Chapter 1

Readings in Psychology: The Theory of Self Actualization

During the twentieth century, three distinct psychological revolutions dominated psychology, namely psychoanalysis, behaviorism and humanistic psychology. Psychoanalysis projects man as a person of conflict and instinct while behaviorism characterizes man as a passive victim of external circumstances. But Humanistic Psychology presents man quite differently, giving emphasis on the whole personality of man as a creative, healthy individual, bent on recognizing and realizing his inner potential. This inner drive is released in the creativity of striving individuals which leads to the goal of self actualization.

Humanistic psychology focuses on the fundamental uniqueness of human beings and on the belief that people have the potential to be creative. Experiencing values like love, creativity, courage and the goal of self actualization in focus motivates a person to be different from other people. Such a person experiences his own being and can relate easily to other people and social groups.

Existentialism has parallels in humanistic psychology. Larry A. Hjelle and Daniel J. Ziegler, eminent American professors of Psychology, in their book Personality- Theories: Basic Assumptions, Research and Applications expound on the similarities and differences between
existentialism and humanistic psychology. “For the existentialists, it is a question of whether or not one can live an authentic (honest and genuine) life. Because existential philosophy believes each person is responsible for his or her own actions, it appeals to humanistic psychology. Humanist theorists also stress that each individual is the chief determinant of his or her own behavior and experience. The human being is a conscious agent – experiencing, deciding and freely choosing his or her own actions.

Humanistic psychology, then, takes as its basic model the responsible human being freely making choices among the possibilities that are open. Perhaps, the most important concept which humanistic psychologists have extracted from existentialism is that of becoming. A person is never static; he or she is always in the process of becoming something different... It is the individual’s responsibility as a free agent to realize as many of his or her human potentialities as possible. For only by actualizing these can one live a truly authentic life... people who have refused to become have refused to grow; they have denied themselves the full possibilities of human existence...Maslow regarded this process of becoming, or self actualization, as inherent to human nature” (253).

Studies in self actualization thus start with Maslow. Born to uneducated Jewish Russian immigrants, Abraham Harold Maslow was encouraged to be academic by his parents. But being a Jewish boy in a non-Jewish neighborhood brought loneliness and suffering and so he found
solace in his books. His own desire for better conditions in life helped him later to lead other people to live enriching lives of their own choices. His marriage to his high school sweetheart, Bertha Goodman and his introduction to the Watsonian school of Behaviorism broadened his outlook on life. The complex behavior displayed by his first daughter at the time of her birth completely overthrew his beliefs in Behaviorism. The Second World War and its atrocities also changed his views on life. For him, war epitomized hatred, anger and the coarse character of human beings. He felt that if human beings were more understanding, then war or destruction of any kind could be avoided. This led him to the study of humanistic psychology which dealt with man as a whole person. This became his life mission as he devoted his entire life and energy to the study of human nature and developing theories regarding the multifaceted aspects of human personality (Cited in Personality 250).

Abraham Maslow regarded human beings to be studied as whole personalities who are quite different from that of animals or neurotics. He strongly believed that people must consider self fulfillment as their ultimate goal and strive towards achieving it, utilizing their inner potentials. Hjelle and Ziegler explain this effectively:

Maslow proposed that human desires (motives) are innately given and are arranged in an ascending hierarchy of priority and potency. The needs are, in order of their potency (1) basic
physiological needs (2) safety needs (3) belongingness and love needs (4) self esteem needs and (5) self actualization needs or the need for personal fulfillment (Personality 257).

These needs are to be studied individually.

Physiological needs are the basic human needs essential for physical survival without which man cannot live. Safety needs tend to ensure a certain amount of security, especially from economic threat and physical harm. Social needs cater to the instincts of people to associate with other people and to be accepted by them: to love and to be loved. This helps people to live in a society and co-operate with other people. Once this need is fulfilled, people tend to aspire for the next level which fulfills the esteem needs of people. Individuals need to have a certain degree of respect and esteem which are of two types, self esteem and esteem for others. Once this is materialized, the final goal of self actualization is the only need to be achieved. This self actualizing need is the need for realizing one’s potentials and capabilities to the fullest, for accomplishing what one is capable of, in terms of his creativity. This tendency to become actualized in one’s own potentiality is termed self actualization.

For Maslow, the arrangement of basic needs in a hierarchy of lesser or a greater need is the chief principle of organization underlying human motivational life. He believed that the further up the hierarchy a person is able to climb, the more individuality, humaneness or psychological health
will he or she display. Self actualization, as defined by Maslow, can be said to be the drive to become what one is capable of becoming which includes growth, achieving one’s potential and self fulfillment, which is unique for every individual. Hjelle and Ziegler comment: “if self actualization is to be achieved, the individual must transcend the restraints of society and his or her deficit needs and assume responsibility for becoming whatever he or she is capable of becoming”(272). Maslow specifies that attaining self actualization is different for every individual. It depends largely on the experiences of the person and on his progression as a self actualizer.

Maslow lists fifteen notable characteristics of his self actualizing persons. They are as follows:

1. Efficient Perception of Reality- This ability means being able to see reality as it is and not being what they wish it to be and at the same being comfortable with the known reality.

2. Acceptance of Self, Others and Nature- Accepting and respecting oneself and others just as they are.

3. Spontaneity, Simplicity, Naturalness- This behavior of self actualizers depends mainly on the person’s inner life and feelings.

4. Problem Centering- They are committed sincerely to a problem which they regard as important and as their mission in life.
(5) Detachment: Need for Privacy- They rely completely on their inner resources and potentials and remain unaffected by external circumstances.

(6) Autonomy: Independence of Culture and Environment- Self actualizers do not depend on their physical and social environment but on their own potentialities and inner resources for their development.

(7) Continued Freshness of Appreciation- These people have a relentless capacity to appreciate and revel in ordinary, everyday experiences.

(8) Peak or Mystic Experiences- Moments or events of intense excitement of high tension which produce bouts of creativity or insight and which make their experiences memorable for self actualizers.

(9) Social Interest- A genuine interest in humanity and a concern for the shortcomings and failures inflicted by human beings on each other. They condemn the failures but at the same time, empathize with the people.

(10) Interpersonal Relations- Self actualizers tend to nurture deep and personal relationships with people having similar interests and goals.
(11) Democratic Character Structure- It maintains the deepest respect for all people, even when they differ from them in many aspects; regardless of race, age, education or political beliefs.

(12) Discrimination between Means and Ends- They distinguish between their end goals and the means of achieving it. They appreciate whatever they do as they move towards their goals.

(13) Sense of Philosophical Humor- Rather than ridiculing and belittling an individual, they laugh at the foolishness of humanity in general.

(14) Creativeness- Maslow likened the most prominent characteristic in self actualizers as the natural creativity seen in little children.

(15) Resistance to Enculturation- It is in harmony with their culture but their individual decisions are entirely their own, which might sometimes be against popular opinion. This makes them extremely independent and unconventional, especially when certain basic issues are at stake (Cited in Personality 277-82).

Each self actualizer may not have all the characteristics listed by Maslow but some of these acquired traits make individuals unique and different and help them grow towards their goal of self actualization. The impulse to realize one’s inner potential is important and natural, but only a few gifted people achieve it. Maslow himself states the reasons for this belief. He believes that people are ignorant of their own capabilities; they
are bound by social circumstances and are strongly influenced by safety needs to overcome them and moving forward is nearly impossible. He asserts that people ought to be willing to take risks and venture into new avenues and experience it fully so as to be self actualizers. Only the bold and courageous people, sure of their capabilities, can decide for themselves and take risks in their lives.

Women, especially, who were long stereotyped as homemakers and restricted to their houses, have gone beyond these boundaries to take risks and venture into the world, and make themselves heard and known to all people. These women, who are so sure of their capabilities, are self actualizers in their own right. The changes made in their social and cultural environment add to their bold move of stepping beyond their restricted life. Their achieving self actualization and making full use of their capabilities are evident in their individual lives and their creative activities. Maslow’s theory deserves special credit for its genuineness, honesty, simplicity and naturalness. He has succeeded in generating awareness among people to realize their self actualizing goals, thereby influencing and motivating them to achieve it by applying their inner capabilities.

Another leading figure in Humanistic Psychology is Carl Rogers. Born in an economically secure home, into a family which was rigorous in its religious practices, Carl Ransom Rogers grew up as a loner who spent considerable time with his books. A brief stay in China during his youth
days changed his whole attitude towards religion. He observed a broad range of cultural and religious attitudes entirely different from his own. This liberated Roger’s outlook on life and he declared his independence from the rigorous religious rites of his home. He married his childhood friend and classmate, Helen Elliott. He became interested in social service. He realized his life goal of helping distressed people. He did his graduate study in clinical and educational psychology and became an influential psychologist. He dedicated his whole life to humanist-oriented research in interpersonal relationships (Cited in *Personality* 288).

Carl Rogers is unquestionably one of the most influential American psychologists. His position is phenomenological. Hjelle and Ziegler define phenomenology as “the study of the individual’s subjective experience, feelings and private concepts as well as his or her personal views of world and self” (*Personality* 287). Rogers believes that the innermost quality of human beings is essentially good and purposeful. He believes that these honest motives are activated under the tendency of self actualization. Hjelle and Ziegler further expound on what Rogers calls the “fully functioning person” (305). This is a term used by Rogers to designate individuals who are using their capabilities and talents, realizing their potentialities and moving toward complete knowledge of themselves and their full range of experiences. Rogers specifies five major personality characteristics pertaining to people who are fully functioning.
The first characteristic is being open to experiences and rationally acting upon it. “For the fully functional person, then, no internal experience or emotion is threatening in its own right - he is truly open to all”(306). The second characteristic is what Rogers terms as ‘existential living’, which is living fully in every moment of one’s life. “This is the global quality of living fully in each and every moment of one’s existence. By doing so, each moment of one’s life is new and different from that which existed before”(306). This characteristic explains the spontaneous and active life of self actualizers who discover and live life to the fullest. The third attribute of a self actualizer is what Rogers calls the ‘organismic trusting’ which is a trust in one’s own organism. This explains the independent decision made by self actualizers to act upon their choices, regardless of social and cultural norms as they trust in their innate ability to decide upon their actions in life. “Organismic trusting thus signifies the ability to consult and abide by one’s inner experiences as the major basis for reaching decisions”(306). Rogers terms the fourth characteristic as ‘experiential freedom’ whereby an individual is free to live one’s life in whatever way he chooses. He takes responsibility for shaping his own life. “It is subjective freedom, a feeling that one, of his own volition, is able to play a responsible part in shaping his or her own world”(306). Finally, a self actualizer’s character is evident in his creativity where he projects his life in his ideas, products and actions. While utilizing their creative talents,
they satisfy their own needs and at the same time, fulfill the needs of the society in which they live. These people are members of the society they live in but they are in no way governed by it. “Their relation to the society around them best be put this way- they are in and of the society of which they are members, but they are not prisoners of that society” (307). Thus Rogers projects a fully functioning person to be a self actualizer, who actually becomes what he is capable of becoming. A person who operates on these specifics reaches the ultimate goal of self actualization.

Both Maslow and Rogers want every person to visualize what he can be and then be a self actualizing person or a fully- functioning individual in his own way. The image of man represented here undertakes the search which carries him towards the realization of his wholeness. This is expressed through his own experience and his relationship with his fellow beings. The self actualizer accepts those relationships which encourage positive satisfaction of human needs but at the same time rejects those which suppress his own capacity and of others to live fully. He is open, honest and genuine about sharing his own personal experiences with others and this is considered very essential for understanding human experiences better.

Humanistic psychology is the reference ground for various fields of study. Hence, a consideration of the same in various perspectives –
The feministic perspective brings out the essence of women fighting for their rights. Women working towards attaining their independence and keeping their identity intact have been the backbone of feminism. The status of women in society is reinstated by these feminist movements. Women living for themselves and on their own choices become self enabled to be independent and free. Feminist Linda Alcoff, in her essay, “Cultural Feminism Versus Post Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feministic Theory”, states ‘positionality’ as a theory. She writes that woman’s position is a “constantly shifting context involving economic condition, political struggles, cultural institutions, ideological movements and other people” (432). Women empathize with other women quickly in their struggles and common experiences. Alcoff further comments on ‘identity politics’: “The idea here is that one’s identity is taken (and defined) as a political point of departure, as a motivation for action and as a delineation of one’s politics”(450). Women tend to assert their identity as women first and then live their lives according to their own dictates. African American womenfolk have to assert their pride in their African American identity and thus be women who are proud of their race. Alcoff writes, “I think that just as Jewish people can choose to assert their Jewishness, so black men, women of all races and other members of more
immediately recognizable groups can practice identity politics by choosing their identity as a member of one or more groups as their political point of departure” (450). This is exactly what the poets under consideration in this study do in their lives. They assert their Jewish and their African American identities and their identity as women and as poets. They change their lives according to their own decisions. Revolutionaries in their decisions, they compel their sister folk to join them and be like them.

Rich insists on a celebration of ‘femaleness’ and heralds the privileges of being a woman. She declares her lesbianism and insists on speaking her own mind. Later on, she too moves towards a point where she believes in a ‘politics of location’ as is seen in her essay of the same title. Rich, in her famous essay, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence” (1980), has coined a term for radical feminism: ‘lesbian continuum’. The Dictionary of Feminist Theory (1990) defines this as “a range of women – identified experience embracing all forms of intensity between women, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desires to have genital contact with other women (defined as ‘lesbian experience’). Lesbian continuum is a political term since it incorporates the giving and receiving of practical and political support between women. Opposed to it is ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ which, Rich argues, perpetuates itself by rendering lesbian experience invisible … Rich defines lesbianism, as it exists under patriarchy, as women-centered politics.
Lesbian continuum will be a source of power and knowledge for women outside of any particular historical movement because it releases women from false continuities” (116-17). Women tend to seek their potential and change themselves and the society in which they live. Freedman, in her book, *Feminism*, comments: “This concept of lesbianism avoids restrictive definitions of lesbianism and reveals vital continuities between different types of shared female experiences” (62). A definition of the concept of ‘self’ in feminist terms also is necessary here. *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory* gives it thus: “The concept generally has two different uses in feminist theory. It can mean the beliefs that a woman has about herself and her individual potential (as in self fulfillment) and it can mean the perception of oneself as a member of a community of women”(199).

Thinking about the literature of black women, Mary Helen Washington, in her essay, “The Darkened Eye Restored”, states: “their literature is about black women; it takes the trouble to record the thoughts, words, feelings, and deeds of black women, experiences that make the realities of being black very different from what men have written. . . . Women talk to other women in this tradition, and their friendships with other women - mothers, sisters, grandmothers, friends, lovers - are vital to their growth and well-being”(35). Bonding with other women and communicating with other women is very essential in the experiences of women and in their growth towards self actualization.
African American women share collective experiences which make
them different when compared to the other Americans. Giovanni insists on
sharing her personal experiences, learning from it and passing on the
knowledge to her sisters. Washington comments: “Giovanni explicitly and
implicitly makes the main points: the identity of the self remains hostage to
the history of the collectivity; the representation of the self in prose or
verse invites the critical scrutiny of the culture” (184). Her poems and her
prose reveal her experiences and enable her to move towards her ultimate
and personal goal of self actualization.

The philosophical implications of humanistic psychology are also to
be considered. Humanistic psychology emphasizes our uniqueness as
individuals thriving on values and freedom in the forward movement of
self actualization. One has to find satisfying values in life and guide one’s
life by them, thus achieving contentment and thereby knowing truth and
happiness.

Modern science does not provide sound values to help a person have
a meaningful life as it does not deal with the inner life experiences of an
individual. But this is what really matters in humanistic psychology, which
believes that each individual must have his own belief based on his own
unique experiences. This is precisely what makes a person different from
another as individual experiences differ.
While humanistic psychology stresses on the importance of the uniqueness of personalities, its philosophical perspectives challenge one to find out the realistic situation of the people in today’s world. J. Robert Donald, in *Philosophical Perspectives of Humanistic Psychology* comments: “Humanistic Psychology emphasizes our uniqueness as individuals, our quest for values and beliefs on and our freedom for self fulfillment. The central theme in the Humanistic Psychology is the will to meaning. This is primarily a matter of finding satisfying beliefs and values and guiding one’s life by them” (186).

In this world of today, with its stretches of anxiety and loneliness, is it possible to set goals? Will a person learn to maintain an ideal and try to control his choices to attain that goal? Robert Donald talks about the need for this conviction of personal fulfillment. He notes “the chief problem of people in the middle decade of the twentieth century as emptiness… The experiences of emptiness, feelings of hollowness is the accumulated result of a person’s particular conviction toward himself that he cannot act as a self in directing his own life or change other people’s attitudes towards him or effectually influence the world around him. Thus he gets the deep sense of despair and futility of life”(189). Man has to overcome this sense of alienation if he wants to move towards his goal in life. One must also have “faith in Individual reason”. (191)
Donald continues:

Another problem of our age is the loss of the sense of the worth and the dignity of the person ... we have lost the sense of the profound respect for one another and a devotion to his rights, beliefs and destiny...But humanistic psychologists and psychotherapists have the privilege of being witnesses to person’s inner and bitter struggles and with external forces challenging his dignity. We need to provide a new ground for these persons and instill in them the realization of the dignity of the human being (191).

Thus it leads to the situation that a person must discover his own inner capacities and try to attain the goal of self fulfillment. Once a person consciously takes charge of his own actions, he uses his inner strength to be creative and different in his endeavors. Donald observes:

Consciousness of self gives us the power to be free, capacity to take a hand in our own development. Consciousness of self and freedom go together – this is shown in the fact that the less self awareness a person has the more he is not free. As he gains more consciousness of self, his range of choice and freedom proportionally increases (193).
It is at this stage that a person can voice his own opinion and at the same time empathize with other people. The individuality and integrity of a person is recognized and empathized and his journey towards self actualization progresses.

While dealing with the psychological perspectives of humanistic psychology, it is realized that one personality differs from another because of the uniqueness of one’s own experiences and one’s attitude towards it. Life’s achievements and the way in living one’s life differ in every person. Psychology, on the whole, deals with a meaningful understanding of an individual. Personality psychology, one of the subfields in psychology, deals with the human personality and tries to identify what makes an individual what he is, in his life. What differentiates one individual from another is his unique share of experiences and how he relates to it. His attitudes, goal for life and his motivation towards achieving this goal makes him unique. Self perception of individuals differs and among the many theories of personalities in which self is the central concept, Maslow’s theory of self actualization is the foremost. Motivation assists a person in achieving his goal in life and this makes his life meaningful and worth living. An Indian psychologist, M.B.Ghorpade, in his book entitled Essentials of Psychology remarks:

For a man, to function at his highest level, his survival needs and his normal social needs have to be gratified adequately. Maslow
points out that the self actualization needs include needs for justice, beauty, order and goodness, as against the basic needs, including biological needs and social needs like needs for affection, security, self esteem, love and belonging. Many people have experienced what Maslow calls peak experiences, when he realizes his needs of self actualization. Such experience is often productive of the greatest happiness, satisfaction and fulfillment and may arise out of communion with nature, personal love, art or literature of the highest order (472).

Intercommunication and interaction with other people in a society enhances the growth of one’s personality. Social psychology is the study of how individuals react and respond to their social experiences. Their unique experiences in turn, shape their personalities which empower them in their lives.

David J. Schneider, another eminent psychologist, in his book, Introduction to Social Psychology expounds about the relationship between personality and social psychology:

Social psychologists have concentrated on how social situations and stimuli affect the generalized, “average” person. Personality psychology, on the other hand, has been more concerned with the study of individuals and how they differ (5).
Individuals respond to situations in diverse ways. According to the culture one belongs to, one’s attitudes and responses vary. American culture is quite different from the Indian one. In India, community living and interdependence is very high. There are certain cultural norms which are to be respected and fulfilled. Americans, on the other hand, attach a lot of importance to personal space and freedom. Economic stability provides them with the necessary aid to be fiercely independent. American women too enjoy this sense of independence. For them, their decisions are their own and they abide by it in their lives, thereby being strong and fulfilled. Schneider further explains on this issue:

As social psychology has evolved during this century, the many problems and issues have tended to group themselves into two large categories: social cognition and social behavior…our social behavior is affected by our thoughts. Furthermore, our thoughts are influenced by our social circumstances. We see the world through glasses composed of our values, attitudes, self concepts, beliefs and cultural understandings. Thus social cognition is concerned with how culture, experience, and language affect our thinking (28-29).

People with similar values and ideologies often form part of a group. They interact with each other and form groups of their own. This interrelationship stimulates the growth of the individual up to a large extent.
Schneider explains the relationship of the individual self to the society. He further remarks:

The self is the object of intense evaluative feelings; terms such as pride, shame and self esteem point to such feelings. In that regard, the self is an important bridge between the individual and the society, because most of our feelings about ourselves reflect what others think of us and are based on culturally defined standards (116).

Experiences are unique and they contribute largely to the shaping of our individual personality. The way in which an individual internalizes his experiences shapes him and his reaction to different issues. Every person evaluates his surroundings and tries to change accordingly. The study of the individual enhances the progression of his personality. When a man lives his life according to what he believes in, he can lead a successful and enriching life.

It is interesting to note the sociological perspective of humanistic psychology also. Man, a social being, is a part of the society in which he lives. Sociology studies about an individual being part of a society, his relationship with others in the society and his individuality. Denisoff and Wahrman, in their book, *Introduction to Sociology* comments:

Social structure and its component parts are at the heart of sociology. Social structure, then, is the organized *relationships*
and their consequences. Societies are the end result of social structures or relationships between the component parts (50).

How an individual fares in a society determines the uniqueness of his personality and this is dealt with in detail in humanistic psychology. The sociological perspective of this would then mean how this uniqueness of individuals affects the society in which they are living and their relationship to it.

A person lives according to the norms and customs set by his society. If he feels dissatisfied with it, he tries to change himself and his society. Values like equality, individual liberty and freedom are highly appreciated in countries like America where they would never compromise on their individual spaces. Cultures differ from country to country and there are various factors contributing to it like economy, government and religion, to name a few. There are many subcultures too in most societies. Denisoff defines subcultures: “A group of people who share certain values and beliefs with the larger culture, but at the same time have other characteristics they share only with one another” (101).

Going by this definition, the characteristics of African Americans are unique. They are people who are essentially American but have their own distinct traits and family heritage to boast of. They consider America to be their home but they are immensely proud of their African heritage. They believe that it is the courage and determination shown by their
ancestors that keep them going forward in this country. They revel in their African American power. Racial segregation in the 1950s prompted the African Americans to organize social movements and protests. Denisoff explains: “social movements can be judged only on three fundamental levels: (1) their stated goals (2) their tactics, that is, how they attempt to achieve their aims; and (3) the relationship of their movement to the society in which it exists” (514). African Americans wanted to do away with racial discrimination and hence they fought for their individual rights and freedom in the United States. They formed movements to combat the injustice done to them.

Denisoff further elaborates:

Most sociological studies begin by describing the social movement as a result of some problem situation, social strain, alienation, or other unpleasantness that the individual or the society is experiencing. A key point is that something in the society gave rise to the movement or motivated the participant to join. For example, some blacks affiliated themselves with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) because of racial segregation. Women became part of the National Organization for Women (NOW) to combat unfair hiring practices. Homosexuals joined the gay liberation to combat discrimination (514).
All these reasons initiated people to join different social movements. Their personality traits made people respond to situations in diverse ways. Social injustice prompted the women victims to react violently and this gave rise to women’s movements. Racial injustice made African Americans react and resist unjust practices. Their united efforts and determination strengthened their cause and their voice was fully heard across the country, which in turn leads to their community being recognized for its true worth. Social change occurred as a result of such protests and the outcome of individual liberty was wholeheartedly accepted and valued.

Giovanni, being one of the bold and leading poets of her times, chose to be proud of her African American heritage and in doing so, urged her society to be so too. Her worth as a poet and as a woman, an African American woman poet to be precise, is to be appreciated and applauded. Her role in her society is worth to be charted through and this is done thoroughly by this sociological perspective study.

Rich accepts her Jewish identity and is happy to acknowledge it as her own. She declares her lesbianism too. She is hailed as one of the most popular poets of America. She is a champion for just causes and she fights for the downtrodden and the neglected, especially the women in her society.

American culture enhances self actualization in a very specific manner. Not all people can attain self actualization. Psychologists Hjelle
and Ziegler are of the view that most people cannot attain self actualization:

Many people are simply blind to their potential they neither know that it is possible nor understand the rewards of self enhancement. Rather, they tend to doubt and even fear their own abilities, thus precluding a fair chance at becoming self actualized. In addition, the social environment often stifles development toward self fulfillment (Personality 263).

But this is not the case of the people who realize their potentials. They are indeed able to attain self actualization. The two poets under consideration accomplish self actualization as they realize their capabilities, are bold to go beyond social norms and are ready to take risks in their lives. And moreover, the American society facilitates them in their progress. “The growth process demands a constant willingness to take risks, to make mistakes, to break old habits. This requires courage”(263). Both poets have exactly the courage and determination to do this. They risk their lives for what they believe in. Rich renounced her marriage but upholds motherhood, believes in her Jewish roots and advocates lesbianism. Giovanni believes in her African American culture, in women and Black folk in general, voices her opinion against Black atrocities, and believes in children and the older generation. Like Rich, she too has renounced marriage. She embraces single motherhood.
She applauds the young and the old alike and believes in them, 
appreciates the heroes and the courage of her ancestors, believes in the 
community and the oral tradition of her people. She values life and lives 
by the courage of her convictions.

Considering the lives and works of the two poets Rich and 
Giovanni, and re-reading their works in the light of the theories of 
humanistic psychology, it can be confidently stated that attaining self 
actualization is their goal in life. The American society abets their 
choice and respects their decisions in life, especially as they progress 
towards being self actualized poets.