and homeland. Throughout the novel, the memory of Nkiruka and sibling bereavement is evident, “All through that night it seemed to me as if my big sister Nkiruka walked beside me.” (Cleave 115)

Furthermore, Griffin states that, “giving love is more than the maternal instinct implanted by nature and receiving love is a way of staving off the pangs of loneliness and rejection.” (128). Sharing communal bond plays a fundamental role in contributing the subjective well-being and emotional resilience. Additionally, the reception of social support and love from the host community serves as a catalyst against psychological trauma and helps in personality development and integration. For Little Bee, the immigration detention center represents a profound negation of belongingness, by imposing a sense of isolation and vulnerability. Although for the initial period of post migration, Bee tries to fit into the socio-cultural spectrum of the UK, she remains alienated, and outsider due to her racial and ethnic background.

The relationship with the second protagonist Sarah and her child Charlie helps Bee to facilitate healing and emotional growth. Sarah’s insistence that Bee stay with them offers a critical aid for Little Bee to receive trust and love she desperately needed. Such relational bond between Sarah and Bee becomes the drive for Little Bee’s emotional progression, allowing her to restructure her disrupted self and external core identity, as she finally claims a new family role, “But while I am here I will be like your daughter. I will love you as if you were my mother and I will love Charlie as if he was my brother.” (Cleave 212) For refugees like Bee, the loss of family and home becomes a huge deficit in love and belongingness, claiming not just a shelter, but to re-anchor the emotional entities. Bee’s ability to move towards self-esteem and self-actualization is directly enabled by the act of love and acceptance offered by Sarah and Charlie. This stresses that the interpersonal connection is the crucial bridge that allows the individuals to transcend survival by revamping new identity.



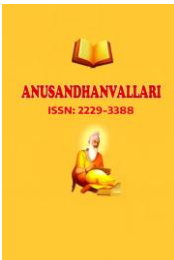
The Esteem needs:

Maslow asserts that the esteem needs represent the basic human desire for a stable and self-evaluation, encompassing respect among the self and external world. He has categorised these needs into two distinct trajectories: the first involves internal desires for adequacy, strength, confidence, achievement, autonomy and independence. The second trajectory involves the external desires including recognition, reputation and appreciation. Maslow precisely defines self-esteem as “the desire for strength for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for confidence in the face of the world, and independence and freedom” (381). The gratification of esteem needs can be theorised to generate a sense of self-worth, strength and confidence, resulting in emotional refueling and meaning making. Followingly, the failure of such needs results in inferiority, non-belongingness and marginalization.

The novel *The other Hand* sheds light on the multifaceted psychological distress of refugee inmates, specifically through the lens of Bee’s quest of esteem. For a certain period of time, Bee is subjected to denial and self-effacement within the detention center, and later she actively resists the marginal stereotype imposed upon her. Her perception of the wounds and scars on the other refugee inmates is viewed as the marker of identity – is reinterpreted not as “ugly” but as an affirmation of resilience and survival. Her statement, ““We must see all scars as beauty, okay? This will be our secret. Because take it from me, a scar does not form on the dying. A scar means, ‘I survived’” (Cleave 13-14), becomes a powerful assertion of endurance and self-worth, thereby transcending a physical trauma into a source of self-esteem.

Furthermore, Bee employs her linguistic mastery as a strategic aid for integration and empowerment. Her linguistic competence serves as a robust mechanism that allows her to assert new hybrid identity that helps to act according to the host country’s social and cultural codes, ““I have been in your country two years. I learned your language and I learned your rules. I am more like you than me now.” (Cleave 269). By calling host country’s language as “Queen’s English” (4), Bee gains fluency by reading “*The Times*”, “*Collins Gem Pocket Dictionary*” and by watching programs “*Love Island* and *Hell’s Kitchen* and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*”. Such strategic adoption of socio-cultural identifiers, developed through language acquisition, necessitates agency to restructure new social identity. However, Bee’s observation of diverse ethnic and sociocultural families in the park solidifies her longing for inclusion, “But I looked around that place and I realise that there were other families like this. Most were white but some were black, as many as were black were mixed. I smiled when I saw this.” (Cleave 309-310), reinforcing her aspiring to join the host community and fulfil her need for belongingness and recognition within the British populace.

Moreover, in the novel, Little Bee’s adjustment to London’s nonhuman environment and her navigation of the city is deeply shaped by her experience as a refugee, acute sense of survival and her observation to fit into the host country. Bee’s adventure trip with Sarah, Charlie and Lawrence to explore London helps her adaptation easier, as she witnesses people from different cultural and racial background. London holds many different races and nationalities making up the city’s vibrant cultural mosaic, as well as the various languages that “mingled in the London air,” fill Little Bee with wonder and excitement. Looking at the crowd strolling along the Thames walkway, Little Bee realizes that “there is no them. This endless procession of people, walking beside this great river, these people are you” (219). She even contemplates taking a name, “London Sunshine,” that would suit her new sense of identity: “All the power of the city was flowing up through the warm stones beneath my feet and entering my body. Yes, I thought. This is the moment. Even for a girl like me, then, there comes a day when she can stop surviving and start living” (220). Happy to be “inside the crowd,” she lets herself be “taken along by this river of human souls that flowed beside the river” (220). Therefore, Bee reclaims the sense of belongingness and adaptability by observing the London’s physical environment.



Self-actualization:

Self-actualization represents the highest level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, characterized by profound self-awareness and a predominance with personal growth and the gratification of individual's potential. However, the emergence of this drive is determined upon the prior, satisfactory fulfilment of physiological, safety, love, and esteem needs. Maslow posits that, Self-actualization constitutes the "desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (qtd. in Griffin 130). Primarily, self-actualization is considered as "a harmonious unity of physiological and psychological capacities or needs that exert a constant pressure on the organism for release and fulfillment" (Geller 62).

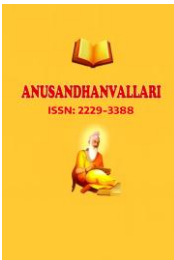
In the novel *The Other Hand*, the protagonist Little Bee's transformative journey can be critically explored through this theoretical lens. Her actions are strongly pronounced by the pursuit of recognition and freedom within the host country, particularly the longingness to shed the identity of being an alien refugee and attain integration within British society. Self-actualization as a crucial drive manifests through the tangible efforts, including the acquisition of the host country's language and local culture to navigate. However, her past trauma undermines to achieve psychological fulfillment, specifically safety and belonging, remain uncertain. Her desire to escape her alien status is captured, "Sometimes I wish I could take one day off from being Little Bee." (Cleave 312)

Little Bee changes her name twice and chooses English name. Even before reaching London, Little Bee, whose original name is Udo and her sister Nkiruka change their name into English names in order to survive, where their original name holds their tribal identity. However, they could not find common English name, they have picked random words in English to frame new names. Nkiruka changes her name into "Kindness" (Cleave), and Udo wishes to change her name as Little Bee, when she notices a bee flies to a beautiful flower, "'My name is Little Bee,' she said, when she heard this name, Kindness smiled" (101). In the post migration period, Bee changes her name again, where she finds her name is not a common English name like Sophie, Joshua etc., During her adventure trip to explore London, Bee frames a new name by recollecting the English vocabulary that she learnt. The name comes to her mind when she sees the huge city in front of her, "My name is London Sunshine" (Cleave 221). Thus, individuals' name often carry cultural markers that can either marginalize or privilege their societal status. By choosing these names, Bee deliberately sheds her original Nigerian name, symbolizing the erasure of pre-colonial identity in order to navigate life in the host society. Her original name, most likely unfamiliar or foreign to the British society, would mark her as an outsider, making it more difficult to adapt into the host society.

Bee's attempt to reconstruct a hybrid identity in the host country, such as mastering "Queen's English" and mimicking like the second protagonist Sarah, posit a striving toward esteem and belonging, but ultimately fail to cultivate self-actualization. Bee's identity as an African refugee proves inseparable, tracing her to the novel's conclusion. such unfulfilled drive is resolved not through the achievement of Maslow's crucial tier, but through the act of identity negotiation and self-acceptance. Ultimately, Little Bee embraces her fundamental self, "Ah, so I am a girl, then an African girl. This is what I am and this is how I will stay." (Cleave 364) such acceptance represents a reconciliation of identity in the face of external obstacles.

Conclusion:

The analysis of Chris Cleave's *The Other Hand*, illustrates Little Bee's partial fulfilment of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, despite multifaceted forced displacement trauma, ultimately aiding her transition toward self-



identification. She satisfies physiological needs by accepting the survival and accommodation in the detention center, and later achieves love and belonging need through her relationship with Sarah and Charlie. However, Little Bee's persistent feeling of fear and unsafety, stemming from her traumatic past, explores that safe haven provided by Sarah cannot be fully satisfy the psychological need for safety when her internal trauma persists. Bee's effort in mastering the host country's language and adopting new socio-cultural patterns signifies a successful esteem need. The novel imposes the protagonists' eventual acceptance of her African identity, indicates a partial fulfilment of self-actualization, that rooted from self-affirmation rather than societal integration. The article puts forth that the sense of belongingness is not merely a preference, but a psychological imperative. The novel serves as a powerful investigation demonstrating how an undocumented individual can satisfy the needs for esteem and belonging, transforming from a state of helplessness to one of active participation and reclamation. The article suggests that individuals experiencing forced displacement and threat, the psychological resilience may not be fulfilled, but the affirmation of the self despite the external world denies their identity. Therefore, Bee's journey underscores the need to consider socio-political context and the impact of migratory trauma when incorporating psychological theories to marginalized populations.

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