Preface

A life of satisfaction is a dream that often awaits realization. Satisfaction is the fulfillment of dreams and desires, which are shaped by the beliefs and actions of a person. Attainment of basic and ordinary physiological needs may satisfy some. But there are others who nurture the desire that their lives should be the realization and utilization of their potentials to the maximum. This desire is termed as self actualization in psychology, and a person who presses forward with a realization of this as his need and desire is called a self actualizer.

A realization of self actualization as an ultimate goal prompts a self actualizer to aim for it in the creativity of his own works. Women of the twenty first century, who wish to live their own lives according to their own dictates and choices, reflect elements of self actualization. For writers, realization of the self actualizing need in their lives enable them to release it in the creativity of their works, thereby making them self actualizers.

Among the several theories on personality, humanistic psychology explains the goal of self actualization, which is a personality feeling of fulfillment. The experiences in life are unique for every individual. These experiences are released in creativity and this enhances the personality of an individual. Tracing out the progression of the activities of a person eventually help in finding out the path of his development as a self actualizing person.
This study takes up two American women poets who may be seen as self actualizers. Adrienne Rich is a Jewish, lesbian poet and Nikki Giovanni is an African American poet. Both are lecturers in English and both write poetry according to their own style. They are daring forerunners in their domain. Their life is evident in their poetry.

The key component of this thesis lies in analyzing the different ways in which self actualization is achieved in and by the two poets. These two American women poets stand apart from the other women in their society. Their relationships with other women are special and they are always ready to fight for the causes of women. Their experiences are different even when they are in the same country, as they come from different social and ethnic backgrounds. It is interesting to note their progression in life as bold and courageous women in their own right. The unique decisions in their life and their determination to act accordingly make them different and their creativity differ in certain ways, yet similar in being daring, independent women, conscious of their rights. Self actualization for them is a felt need, to which they respond convincingly, each in their own manner. It is interesting to trace their progression from young poets to mature, confident adult poets, conscious of their women rights and also of their fellow sisters.

Self actualization in these two poets is evident when one considers how they interact with their society, relating to people of all ages, irrespective
of color, caste or creed. They are open to new experiences. Their bold
endeavors help them in their life to be successful, constantly learning from
others and releasing their potential to achieve their ultimate, capable self.

For instance, Adrienne Rich violently reacts to the restrictions
imposed in her life by her father and later on, her husband, and she rejects
these restrictions to take a daring, different, yet difficult task. She decides to
be independent and to follow the dictates of her own conscience and thus
become free in her life. She goes on to become a political and social activist,
fighting for women rights and becoming an authority on women issues. She
strongly advocates lesbianism and has her own strong opinions on
motherhood and other women-related topics. For her, poetry becomes the
medium to reveal her thoughts and she goes on to make a difference in the
minds of her readers. She talks openly, without restriction, on topics which
are considered taboo, in the society. She advocates sisterhood and she has
her own opinions on political issues. She is against war and its atrocities and
she openly declares her opinions. She is a known figure in America due to
her unorthodox views and opinions, but she is loved all the more because of
it. She is a popular name among the writers of America.

Nikki Giovanni is an African American poet who responds positively
to her responsibilities as a woman poet, mother, daughter and social activist.
She blends the private and the public experiences in her own style to create
beautiful works of poetry and prose. She relates to people of all generations, both young children and old people alike and is loved in return by all. She is intent in celebrating African American pride and their ways of life in all her works. She always upholds the traditions of the African Americans and is very proud to be one among them. She bluntly reacts to the disparities found in her society and among her people. She lashes out against the treatment meted out by the men in her society towards their women. She never spares other people for disregarding her people. She encourages her people to stand up for their rights and she is a fierce fighter for social justice. It is interesting to note her progression as a self actualizing African American women poet, who is truthful as well as popular and bold in her convictions. She renders her responsibilities truthfully and capably and is truly a self actualizing person in her own right.

This thesis aims at outlining the progression of the two women poets in their growth as self actualizing poets. Their cultural backgrounds are different and this influences their life to a very large extent. They release their experiences in their poems. They attain self actualization in different ways, due to their different experiences and this is clear when the progression of their poems is analyzed.

The first chapter, “Readings in Psychology: The Theory of Self Actualization” deals with the different theories on personality. The chapter
opens with an explanation on the concept of humanistic psychology, and also highlights how humanistic psychology is different from psychoanalysis and behaviorism. The relevance of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers as theorists in self actualization is brought out, with reference to the studies of psychologists Larry A. Hjelle and David J. Zeigler. The former two have expounded on the theory of self actualization and the characteristics of self actualizers while the latter two explain the different aspects of humanistic psychology. The study moves on to consider the different aspects of humanistic psychology, such as feminist, philosophical, psychological and sociological. Supporting views of various other scholars are also taken into consideration. The aim of this chapter is to break the ground, facilitating a confident consideration of the two writers Adrienne Rich and Nikki Giovanni as self actualizer poets. Parallels are drawn between the poets in their being feminists and teachers in writing and poetry; their differences in poetic styles and in their cultural backgrounds are also brought out.

The second chapter, “Rendering it in Words: Self Actualization in Contemporary American Poetry” explains how self actualization is the triggering force of literature. Contextualization of self actualization is noted with respect to contemporary American poetry. It also states what it means to be a self actualizer poet with reference to the two poets under consideration. The poetry by women is on a platform of its own and Rich and Giovanni are its two main contenders. Both these poets are similar in
being women poets, yet their style and attitudes are entirely different. Rich prefers the ideological above the personal while Giovanni prefers the individual and blends the public and the private in her own way. Both poets and their works are analyzed in detail in the next two chapters of the thesis.

The third chapter, “Reacting to a Restriction: Self Actualization in Adrienne Rich”, is on the person and works of the poet, Adrienne Rich. Here we see the growth of Rich from a young poet to a poet of the present, demonstrating maturity and confidence. Her gradual change from individuality to ideology is the theme in her poems and this is worth noting. She breaks free from the restrictions of family as daughter, wife and mother to be an independent woman in her own capacity. She is happy in her life as a lesbian and she boldly writes of her own perspectives in life. Her works highlight women issues and deal with topics which are relevant to women. Her roles as a political and social activist make her works different and daring. Self actualizers perceive reality as it is. This makes them aware of the social and racial issues in the society in which they live. Rich fights for justice and the rights of women. Her theory on motherhood and her life as a lesbian, radical feminist makes her stand apart as an individual. The form and style of both her prose and poetry are different as they break away from traditional themes and styles. She is a popular poet because she dares to live her life on her own choices. The search for her identity and her coming to terms with her own womanhood are interesting
subjects to ponder. She is a self actualizing person to the core as she makes use of her capabilities to the maximum potential. Her roles as a woman, poet, feminist and social activist are fulfilled in her own way. Her poems are analyzed and her progression as a self actualizer is noted. Her volumes of poetry show a gradual, yet decisive change of the poet from a young adult to a mature and confident self actualizer.

The fourth chapter, “Responding to a Responsibility: Self Actualization in Nikki Giovanni” deals with the African American poet, Nikki Giovanni, who responds to every situation around her with concerns of justice and love for her fellow beings. She reacts violently against the social and racial injustice rendered against her people. She believes in relationships and strives to keep tradition and values going strong. She raises her voice against the injustice meted out by men in general, and in particular, the men of her community. She is enraged at their behavior but at the same time, empathizes with her people, especially the women folk. She has the uncanny ability of dealing with people, both young and old. She defies traditional norms and lives her own life with responsibility. She uses vernacular language and writes poems in her own style, going against the popular forms. She reads poetry orally to large audiences in the style of the blues. She celebrates being a woman and also an African American. Her genuine social interest is a definite characteristic of a self actualizer. She has genuine interest for her African American community. She condemns the
injustice found in her society. Her interpersonal relationships are also characteristic of a self actualizer. She has sincere relationships with little children, young adults who are her students and with older people. Her popularity increases day by day as she mingles with the young and the old alike. She enjoys being different and unique and urges her people to be responsible citizens. Her progression as a mature, confident, African American poet is worth studying. She is loved for her poetry and her style. She emerges as a triumphant self actualizer who is loved by all.

The fifth chapter, “Releasing the Realization: The Self Actualizing Poets” compares and contrasts the two poets and thus supplements the individual studies in the previous chapters. Their similarity in being daring women poets is studied, along with the contrast they offer because of their differences in cultural backgrounds. Self actualization is achieved by these two poets through their poems. They achieve this goal of self actualization, overcoming personal crisis and public disasters. Happiness and contentment is achieved in the lives of these poets as they have lived their lives to the fullest extent, in their own unique ways. The ways in which they achieve this is different but the goal is rightly achieved through their own decisions. This goal of self actualization and the process of progression to reach this state are clearly seen in the poems of both the poets. The drive to achieve self actualization, using their own abilities, attains full circle in and though their poems and these poets are applauded for their achievements.