



Application of Jungian Theory of Individuation to Khalil Gibran's Poem *The Prophet*

Sundus Ejaz¹

ABSTRACT:

This research paper explores Khalil Gibran's *The Prophet* in the light of Jungian concept of individuation. All the leading characters of the poem under investigation look caught up in the processes self-affirmation that is termed individuation in the Jungian theories of analytic psychology. The protagonist of the present data experiences the multifaceted dialectical processes and binaric structures of various dimensions of life to head, step by step, towards the goal of self-realization. The conscious and the unconscious, along with so many dialectics, interact with and influence each other to result into the structures that tend to the realization of individuation. The personal unconscious and the collective unconscious, the personal and the sociopolitical, the cognitive and the cultural undergo the famous „to and fro“ motions to cause the unification of the self. Owing to these interactions, the individual is supposed to achieve individuation.

Key Words: Jungian Individuation, Khalil Gibran, *The Prophet*

¹ Lecturer at Superior College Sheikhupura - (sundusejaz261@gmail.com)





1. Introduction:

In this paper Gibran's *The Prophet* is studied via paradigm of Jungian psychoanalysis. This paper tells us how Gibran in his literary composition under investigation foregrounds the need for psychological and spiritual growth of humans: an essential remedy for the society caught in the jaws of existential and worldly problems. The Jungian traditions hold that the alert consciousness of the very smart individual is a prerequisite to take initiative to overcome the challenges faced on individual and social level. This initiative is supposed not only to work wonders, but it is also expected to materialize the very process of self- actualization of a human. When the individual ventures to take responsibility, that is the demand of the individuation process, the significance of the worth of the individual is brought to the focus. The individuation activity leads to the stage of meaningfulness of the individual.

The very structure of *The Prophet* is designed for the multiple operations to work under individuation. There are two narratives in the present data. The frame narrative reports the occurrence of a huge incident on the day the protagonist Al-Mustafa is about to return to his birthplace. When the book opens, his ship is about to arrive. The second narrative, the embedded one, comprises of questions on basic concerns of life asked by the native community from the protagonist, Al-Mustafa, who has left a strong mark on their hearts by his strong character. All other characters in *The Prophet*, being curious, seek wisdom from Al Mustafa, who has spent twelve years with them on their land Orphalese. The musings of the protagonist and performativities of the leading character do stress the importance of the spiritual as the crying need of the present-day social formations across the globe. Psychic rebirth was envisioned to be the need of the hour to revive the zest for beautiful aspects of life.

The individuation phenomenon involves the interactive modes of various elements at so many levels. All these dialectical operations vehemently pursue the binaristic tasks to let the proverbial thesis-antithesis conditions lead to synthesis. The imbalance situation is expected to lead to the balance. The „to and fro“ motion of the conscious and the unconscious, the introvert and the extrovert, the spiritual and the material etc. also yoke together the four senses, thinking, feeling, sensing, intuiting to pave the way for individuation. The goal towards which the process of individuation strives, comprises of stripping away fallacious coverings of a mask, persona, simultaneously an endeavor to remove the evocative potential of the ancient and primeval representations. The Jungian constructive method involves the transcendent function which unites the conscious and the unconscious. It needs profound reflection which also involves a process of meaning-making called signification under semiotics: it is an active process. However, an individual gets his sense of self through social interactions. Better personality is achieved by collaboration between individuals from different, social, cultural, ethnic and regional backgrounds.





2. Literature Review:

There are so many pieces of research conducted on the works of Khalil Gibran and especially *The Prophet*. Jesikha, et al (2018) in *Proceedings Of the 1st Annual International Conference on Languages and Literature* assert that Gibran's unique poetic expression became renowned as, "Gibranism"; "His language touches the inner souls of readers, and his parables teach them spiritual lesson" (p. 394). Sundas Ejaz (2021) in her MPhil English literature thesis *A Study of Self-actualization in Gibran's The Prophet* (2021) that self-realization is a focal motif which motivates an individual to work on himself to get a clear conscious by maximizing one's potential and then benefiting humanity. It is stressed by Atalay (2008) in *The Idea of Balance between Spirituality and Intelligence according to Khalil* that Gibran was an extraordinary mystical poet and, also had brains of a rationalist thinker. Gibran's *The Prophet* shows, how by developing ourselves into our better version, we can really connect with the humanity and contribute in the general well-being of humans. The approach is parallel to Jungian concept of individuation as an apotheosis of individuality; "the self has attributes of uniqueness and of occurring once in time" (p.62); individuation means "coming to selfhood" or "self-realization" (Jung, 1953, p. 238).

Stein (2005) in his research *Individuation: Inner Working* asserted that "Liminality is a core feature of psychological transformation whenever it occurs in life. The term indicates a period of uncertainty when one finds oneself „betwixt and between“ fixed identities" (p. 9). He further says that Gibran portrayed the protagonist in *The Prophet* who has experienced liminality, and he is in a state of transformation. After WW1, with the rise of material progress, a newly emerging trend was of one-sided emphasis on materialism. Success in the material domain only was perceived to be incapable of giving satisfaction by the learned. Stephen Howard (2007) in his study *The Lady in the Looking-Glass: Reflections on the Self in Virginia Woolf* asserts that stagnation of the world of the mirror looks "lifeless compared to reality"; he further adds that this frozen aspect recalls to our mind Woolf's criticism of "„materialists“ in her modern fiction (p. 187). Spirituality is a topic that is stressed exclusively in 21st century also. Adam & Csiernik (2005) have added a line from the poem, On Religion, from *The Prophet* in their study *Creating Wellness in Wellness and Work, Employee Assistance Programming in Canada* at the start of their article, "Who can separate his faith from his action, or his belief from his occupation?" (p. 64). Their entire research revolves around this line. It is a very significant piece of research.

Datta (2010) in his research *The Blue Flame: An Elliptical Interaction Between Khalil Gibran and Rabindranath Tagore* asserted that an Arab born American poet, Gibran had interacted with Rabindranath Tagore who was a renowned Eastern mystic poet and philosopher from India and their interaction was termed „Blue Flame" (p. 119). Jung was also influenced by the East particularly Indian mysticism. Jung had travelled to the sub-continent and references to India, Eastern myths and religion. He was largely influenced by Buddhism and Upanishads.





In *The Handbook of Jungian Psychology: Theory, Practice and Application* by Colman (2006) we see a nice criticism on *The Prophet*. He says, “The self is constellated through the process of self-organization” (p. 170). It is further said that *The Prophet* has emphasized valuing other perspectives and to understand others by stepping into their shoes. The text is not univocal. Tolerance for flaws in other people is stressed. One must acknowledge and accept one’s individual lacking and need of the Divine light for guidance. “Empty and dark I raise my lantern/ And the guardian of the night shall...light it also” (Gibran, 1923, p. 4). An individual must connect with the voice of conscience, through reflection, it leads to make the mirror of perception clear and less illusive. Seeing an individual’s transformation through individuation in a broader context, as a way of gaining individuality, consistently differentiating from the surroundings yet not detaching oneself. Discussing self-transformations and their impact, Kalantzis asserted: “The society of self-regulating community; civil society, is becoming a more significant locus of action and decision.” (2006, p. 7). This research paper explores self-transformation in *The Prophet* through Jungian concept of individuation and assesses the role of perceptive individuals to rejuvenate the spirit of their age.

3. Research Statement:

This paper explores individuation in Gibran’s *The Prophet*. The research foregrounds the need for psychological and spiritual growth, particularly as Gibran’s *The Prophet* advocated it as a remedy for his society and presented it as a prophecy for the coming generations. Applying Jungian analysis on the data leads to drawing relevance of Gibran’s perspective about the need to rethink about ourselves and circumstances. The research brings out that individuation is a requisite for overcoming the challenges faced by humans on individual and social level.

4. Research Questions

1. What role does the Jungian concept of individuation play in Gibran’s *The Prophet*?
2. How the integration of the spiritual in collusion with the material leads to help out the contemporary society in *The Prophet*?

5. Theoretical Statement

The theoretical framework of this research paper comprises of Carl Jung’s concept of individuation, particularly its third stage which is centering / integrating stage. The present research is propelled especially in the light of the Jungian concept of individuation contained in the chapter Individuation by Murray Stein in the book *The Handbook of Jungian Psychology* by Renos K. Papadopoulos (2006). Here Stein has elaborated the process of individuation and its three stages or phases. The first phase of individuation is containment/nurturing phase, the matriarchal phase in Neumann’s terminology, the individual in this phase is ruled by pleasure principle. The testing and challenging of various boundaries fall according to Neumann in this





phase. The second phase of individuation is the adapting/adjusting phase, the patriarchal phase in Neumann's terminology; the individual in this phase is ruled by the reality principle, the fascination of the hero archetype, the energy to slay the dragon of incest wish and to win the princess which is the soul. However, this inner identification with the hero makes one realize that reality has better rewards than fantasy. In the concluding lines of the discussion, Stein has drawn attention to the fact that in the third stage, an individual tries to assume his genuine self and there is a turning away from materialistic approach towards the spiritual. The individual prefers meaningful life over a life that is shaped by animalistic urge to survive in this this life only. The stages of individuation as mentioned by Murray Stein (p.199), using Enrich Neumann's paradigm, can be represented in the table given below:

	First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
Stages of Individuation	Containment/ Nurturance	Adapting/ Adjusting	Centering/ Integrating
Neumann's Terminology	Matriarchal Stage	Patriarchal Stage	Individual Stage

Individuation, according to Sharp (1991) means “ a process of psychological differentiation, having for its goal the development of the individual personality...Individuation differs from individualism in that the former deviates from collective norms but retains respect for them, while the latter eschews them entirely” (p.67). Jungian analyst Colman (2000) asserts that “self as a structure is inherent, while as a tendency for organization it is like a process” (p. 69). Jungian analyst Warren Colman gives an elaborate self-realization process through the Jungian concept of individuation.

It is qualitative research done with given two perspectives: psychoanalytic perspective and psycho-social perspective.

It is an analytic study of the selected data. The inductive method is followed in this article, to highlight the specific patterns, images and symbols in the data which depict the individuation and how it becomes relevant to the entire humanity in general. The text was read closely to study of processes of individuation using.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

Khalil Gibran's poem *The Prophet* is explored in the light of two research questions that aim at the dissection of the phenomenon of individuation and self-actualization. Along with the analysis, the discussion and debate are also pursued. In one of his poems, *On Work*, Gibran has enumerated





benefits of putting our heart and soul in our practical routine work. It creates a strong connection with our inner self, with humanity and with the Creator. It is possible, communion with God, only when we work from genuine urge and zest. For example, the protagonist was able to leave his mark on the heart of the people, during his stay, due to the strength of his hard-working character. In the poem, Gibran argued that the role of parents is to let their kids develop fully to their best potential. The undue imposition is to be avoided, however; with love, the parents should groom their kids; with their experience, they should prepare the next generation that is to ready to experience the moments of their future life. Gibran says, „seek not to make them like you“ (1923, p. 12) rather they should be better than their parents in terms of selfhood.

Gibran says as children are for future therefore, they must be trained accordingly. The first two phases of self-development, the phase of nurturing and the phase of adaptability, are also significant to make an individual capable of proceeding ahead and with faster speed. Jung asserted that it is the nature of every living thing that it endeavors to gain completeness or wholeness; he added that “the one-sidedness of our conscious life”, although it is inevitable, it is “continually being corrected and compensated by the universal human being in us” (1960, p. 380). He asserts that the goal of consciousness “is the ultimate integration of conscious and unconscious, or better, the assimilation of the ego to a wider personality” (p. 380). In the poem *On Love*, love is depicted as a source of uniting body and soul, as a catalyst to enhance spirituality. Some words of this poem like „crucify“, „ecstasy“, „winged heart“ and „prayer“ bear the spiritual connotations are (1923, pp.7-9). Gibran states in the poem that the path which love offers us is to be pursued, and we need to respond to its calling even if the path is „hard and steep“ (p. 7). He stressed the capability of love in assisting spiritual growth and wisdom. He asserted that love guides us to evolve. Gibran says that love „grinded you to Whiteness, /He kneads you until you are plaint“ (p. 8). Through love, one ascends in the process of individuation. Jung (1960) asserted that a weak personality is in danger of being dissolved in various snares like in the high energy of subliminal contents. In the poem, *On Teaching*, Gibran asserted unless we are ready to receive advice and training, we cannot get it. We receive as much as we are prepared to. Jung (2005) asserted that mostly our social goals are made without considering the psychology of the person for whom they are made and regretfully they most often propagate the personal illusions instead of modifying them to be above personal complexes.

Fesit (2009) says that “The complex makeup of humans invalidates any simple or one-sided description”; he further adds that “according to Jung, each person is a composition of opposing forces” (p. 138). Gibran asserted in the poem, *On Reason and Passion*, that neither reason nor passion should be the sole dominating factor in a person. For individuation, various opposite faculties in an individual are differentiated and must be integrated. Gibran mentioned a pair of opposites, the reason and passion commonly taken to be the counter ones of which reason is valued more than passion. The positive aspect of passion and zeal to perform something good and lasting is mentioned as an attribute of the Creator. He affirms the significance of inculcating these Divine





attributes in our personality to become a balanced whole as an individual. The process of integration and balancing of the personality is a lifelong activity of transformation. Giving expression in the manner one feels appropriate is seen in Gibran's poem *On Children*, where he pleads for giving youth free avenues and means to bloom fully. Jung (1959) was of a firm belief in the significance of symbol-formation, an individual's capability to express something, an idea or concept with most suitable expression, by making symbols and mandalas which could reflect his capabilities to proceed in self-realization through individuation. Jung discussed self as a union of opposites and asserted that it is a symbol of psychic totality as it includes both conscious, considered masculine, and unconscious, considered feminine; he infers that self is a totality. "Empirically, the self appears spontaneously in the shape of specific symbols, and its totality is discernible above all in the mandala and its countless variants." (p. 268). This shows how the process of inner integration in individuation unites opposites and "a dual being" (p. 268) is born. He asserted that self stands for "psychic totality" (p. 268) as it is a union of the conscious and unconscious. It can be inferred that symbol is a meaning making process which involves active imagination. Sharp (1991) defined active imagination as a process of making the unconscious and conscious to shape the higher truths that are unveiled together with an ethical commitment to follow one's calling. This process is very close to the individuation in the third phase of centering. However, an individual's self-expression must not be antagonistic to the ethos of culture and basic ethics of human societies and religions. The stage where an individual understands the dual aspects of his self, and achieves a totality, Gibran calls it a higher self, or god-image; it is precisely a higher state of consciousness.

To Jung (1959), to transcend the zeitgeist completely is not possible for anyone. He contends that nobody can totally outshine the influences that are current in his time. The impact of one's social context is to be acknowledged as its imprint is also a reality, apart from that of unconscious collective heritage and the biological or a priori given material that we get by birth. An individual must individuate deeply in the second stage of ego; one must learn to differentiate itself, before active use of psychic energy. In the poem, *On Crime and Punishment*, the fusion of good and bad aspects is the warp and woof of an individual's self. Gibran says that the law makers are the people who build the sandcastles and feel the breaking and making of laws. He gave the analogy of roots of trees interlinked underneath the soil to show the interlinking of individuals in a society. About good and evil, he does not create sharp contrasts to label people since he believes in the transformation of self and evolution of soul moving towards self-fulfillment.

In the poem, *On Pleasure*, the idea of self as constructed by the interaction with individuals in the society could be perceived in the analogy of bees and flowers working in interaction and finding self-fulfillment through satisfaction. He asserted that the universe works on different needs and nature of its creation which fit together in a mutually beneficial relationship. Going with pleasure and ease is possible when one knows oneself. "Young Eisendrath and Zinkin both stress that the archetypal self cannot be divorced from the personal self and the personal self is acquired





through mutual interaction” (Colman, 2000, p. 17). The universe offers signs to the perceptive people and a plenty of eye-opening manifestations are found in our self and in life around us.

Stereotypes are socially defined, and the parts of personality are shunned which do not fit in with those definitions. “The anima/animus stage is correlated with polytheism, the self with monotheism. Self in a fully individuated person is whole. The natural archetypal symbolism, describing a totality that includes light and dark” (Jung, p. 268). Twin aspects that have equal significance are synthesized to create the totality of self. Counter and underdeveloped functions must be integrated to complete the personality of any human being. The idea of essence of soul being revealed to one who ponders deeply is found in the poem, On Self Knowledge; the self is a „sea boundless and measureless” (Gibran, 1923, p. 43). Jung (2005) asserted that the majority is used to mix up “„self-knowledge” with knowledge of their conscious ego personalities” only and stay oblivious of the total scope of knowledge about self. (1959, p. 3). Gibran asserted „the soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless petals” (Gibran, 1923, p. 44). The yearning to improve and transform is common in all humanity. However, the self, revealed thus is unique and distinct.

In the poem, On Prayer, Gibran asserted that inner work reveals the bonding with the creator and then the journey of this life becomes a meaningful endeavor to preserve our soul. He feels payer to be „an expansion of self into the living ether” (1923, p. 56). The individual becomes synchronized with the Divine through prayer. Jung (1960) asserted that meaningful clues come either in dreams or situations paralleling the unconscious at a moment. (pp. 410-411). Jung depicted the process of revelation of self and asserted the significance of four parts in the full exploration of self, as it makes possible the distinction of its parts: the sublimation. Jung (1959) holds that it is a revelation of “totality into four parts four times”; it means many combinations of basic four functions and two attitudes creating a great versatility and diversity. He adds that it is a process of making totality of self and says “Only the nurturing of these four aspects makes a total description possible” (p. 259). He further stressed that, such a description is not a final one as self is consistently evolving, and it is not fixed, stagnant instead it “is also a dynamic process” (p. 260).

The protagonist in *The Prophet* stressed the need to pursue one’s individuation by listening to the imaginative, social, and psychological dichotomies and binaries. The spiritual and symbolic aspect of the mountains and mounds is also foregrounded as he addressed the people from the ascent or height which is symbolic of his spiritual nearness to the creator and the purity of his soul he achieved by solitude and reflection to get a clear conscience. This can be done by contemplating about the natural phenomena: „These mountains and plains” he added „are a cradle and a steppingstone” (Gibran, 1923, p. 72). In the poem, On Death, Gibran asserted that death is just „to cease breathing” (p. 67). It is a phase to enable the soul to „rise and expand and seek God” (p. 67) in an unconstrained manner. Jung asserted that man in such the current society “underwent strange pagan transformations, exchanging the heavenly goal for an earthly one” (1959, p. 43). Cultural definitions of good and evil also have an impact on the personality of an individual and it also sets limits on appropriateness of behavior.





5. Conclusion

The need for balanced development is found significant for individuation, as explored vividly in the data analysis. Having more knowledge of psychological and social philosophies enables the instructors to develop their students to the best of their capabilities. The linking of literature to the real-world life by drawing on the historical contexts as well as trying to create practical solutions for the present, in so paving the path for even better future outcomes is a nice strategy. There is a need to put knowledge into practice. The inclusion of multiple voices by widening the horizon of teaching in the underdeveloped countries also, as a beneficial effect of covid has created more outlets and better opportunities for female students and scholars to participate in various scholarly conferences, courses, and webinars than ever before. An individual in contemporary global village of swift communication is always in a situation that puts him into confrontation with the other cultures, beliefs, languages, traditions, lifestyles, and people. There is a need for an inclusive mindset with a firm sense of individuality retaining our own viewpoint to agree or disagree based on our preferences that are result of our ideology, vision, and beliefs. There must be a genuine knowledge to understand the differences. There must be a concern for better outcomes for majority to create a conciliation between different viewpoints keeping in mind the bigger picture.

Bibliography

- D., W., and Csiernik, R.,. (2005). Spirituality and Work. In R. Csiernik, *Creating Wellness in Wellness and Work, Employee Assistance Programming in Canada* (p. 345). Toronto: Canadian Scholars" Press, Toronto.
- Atalay, M. (2008). The Idea of Balance between Spirituality and Intelligence according to Khalil Gibran. *Istanbul Universities Il'ahiyat Fakulter's Dagis*, 101-125. Retrieved from <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/10239> file.
- Beebe, J., Casement, A., Chodorow, J., Colman, W., Gaillard, C., Hauke, C., Jacoby, M., Kast, V., Main, R., Marlan, S., Mattoon, A., M., Renos, K., P., Samuels., A., Stein, M., Stevens, A.,. (2006). (K. P. Renos, Editor) Retrieved from <https://dondeg.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/hjp.pdf>
- Colman, W. (2000). Models of the Self in Jungian Psychology. In E. C. ed., *Jungian Thought in the Modern World*,. London. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/5676678https://www.academia.edu/5676678/Models_of_the_Self_in_Jungian_Psychology
- Colman, W. (2006). The Self. In K. P. Renos (Ed.), *The Handbook of Jungian Psychology: Theory, Practice and Application*. London & NY: Taylor & Francis Group, Routledge.
- Datta, I. (2010). The „Blue Flame“: An „Elliptical“ Interaction Between Khalil Gibran and Rabindranath Tagore. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 1(2),





119. doi:DOI: <http://doi: 10.21659/rupkatha.v2n2.02>

- East, M. (2021). *Foundational Principles of Task-Based Language Teaching*. NY & London: ESL & Applied Linguistics Professional Series.
- Ejaz, S. (2021). A Study of Self-actualization in Gibran's *The Prophet*. 5. Riphah International University, Lahore.
- Fesit, J. &. (2009). *Theories of Personality* (7 ed.). McGraw–Hill Primis. Retrieved from Theories-of-Personality-7e-English.pdf
- Gibran, K. (1923). *The Prophet* (2013 ed.). Lahore: ILQA Publications and Readings.
- Howard, S. (2007). The Lady in the Looking-Glass: Reflections on the Self in Virginia Woolf. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 8(2), 44-54. Retrieved from <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol8/iss2/5>
- Jesikha D., Purwarno P., & Manugerenn. (2018). Positive Personality Trait in Khalil Gibran's, *The Broken Wings*. *Proceedings Of the 1st Annual International Conference on Languages and Literature*, (pp. 18-19.). Fakultas Sastra UISU, Media, Indonesia,. Retrieved from POSITIVE PERSONALITY TRAIT IN KAHLIL GIBRAN'S THE BROKEN WINGS | Jesikha | AICLL: ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE (uisu.ac.id)
- Jung, C. G. (1953). Two Essays on Analytical Psychology. In C. Jung, & R. M. Fordham. (Ed.), *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, (Vol. 7). Princeton University Press, pdf.
- Jung, C. G. (1959). *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self* (Vols. 9, part 2). (H. R. Fordham, Ed.) Bollingen Series XX, Princeton University Press, pdf.
- Jung, C. G. (1960). Structure and Dynamics of Psyche. In C. G. Jung, *Collected Works* (Vol. 8). Princeton University Press, pdf.
- Jung, C. G. (1964). *Man and his Symbols*. New York, NY: Ferguson Publishing, An Anchor Press Book Published by Doubleday, a Division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 666 Fifth Ave., pdf.
- Jung, C. G. (1971). Psychological Types. In C. G. Jung, & M. R. F. C. HULL (Ed.), *Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (Vol. 6). Princeton University Press, pdf.
- Jung, C. G. (2005). *The Undiscovered Self*. London & NY: Routledge Taylor and Francis e-Library, pdf. doi:jungthe-undiscovered-self-1957.pdf
- Kalantzis, M. (2006). Changing Subjectivities, New Learning. *Pedagogies: An International Journal EDAGOGIES*, 1(1), 7-12. doi:(researchgate.net)
- Sharp, D. (1991). *Jung Lexicon: A Primer of Terms and Concepts*. doi:(psychceu.com)
- Stein, M. (2005). Individuation: inner working. *Journal of Jungian Theory and Practice*, 5. Retrieved from https://issuu.com/lewislafontaine/docs/individuation_murray_stein





- Stein, M. (2006). "Individuation. In P. (ed.) (Ed.), *Handbook of Jungian Psychology, Theory, practice and applications* (pp. 196-214). London and New York: Routledge, London and New York.
- Stein, M. (2017, January 16). Where East meets West: in the house of Individuation. *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 62(1), Abstract. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5922.12280>

