Abstract

To Realize and to Release: Self Actualization in the Poetry of Adrienne Rich and Nikki Giovanni

The urge for creativity is a response to the need of a sensitive mind – the need to realize one’s potential. Humanistic Psychology identifies this as the need of self actualization. This response finds fulfillment as it steps out to release – the fruits of which manifest as products of literature when it comes from a writer.

This thesis aims to establish that the need of self actualization is a driving force behind literary creativity. The focus is on two contemporary American poets, Adrienne Rich and Nikki Giovanni. An analysis of their poetry in the backdrop of their lives endeavors to prove two ideas: (i) the need to realize (the need of self actualization) is the motivating force in their evolution as poets and (ii) their poems serve to release what they have discovered in their progress as self actualizers.

The thesis begins with a brief preface, serving as a statement of the theme, and then highlights the ideas that are to come in the later chapters. The first chapter titled “Readings in Psychology: The Theory of Self Actualization” explains the concept of self actualization and analyses the different aspects of humanistic psychology in terms of the two women poets.

The second chapter, “Rendering it in Words: Self Actualization in Contemporary American Poetry”, links self actualization to literary
creativity. A contextual approach is adopted here by considering self actualization with respect to Contemporary American poetry. In the third chapter, “Reacting to a Restriction: Self Actualization in Adrienne Rich”, the person and poetry of Adrienne Rich are considered. Her concerns, roles and transitions are dealt with here.

The fourth chapter is “Responding to a Responsibility: Self Actualization in Nikki Giovanni”. It examines how Nikki Giovanni evolves as a self actualizing poet. Her poems prove her progression as a mature, confident poet emerging as a victorious self actualizer. The fifth chapter, “Releasing the Realization: The Self Actualizing Poets”, is a study in comparison and contrast. It proves how self actualization is achieved by the two poets in diverse ways. The thesis concludes here with a confidence that the idea of self actualization fits well into the realm of literature, serving both as a need and a goal in the evolution of writers who aim to release what they have realized.