CHAPTER ONE

Adrienne Rich and Her Poetic Career

Adrienne Rich is a living prolific and celebrated American poet . She is not only a reputed poet but also a well known prose writer. She received her early education and began her career by imitating the established masters in the field of writing. She is respected as a pioneer who advocates a feminist philosophy. Her works seek to integrate private and public spheres of women's life. Rich herself struggled for years to break free as a woman as well as a poet overcoming self-doubt about patriarchy-defined womanhood. Rich's works explore the experience of women who reject patriarchal definitions of feminity.

Rich published her first book of poetry in 1951. She brought the struggle for a distinct women's identity started by Emily Dickinson and advanced by Marianne Moore. The long -awaited breakthrough in women's poetry came in 1960s. At that time, the long felt anger expressed through the satiric poems decrying the masculine tradition of universal language and gender polarized relationships.

The anti-patriarchal view emerged in her because of the intense emotional and mental conflicts she experienced as a daughter, wife and mother. She knew that she had to reject the role of proper woman defined by patriarchy. Further, she found it difficult to define herself the concept of free woman. She argued that the notion of the free woman is strongly coated with sexual promiscuity. Significantly, she extended her poetic vision to affect a social and cultural change.

Rich's understanding of location brought together geography, history, multi-identities, memory and process. The issues of locatedness and the problem of subject cecame the major theoretical debate. The importance of saying "I", the individual

subject and "We", the collective subject became a refrain throughout the work of Rich. This double perspective is often expressed through what we might call the problem of pronouns. Her personal uncertainty and irresolvable debates on subjectivity and locatedness have preoccupied feminist thinking in the last two decades.

Like Virginia Woolf's belief that women writing should look back at their literary predecessor, Rich's approach to the female literary traditions operated on a family model of influence. Mothers and daughters sought to transcend the divisive attitudes of patriarchy. Different women writers have come to represent for Rich the variety of strategies by which women have confronted, subverted, transferred or been silenced by patriarchy.

Like Woolf, Rich worries about the refractory nature of heart/emotion, its reluctance to be schooled. Feelings lure the white eye back to the centre, to its accustomed place of privilege. Yet, the brain is also problematic. Paradoxically, it is the brain (reason) that is most effective and expressive; the heart (emotion) toils painstakingly. In her book she writes:

> I do not any longer believe, my feelings do not allow me to believe that the white eye sees from the centre. Yet I often myself think as if I still believed that were true. Or, rather, my thinking stands still. I feel in a state of arrest, as if my brain, has executed in breaking the taboo against women thinking, has taken off on the wind, saying, *I am the women who asks the question*. My heart has been learning in a much more humble and laborious way, learning that feelings are useless

without facts, that all privilege is at the core. (Your Native, 226).

But, as in Woolf, "reason" and "emotion" or, to use Rich's terms "brain" and "heart" are in dispute. Their incompatibility provokes for Rich too a bodily sensation in "a state of arrest" as in aforementioned lines.

The 1980s marked a seminal change in Rich's poetry. It was the dominantly feminist focus of the previous decade to sustained interest in the paradoxes of American history. In her writing of 1980s, Marxist impression could be found abundantly. Like Marx, she proved herself as a "geographer of human condition" (Rich, Arts 4). She devoted her intellectual energies to measuring the impact of repressive economic circumstances of human relations. The poems she composed during the decade provide evidence of her growing preoccupation with the idea of civic responsibility. She frequently and characteristically approached through exploration of her own personal life as a, woman, a feminist thinker, a Jew activist and a poet.

In her book *The Dream and the Dialogue*, Alice Templeton took note of Rich's gender-inclusive character of the poem— "An Atlas of the Difficult World". Templeton argues that it honors both male and female individuals: she opines "[T]he disenfranchised, the dispossessed, the internal "emigrant", and difficult truths, not the mock-innocent, the colonizer, the madness of solitude or the deception of simplistic alliances and oppositions" (164-65).

In "An Atlas of the Difficult World ", Rich male and female identities. This can be seen as a poem addressing to the unfulfilled promise of the women's liberation movement. Some of the individuals featured in the poem happen to be women. The

way in which Rich depicts their oppression by forces of misogyny and homophobia illustrates her continuing commitment to radical feminism.

Rich herself is the critic of her poetry. She also conveys her poetic essence through her prose. In *What is Found There* she conceives poetry as:

> [A]n exchange of electrical currents through language – that daily, mundane, abused and ill-prized, that instrument of deception and revelation, that material thing, that knife, rage, boat spoon/reed become pipe/tree trunk become drum/mud become clay flute/conch shell become iconography in appliqué/rubber bands stretched around a box become a lyre. (83-84)

For Rich the question is not whether poetry continues to be written but whether it is capable of creating a common bond between people of different ethnic and social backgrounds. The question is whether poetry can fulfill the need for multicultural exchange.

If there is one point on which critics agree with regard to Rich, it is her potential for self-revision and change. From the start, Rich's poetry has been an unpredictable writing-in-process. A fact that she herself has emphasized again and again. As she states her work, both the poetry and the prose, is "a process still going on" (*Poems* XV), "a continuing exploration" (*Blood* XIII) and a struggle to keep moving.

Most of the attention devoted to Rich's power of change has been concentrated on the transition in her identity. Her identity keeps on changing from reticent, self-censoring aesthete of the 1950^{s} to Rich as radical lesbian poet of the '1970^{s} and 1980^{s}. However, her poem "Delta" (1987) takes the shift which occurred in the more recent

phases of her career. More significantly, how recent developments in Rich's politics in which she represents her relationship with her father and mother. In the 1970s and '1980, Rich's politics is marked by a sense of urgency. This is a feeling of radical new choices. In her poetry of this period she wants that "there come times–perhaps this is one of them–when we have to take ourselves more seriously or die" (*The Dream 74*).

Rich entered into the Women's Liberation Movement in 1970. She spent years in it for the solidarity and empowerment of women. She spent years in it for the solidarity and empowerment of women. She tried her best to establish herself as a feminist or a radical feminist or ultimately as a lesbian. In this regard she opines:

> For most of my life, I had heard the word *feminist* spoken in peroration and derision. The phrase *women's liberation* was illuminating me and *feminism* was beginning to resonate with fresh and positive meaning. I identified myself as a radical feminist, and as soon after–not as a political act but out of powerful and unmistakable feelings as a lesbian. (*Blood*, VII)

She starts her journey for the sake of women as a feminist. Later, she develops herself as a radical feminist. After that, she introduces herself more radically "a lesbian".

There was a latent force and tempering urgency in Rich's work. But, that did not gather enough strength in 1970s and early eighties to make her poetry seem especially calm, tempered or patient. She gained a reputation as a relentlessly serious and sometimes harsh, no-nonsense poet. Only at the end of the 1980s Rich began to convincingly express a desire to work with the circumstances instead of insisting on radical, immediate change. In *Time's Power*, her volume of poetry, she was ready to content herself with reaching a point where the material and dream could join. She

believed, in minute change. To Rich, as she stated in an interview with Moolly McQuade:

> It is important to possess a short-term pessimism and a long term pessimism and long-term optimsm–not to expect everything of any given 'campaign', but to believe that, piece by piece, changes will come. (44)

Endowed with a new and more consistent patience that made it possible to sacrifice immediate effect to long term transformation, Rich could trust in the changing capacity of time.

In her prose, Rich expresses her resistance and resentment toward her father even more clearly. In *Of Woman Born* she blames him for having expected his wife to sacrifice her career. As she believes, her father is the cause of her rupture of the intense bond that existed between mother and her self. She writes that "authority and control ran through [my father's body] like electric filaments", denying her the "right to an emotional life and a selfhood beyond his needs and theories" (*Of Woman* 219, 222). Resisting her father's Victorian paternalism, his seductive charm and controlling cruelty, she always went beyond his expectations.

However, in her 1982 essay "Spilt at the Root: An Essay on Jewish Identity", she changes her attitude. Here, she undertakes first steps towards reconciliation or, at least, negotiation, with her father. Though the majority of the essay indicts his lies, secrets, and silences. His insistence on hiding all traces of Jewishness and on instilling assimilationist values in his wife and children, Rich, for the first time, attempts to "claim [her] father" and grants that:

> He taught me nevertheless, to believe in hard work, to mistrust easy inspiration, to write and rewrite; to feel that I *was* a person of the book, even though a woman, to take ideas seriously. He made the feel, at a very young age, the power of language and that I could share in it. (*Blood*, 100)

Unlike before, Rich is willing to acknowledge and appreciate the difference her father makes and the crucial role he plays in her career as a poet. Rich's new lens has enabled her to take the time to see beneath the negative traits in order to understand her father more fully. This attitude also helps her to create a space where she and her father can coexist in peace.

Rich has come to understand her mother, Helen, in a similar way. Though, Rich has written surprisingly little about her mother. One of the few poems which seems to offer insight into the poem about Helen is "A Women Mourned by Daughters" (1960). Here, the speaker/daughter wonders how her mother, a woman so frangible and weak, could have been so unbearably oppressive to her children. In an exceedingly callous and contemptuous tone Rich writes:

> You are puffed up in death like a corpse pulled from the sea; we groan beneath your weight. And yet you were a leaf, a straw blown on the bed, you had long since become crisp as a dead insect. (*Early Poems*, 159)

Suffering from a kind of female anxiety of influence, the speaker/daughter reflects anything that could be associated with her mother.

Rich never really resolves her conflicts with her mother. However, by the time she writes *Time's Power* in the second half of the 1980s, Rich's new approach to life

has made a rapprochement between daughter and mother possible. Rich describes the piano at which she regularly received lessons from her mother as a tremendous, frightening monster:

> Your windfall at fifteen your steinway grand
> paid for by five insurance
> came to me as birthright a black cave
> with teeth of ebony and ivory
> twangling and thundering over the head
> of the crawling child [. . .]. (*Early Poems*, 3)

The piano, a monster which victimizes her, is, at the same time, a symbol of her victimhood, for it, like the child, can be manipulated according to parents' will. Less equivocally monstrous are the parents and, in particular, the mother.

The rational mode is strongly presented in Rich's work as it is in much politics of location writing. The project demands self-reflexivity, a deliberate and conscientious unpicking of determining factor, a willingness to be searching. In an interview with Audre Lorde. Rich bemoans through her provoking view. But she reclaims the term by redefining it and linking it with a progressive politics. Lorde writes Rich's saying in this regard:

> [O]ne of the crosses I have borne all my life is being told that I'm rational, cool. I am not cool, I'm not rational and logical in that sense. But there is a way in which, trying to translate from your experience to male, slipping away into: 'Ah, yes I understand you' [. . .]. So if I ask for documentation, it's because I take seriously the spaces between us

that difference has created, that racism has created. (104)

These lines are spoken in the context of her poem "Chapter and Verse". The rational and a careful hearing of it prevents a too-easy consensus. Here, the focus is the difference between Black and White. Rich wants to ground the body. She prefers the detailed, factual evidence of the rational to "free-floating abstraction" (*Sister Qutslider*, 214).

Rich, in fact, is the liberator of women. The silenced voices of women, people of color, Jews, gays and lesbians are to be echoed through the writings of Rich. She explores the experience and the intricacies of being white, female, lesbian, Jewish and a US citizen both at the particular time and through the lens of her past.

Rich was a successful poet because her works fulfilled the requirements of traditional terms and conditions. Her poems are teemed with skill and command of language. They are nicely constrained and cosntricted. They don't demand more of the literary establishment than they are ready to give. The poems by her do not attack, do not accuse, do not make any fuss. They behave themselves. At the same time there are under currents in the poems which have different message. Her works contain encoded messages. It is not necessary that they should be discernible at the time the poem was written. However, that is only detectable on going back and revisioning the poem.

Margaret Dickie appreciates Rich's poem–"An Atlas of the Difficult World" as "a poem with national rather than feminist scope." She further writes, "Rich expresses her longing for the ancient poetry of public lament not just for herself, not just for the poet, but for the country she would unite in addressing" (165).

Importantly, Rich's career has been marked by major shifts in gear. From traditional poet to an experimental one and from marriage to lesbian, feminist and outspoken political activist, Rich's career has taken the wonderful turn. Charges of excessive didacticism dogged her middle and later career according to some critics. That undercut the scope of her achievement as well.

In this way, Rich's voice poses a serious and self-renewing challenge to the dominant values of her political and aesthetic context. Significantly involved with her political critique of patriarchy, her radically subversive project depends on and helps to shape the poetic voice. This voice speaks with an intensely decentering, politically focused and self-critical power. The voice, moreover, intimates shared projects and useful connections between Rich's lesbian feminism and several other forms of radical or potentially radical discourse.

Rich's primary concern is with the critical attack on dominant patterns of perception and practices. Her refusal to be overcome by patriarchy and her determination to function as an independent member of society is the focus of this dissertation. Her efforts to dispel myths regarding women's role in matrimony have followed the process of revision of a women's power and social position advocated by her poetry through the years.

CHAPTER TWO

Operation Versus Oppression: A Study of Feminism

The term "feminism" is probably a bit complex. The Oxford English Dictionary describes the word feminism as the movement. It represents one of the most important social, economic and aesthetic revolutions of modern times. Virginia Woolf' writes in *Three Guineas*:

> What more fitting than to destroy an old word, a vicious and corrupt word that has done much harm in its and is now obsolute ? The word 'feminist' is the word indicated. That word according to the dictionary, means 'one who champions the rights of women'. Since the only right, the right to earn a living, has been won, the word no longer has a meaning. (117)

Woolf goes on to describe a symbolic burning of the "dead" and "corrupt" word. She declares that once this has been done the air is cleared, and that we can see men and women working together for the same cause. Also, Woolf argues that the word feminist was one which was applied to those fighting "the tyranny of the patriarchal state [. . .] to their resentment" (*Three Guineas* 117). Obviously, the word was imposed on rather than chosen by women fighting for the rights of women. Luce Irigaray's objection to the word in 1982 interview was that feminist "is the word by which the social system designates the struggle of women [. . .] I prefer to say the struggles of women, which reveals a plural and polymorphous character" (Todd 233).

Such arguments have not been successful in burying the word in question. However, to a very large extent, women and men fighting for women's right have been happy to call themselves, and be called, feminists. As the movement expands

and develops, discussion about such a key descriptive term inevitably takes on a political character. Different interest groupings engage in struggle to impose their own meaning on any term which has become a very important point.

In general usage, the term feminism is usually treated as an umbrella term to describe those who disagree with Virginia Woolf that there are no more rights to be achieved for women. And, who think that it is necessary to struggle against the oppression of women on a number of different planes: social, economical and ideological. Such struggle takes varied forms and has differing objectives. Sometimes the term sounds quite tricky.

Before 1960's women were confined only to the hearth. They were supposed to live passively inside house. They were obliged to accept what the male member of the family provided them. Women were oppressed, so their voice was not heard. Gradually, women started to write their feelings and desires on diaries, pamphlets, love letters etc.

1960s saw the emergence of feminist group which advocated women's liberation and socio-political union. They fought for women's right to vote and to receive education. This movement coincided with the goals of other reform movements of the time, which included improved medical care, socialized property ownership, and class equality. Moreover, the works of Mary Wollstone Craft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* was written in 1792 and Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1928) supported the thesis of these movement.

The United States has a long history of women organizing to change various aspects of society in particular gender norms and limitation. All women's movements rise out of periods of generalized social upheaval and cycle through periods of mass

activity and inactivity. American feminist criticism seems primarily a revisionary reading of the texts written about or by women. As Elaine Showalter writes, "All feminist criticism is in some sense revisionist [. . .] indeed most contemporary. American criticism claims to be revisionist too" (333).

Conventionally, there were three waves of feminist movement. The first wave of US feminism emerged from the abolitionism. This struggled to end slavery in the 1830s and toward during an era of social reform in the 1890s. It was a time of geographic expansion, industrial development, social reform, and a growing debate on individual's rights. In 1840, at the World Anti Slavery Convention in London, women were sent to the galleries and prohibited from participating. The silencing of slaves with the rights of women denounced the male supremacy.

Outraged at their treatment by their fellow abolitionists, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton held a convention for women's rights. This focused on multiple issues including education rights, property reforms, and women's roles within the family. On July 14, 1848, the Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention drew three hundred people. At the convention both women and men drafted declaration of sentiments and twelve resolutions demanding women's equal rights to determine their own lives, particularly in the areas such as the law, marriage, employment, and religion. After a long debate convention attendees agree to fight also for women's suffrage. It was called the bloomer movement. Steven M. Buecheler states:

> The National Woman's Suffrage addressed issues outside suffrage in 1869 with more radical tactics. Women of Ohio spontaneously protested the evils of alcohol in 1873. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (1874) viewed alcohol as the greatest disrupter of

> life. [. . .] By the late 1940s and early 1950s, the domestic role of women dominated American culture putting the movement into a state of doldrums. (*Women's Movements*,102)

The first wave of feminist movement in America create space for woman in the male dominated world scenario. Moreover, It gave the way for second wave of feminism.

"The second wave" was a phrase used to denote women's activism expanded from the mid 1960s to the end of twentieth century and possibly beyond. This movement incorporated a variety of goals, ideologies and members.

Liberal feminism had goals to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society through changes of legal and political channels within the system. In 1976, Betty Friedan published her writing collection about housewives' frustration with their lives of suffocation. The women's liberation movement which came through different phases, supported by abolition movement, suffrage movement, civil rights movement and liberation movement paved way to black feminists to form an autonomous black movement of 1970 in United states.

Hence, feminist theories tried to explore women's personal as well as common experiences of suffering, exploitation, oppression and their struggle for independence and liberation. Feminism tried to discover all forms of violence, abuses and oppression against women of all different socio-political context. Furthermore, the theory tried to find out the causes and consequences of the crises and provides favorable strategies for women's liberation. Despite, the served dimension and diversities, the autonomous movement of 1960s emphasized on the common goals of women's emancipation.

In 1970s, this wave of feminism widened more. Liberal feminists tried to consider the problems of women more explicitly. Janice Radway writes:

> Liberals like Betty Friedan and Pawi Murragy founded the National organization for women in 1966 to win legal equality form women. It had a number of goals including abortion rights, but their primary objective throughout the 1970s was a constitutional Equal Rights Amendment. The heyday of the second wave came between the years of 1972 and 1982. (qtd. in *Reading the Romance*, 76)

The "younger" or "collectivist" strand consisted of college students who dreamt on networks and organizing skills acquired in civil rights and New Left Movements. Many of the women who came to women's liberation did so after experiencing sexism within student rights, antiwar civil rights and New left organizations. Women such as Casey Hayden and Mary King, dissatisfied with sexism in the New Left, began to articulate their experiences, drawing a connection between sex and oppressive class systems.

Radical feminism could be taken as a term still current but perhaps more in use in 1960s and 1970s. It endorsed the belief that male superiority had varied on women's subordination. It emphasized on eradicating sex roles as the root cause of the forms of oppression. Radicals challenged liberals focus on legal equality. In this sense, radical feminists insist upon the fundamental and all-embracing significance of gender differentiation. Radical feminism's radicalness was normally taken to consist along with (often but not always) a rejection of most or all forms of collaboration with men or organizations containing men. By 1975, two variants on radical feminism had

become prominent: lesbian feminism and socialist feminism. The former emerged in the early 1970 whereas later flowered between 1972 and 1976.

Radical feminism tends to be universalizing rather than to focus upon the socially culturally, and historically specific characteristics of patriarchy, although specific terms of oppression. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has commented, in the criticism of radical feminism, that it

> [T] ends to deny that the meaning of gender or sexuality has ever significantly changed; and more damningly, it can make future change appear impossible, or necessarily apocalyptic, even though desirable. Alternatively, it can radically oversimplify the prerequisites for significant change. In addition, history even in the residual synchronic form of class of radical difference conflict becomes invisible or excessively coarsened and dichotomized in the universalizing structuralist view. (13)

Radical feminism redefined traditional gender roles for women and brought about new cultural awareness of issues of sexism and discrimination. Finally, second wave organizations continued to activate large numbers of women who remained committed to working for feminist goals.

Cultural feminism categorized by lesbian feminism, took on an institutional reality with the emergence of feminist art, music literature and analyses of women's lives. Women's studies programmes flourished at colleges and universities from the 1970s to 1990s. However, the pace of feminist activism began to decline in 1983 and the movement began to slow down gradually. Despite the setbacks of 1980s and 1990s, the movement was significant in various aspects such as gender equity and

cultural awareness of issues of sexism. Likewise, the second wave organizations cultivated many women to work for feminist goals.

The third wave of the women's movement emerged in 1990s. These women felt that their concerns were different from the second wave feminists. Created more out of generational differences than social upheaval, third wave feminists drew on technologies such as the internet to communicate, disseminate information, form organizations and mobilize feminist activism. Leila J.Rupp and Verta Taylor writes:

> It is important to note that although US feminism has a continuous history, scholars often discuss "women's movements" to acknowledge the diversity of feminist experiences. Throughout US history issues of race, class and ethnicity have led women of color to organize separately from white women. The National Association of Colored Women was the first black organization. (215)

In addition to race, class, and ethnicity, other feminist movements have been generated including those concerned with women's health, economic status and domestic violence.

Gradually, this movement took the form of global movement. Global feminist movements have organized around a wide variety of goals and grievances. Issues addressed by global feminists have not focused solely on issues of gender discrimination. But that addressed how gender intertwines with issues of colonization and racism, creating constellation of oppressions that vary by political culture.

In the late 1980s the most developed form of the feminism, called "The Gender Theory", emerged and was applied to the study of sexual differences. It viewed that writings by men also could be feminist and our perception of gender did

not go far from feminist theory. Feminist criticism was an analysis of gender and opens the textual field in discourse. Gender theory promised to introduce the subject of masculinity into feminist criticism. The distinction from traditional feminism was that it tried to bring me the theorists, critics and scholars into feminist criticism. Another aspect of gender study was that it brings feminist criticism from margin to the center in literary analysis.

The overall view was that female literature is to free from women particularly from patriarchal society. Feminists were of the opinion that only a feminist struggle would change relations between men and women on issues such as sexuality violence and different cultural policies of dress. Hence, feminism explored female identity and role under the circumstances of hegemonic discourses of patriarchy. To raise voice of equality and freedom, a feminist thinker should unite in a broad network of feminist movement.

The term "patriarchy" had been used to point both to the actual exercise of power and also the ideological system–the ideas and attitudes. It was used to bolster, justify and protect this power. Patriarchy thus had political, economic, social and ideological dimensions. Much recent feminist literary criticism has aimed to uncover patriarchal ideas in works of literature as well as in the systems surrounding these works. For instance, education, publishing, journalism, reviewing, and the general systems of literary production were specific to different cultures and societies.

Some argued that patriarchy is based primarily upon male violence and of women's sexuality. So, we can say that domestic violence and the sexual abuse of both women and children within the home was seen as the cutting edge of the

patriarchal oppression where many women face male power in its crudest and the most aggressive form. In her book *The Second Sex* Simone de Beauvoir States:

> As a mater of fact, the privileged position of men comes from the integration at his biologically aggressive role with his social function as leader or master; it is an account of this social function that the psychological differences take on all their significance. Because man is ruler in the world, he holds that the violence of his desires in a sign of his sovereignty; a man of great erotic capacity is said to be strong, potent-epithets-that employee activity and transcendence. But, as warm and frigid, which is to say that she will never manifest other than passive qualities. (397)

Patriarchal society gave all power to the male and weaknesses to the female. In a patriarchal social structure, men were taken as rational, active and superior beings where as women are regarded as inferior, passive and kind. Such type of discrimination compelled women to accept sexual abuses and harassment as natural without any objection.

But today, the situation has changed. Women have become conscious of their secondary position and have began to question against it. Thus, feminism is based on the belief that the patriarchy is the primary cause of women to be taken as second class citizens.

Adrienne Rich as a critic has poured her views on feminism abundantly, especially on patriarchy. In her prose work, *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, Rich wrote of her ambivalent feelings towards a women's role and power in a patriarchal culture. The emotional burden of full-time motherhood

and wifely duties caused tremendous strain to her. She began to realize that being a traditional female human being was the curse upon her imaginative expansion. In her early career she was confused about her position in the world or "marriage and motherhood, experiences which were supposed to be truly womanly, often left [her] feeling unfit, disempowered, adrift" (*Blood*, 175). Later she realized that she would have to reject the so-called patriarchal idea that a poem's text and a poet's everyday life were mutually exclusive. She also wanted readers to look beyond innovation and artistry in her poetry and recognize her struggles to connect with problems associated with her sex. Regarding the limited role of mother and their effect on their daughters, Rich writes:

> Few women growing up in patriarchal society can feel mothered enough, the power of our mothers, whatever their love for us and their struggles on our behalf, is too restricted. And it is the mother through whom patriarchy teaches the small female, her proper expectation [. . .]. A mother's victimization does not merely humiliate her, it mutilates the daughter who watches her for clues as to what it means to be a woman [. . .]. It is not simply that such mother's feeling both responsible and powerless. It is they that carry their own guilt and self hatred over into their daughters' experiences. (*Of Women Born*, 243-44)

Rich believed that a daughter could feel rage at her mother's powerlessness. The life of a daughter, wife mother and poet was immensely suppressed by patriarchy. Rich chooses male identification to signify her determination to take risks in an attempt to resolve the conflict between her two selves. It was difficult for a woman to escape the

fact that poet was a masculine noun in the fifties and sixties. Rich intended to discard the external "feminine" self and free from her well-constructed world. Rich's involvement in the independent women's movement of the late sixties through her poetry, prose, and lectures helped her shape a feminist theory based on "female experience, and remain connected to a radical imagining of social transformation" (*Blood*, IX).

The word "power" was highly charged for women. It had been long associated for them with force, rape, stockpiling of weapons, ruthless accrual of wealth, and the hoarding of resources. The power acted only in its own interest despising and exploiting the powerless including women and children. The effect of this kind of power was all around them. Literally, the effects were in the water they drink and the air they breathe, in the form of carcinogens and radioactive waters. But, for a long time, feminists had been talking about redefining power. An early objection to feminism in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was that it would make women behave like men ruthlessly, exploitatively, and oppressively.

Obviously, radical feminism looked to a transformation of human relationship and structures. The power in this structures was shared in the form of knowledge, expertise, decision making access to tools, as well as in the basic forms of food shelter, health care and literacy. Both the feminists and non-feminists were concerned with what power would mean in such a society. The discuss the relative differences was in power among and between women here and now. The next meaning of power, where women were concerned, was the false power which masculine society offered a few women on condition that they used it to maintain things as they were, and that they essentially thought like men. In as much as female tokenism was that power,

which withheld from the vast majority of women, was offered to a few. So that it appeared that any truly qualified woman could gain access to leadership, recognition and reward. Hence, that justice based on merit actually prevails. Rich opined:

> The token women is encouraged to see herself as different from most other women as exceptionally talented and deserving, and to separate herself from the wider female condition; and she is perceived by "ordinary" women as separate also, perhaps even as stronger than themselves. (*Blood*, 6)

Because she was within the limits of all women's ultimate outsider hood, a privileged groups of women. It was extremely important for her future sanity that she understood the way tokenism functions. Paradoxically, while it saw to offer the individual token women, a means to realize her creativity, to influence the course of events. It also demanded her certain kinds of behavior and style which act to blur her outsider's eye. Actually, the view of other women could be her real source of power and vision. Losing her outsider's vision, she lost the insight which both binds her to other women and firms her in herself.

Tokenism essentially demanded that the token deny her identification with women as a group, especially with women less privileged than her. If she was a lesbian, she denied her relationship with individual woman. She perpetuated rules and structures, criteria, and methodologies which have functioned to exclude women. Further, she renounced or left undeveloped the critical perspective of her female consciousness. Unlike herself, poor women, women of color, waitresses, secretaries, housewives in the supermarket, prostitutes, old women became invisible to her. They might represent too acutely what she has escaped or wished to flee.

Rich believed that any profession would be better for having more women practising it. Any woman practising law or medicine would use her knowledge and skill to work to transform the realm of health care and the interpretations of the law. To make them responsive to the needs of all those women, people of color, children, the aged and the dispossessed, they functioned these days as responsive controls. Rich believes this, but it does not happen even fifty percent of the members of these professions are women. Until and unless those women refused to be made into token insiders, unless they jealously preserve the outsider's view and the outsider's consciousness. For no woman is really an insider in the institutions fathered by masculine consciousness. When women allow themselves to believe they were, they lost, touch with parts of themselves defined as unacceptable by that consciousness. Rich says:

> I believe that every woman's son is haunted by the spirits of earlier women who fought for their unmet needs and those of their children and their tribes and their peoples, who refused to accept the prescriptions of a male church and state, who took risk's and resisted, as women today—like Inez Gracia, Yonne Wanrow, Joan Little, Cassandra Peten—are fighting their rapists and batterers. Those spirits dwell in us, trying to speak to us. But we can choose to be deaf; and tokenism, the myth of the "special" women, the unmothered Athena sprung from her father's brow, can deafen us to their voices. (*Blood*, 7-8)

More women were entering the professions though they were the victim of sexual harassment in the work place. If they have children, they were carrying two full time

jobs. They were vastly outnumbered by men in upper level and decision-making jobs. They needed most profoundly to remember that early insight of the feminist movement as it evolved in the late' sixties that no woman is liberated until they all are liberated. The media flooded them with messages to the contrary telling them that they lived in an era freely accepted marriage contracts. Similarly, the new intimacies were revolutionizing heterosexual relationships, and that shared parenting plus the new fatherhood will change the world.

They lived in a society leeched upon by the personal growth and human potential industry by the delusion. The individual self-fulfillment could be found within short time. The orientation and injustice was experienced by women, black and third world people. The poor woman ruled by white males in a society which failed to meet the most basic needs and which is slowly poisoning itself. It could be mitigated or dispersed by transcendental mediation.

Perhaps, the most succinct expression of the message Rich had seen is the appearance of a magazine for women called "Self". The insistence of the feminist movement was on each woman's selfhood that is precious. The feminine ethic of self-denial and self-sacrifice must give way to a true woman identification which would affirm their connectedness with all women. It was perverted into a commercially profitable and a politically debilitating narcissism(self love). It was important for each of them. Many of these messages were especially directed to discriminate clearly between liberated life style and feminist struggle, and to make a conscious choice.

Rich suggested women to learn history of foresisters how they had compromised the greater liberation of women. They had risked their privileges to further it. The brilliant and successful women had failed to create a more just and

caring society due to acceptance and tolerance of the powerful men around them. She advised to be worthy of the women of every class, culture and historical age, who resisted slavery and who broke the male constructed taboos. She also disregarded the leadership to certain women bestowed by males. Regarding the fact Rich views:

> To be a token woman—whether you win the Noble prize or merely get tenure at the cost of denying your sisters–is to become something less than a man indeed, since men are loyal at least to their own world view, their laws of brotherhood and male self-interest. I am not suggesting that you imitate male loyalties; with the philosopher Mary Dally, I believe that the bonding of women must be utterly different and for an utterly different end: not the misering of resource and power, but the release, in each other, of the yet un explored resources and transformative power of women, so long despised, confined, and wasted. (*Blood*, 9-10)

Rich discarded female tokenism and appeals all the women to be united. No sense of center-margin dilemma have to be created among or between women. Unity was power but tokenism brought rift in it.

Rich further suggested to get all knowledge and a skill woman could handle in whatever professions she enters. However, there must be self-education in learning the things. The women need to know and in calling up the voices they need to hear within themselves.

According to Rich, biologically men have only one innate orientation – a sexual one that draws them to women. While women have two innate orientations, sexual toward men and reproductive toward their young. In her later days, she preferd

lesbianism to heterosexualism. She argued that women want children because their heterosexual relationships lack richness and intensity. Having a child a woman seeks to re-create her own intense relationship with her mother. Women were used, abused and misused everywhere. Even so-called soft-core pornography and advertising depict women as objects of sexual appetite devoid of emotional context, without individual meaning of personality. They are presented as a sexual commodity to be consumed by males. This was the reason why Rich raised her voice of dissent through lesbianism by destroying the social institution–Marriage that was historically established by patriarchal hegemony. Rich undermined the masculine view that women as sexual beings whose responsibility was the sexual service of men.

Rich perceived the lesbian experience as a being, like motherhood, a profoundly female experience, with particular oppressions, meanings and potentialities. She envisaged her opinion towards lesbian existence in this way:

> *Lesbian existence* suggests both the fact of the historical presence of lesbians and our continuing creation of the meaning of that existence. I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include a range–through each woman's life and throughout history—of woman identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had a consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bounding against male tyranny [. . .], we being to grasp breadths of female history and psychology which have lain out of reach as a consequence of limited

mostly clinical, definitions of *lesbianism*. (*Blood*, 52)

Rich wanted to create especial kind of relationship with her female partner. This relation was needed to prevent herself from the male "tyranny". So, lesbian existence comprised both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life. It was also a direct or indirect attack on male right of access to women.

CHAPTER THREE

Rich's Poetry: A Challenge to Matrimony and Patriarchy

This chapter attempts to analyze Rich's responses to the patriarchal definition of a woman's position in marriage. While commenting on marriage, she expands her focus from mere a man-woman relationship to include mothers and daughters who are integral part of the institution.

In Rich's early poems, a woman's suppressed longings receive only covert expression. *The Dream of a Common Language* (1974-1977) established her power as a woman and poet. Rich explores the concerns of a woman locked in traditional roles in her third volume of poems called snapshots of a *Daughter-in-Law* (1963). Mostly, the dissertation will revolve around the analysis of the poems in this anthology. Her inner frustrations and impatience at the boundaries prescribed for women are explored in "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law", "A Marriage in the Sixties", and "The Roofwalker". They all were written in the late fifties and early sixties. These poems are significant because after fifties Rich was able to write directly about experiencing herself as a woman. These poems followed her struggle for mutuality rather than male hierarchy will be examined in social and biological contexts. The evolution of Rich's feminist vision as reflected in her poetry of the 'seventies and 'eighties will be discussed analytically.

Although Rich is known for her role in establishing a women's movement, her work, as a young poet, was often defined in terms of modesty and restraint. *A Change of World (1951)* is Rich's first volume of the poem. *The Diamond Cutters (1951)*, her second book of poems is praised for their formalism and technical brilliance. As with the earlier poets the subversiveness in Rich's poetry is concerned beneath traditional

forms. Nevertheless, Rich acknowledges her debt to the poetry of Frost, Stevens, Auden, and Yeats and its influence on her subject mater and style. As a woman, writing and striving for recognition in a patriarchal culture, Rich realizes the importance of believing to established techniques.

Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law provides a collection of poems written between 1954 and 1962. The poems reflect the poet's personal growth during those those years. These poems are characterized by the poet's efforts to break away from male poetic influences. The poems are actually written to create a distinct artistic identity by experimenting with subject matter and rhyme schemes. The poems also dramatize Rich's departure on an inner journey of exploration and discovery Rich's main objective in writing this volume is succinctly expressed in her poem "Double Monologue". The poem reads: "to know/simply as I know my name/at any given moment, where I stand" (*Snapshots,* 33). The volume provides the reader with candid glimpses of a woman's anger, hopelessness and hope. But a frank expression of woman's opinion regarding marriage and the confinement of women in gender-specific roles is doubled by some critics. Though the poems in the volume are far tamer than those that were to appear in the seventies and eighties. It is becoming increasingly clear that they posed a threat to the patriarchal notion of "acceptable" poetry.

Rich's own voice overtly challenging the established traditions, begins to emerge with the ten-part title poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law." Through the use of irony, wit and allusion, Rich scrutinizes women's frustrations and yearnings in a world that seeks to stifle her creativity. Nevertheless, it is also a poem of hope

where the poet envisions the ultimate freedom of women from social oppression. The poem doubtlessly concerns the voices of women.

Moreover, the poem introduces her central themes regarding patriarchy. It discloses the emptiness of women's experience in patriarchally defined roles. The poem attempts to elicit the negative attributes of matrimony and concludes on a note of hope for future. It takes the readers through the lives and minds of mothers, wives and daughter-in-law who live in the conventional life of sacrifice. But all of them are also becoming aware of their own inner potential. The first part provides a flashback of sorts where a long forgotten portrait of a mother is revived. The woman, "once a belle in Shreveport,/with henna-colored hair, skin like a peachbud", how possesses a mind "mouldering like wedding cake,/heavy with useless experience, rich with suspicion, rumor, fantasy" (*Snapshots*, 21). This negative caricature of the mother is offset by a picture of her daughter as one who is gaining awareness of her real self—"Nervy, glowing, your daughter/wipes the teaspoons, grows another way." (21)

The mental strain that accompanies the process of growth and self-definition forms the core of the next section. The daughter yearns emancipation but is unable to obey the voices that encourage her to rebel. Although she longs for creative power, she also fears the consequences of acquiring it. She realizes that using her power means going against all patriarchal traditions. The chiding of the angles telling her to "*Have no patience*", to "*Be insatiable*", and to "*Save yourself*; *Others you Cannot Save*" (21) become a source of conflict between what she is and what she wants to be. These voices distract her from her daily tasks as a result of which she burns herself:

> Sometimes she's let the tap stream scald her arm,
>
> a match burn to her thumbnail,

or held her hand above the kettle's snout

right in the wooly steam. (21)

These acts of burning, actually, are the woman's means of countering fire in order to deaden her longing. Although she succeeds to certain extent, "each morning's grit blowing into her eyes" (21) reminds her of the grinding pain that will accompany the difficult process of growth.

The chiding angels in Rich's poem provide the speaker with a vision of freedom. The angels urge her to rebel and resist openly the patriarchal definition of a woman's role in society. The poet finds courage to voice her concerns publicly and to strive for the recognition of a female community as a positive and empowering value in itself.

The next section indicates precisely the problems that accompany a woman's growing self-awareness and struggle for selfhood. She is a "thinking woman" who sleeps with monsters (22). These "monsters" represent the forbidden voices of dissent that haunt her from within. The growing sense of "madness" that women experience leads them to victimize and vent their frustrations on each other: "[. . .] all the old knives/that have rusted in my back, I drive in yours" (22). The ranking frustrations make their gifts seem like "[. . .] no pure fruition, but a thorn /the prick filed sharp against a hint of scorn [. . .]." Rich now proceeds to celebrate her predecessors who have courage to pursue their calling amid adversity. She admires her achievement while recognizing the obstacles that hindered her success– "Few mean about her would or could do more,/ hence she was labeled harpy, shrew and whore" (23).

Furthermore, Rich introduces a subject that reflects her personal concerns. She questions the sincerity of a woman's relationship to her art in a society that gives

precedence to her willingness to confirm. These concerns are expressed through the image of conventional woman whose art is subordinated to her ability to please—"When to her lute Corinna sings/neither words nor music are her own"(22). Rich provides an elaborate description of her costume and seductive posture that adequately masks her real self. The ability to manipulate and seduce have been characterized as "power" in women as discussed by other feminists. But Rich seems not to consider this fact. This ability of woman is just for her survival.

The focus now, shifts from a picture of slight knowledge to that a woman standing "Poised, trembling and unsatisfied, before/an unlocked door, that cage of cages (23). The words, "trembling" and "unsatisfied" in this context, suggest relentlessness and impatience that inspire hope. Here "cage" serves as a metaphor that could represent shackles of matrimony or environment that restricts a woman's use of her creative power. The woman is compared to a bird standing before an unlocked engaged door. The reference to an "unlocked" door implies the movement of women's poetic tradition when the attainment of a selfhood outside patriarchal boundaries seems a distinct possibility. Even though, the bird signifies flight and freedom from oppression, the woman does not fly away from its cage. Her inability to release herself from oppression of male arises from the social conditioning. The patriarchal social system teach women to equate "Love" with happiness and power: "Pinned down/by love, for you the only natural action" (23). The section ends with a pertinent question: "has Nature shown/her household books to you, daughter-in-law/that her son never saw " (23) ? The poet wonders if "Nature" has granted woman access to the knowledge of her own creative powers; her rightful place in the order of things. The

difference between that a woman is and what she ought to be, constitute the secrets of the vault that Rich struggles to make known through her poetry.

Section nine dwells on the gender-polarized roles that often confine women. The section begins with an allusion to Samuel Johnson's remark about a woman's preaching: "*Not that it is done well, but/that it is done at all"* (23) ? Man's refusal even to consider a woman's eligibility for a task traditionally performed by men reflects her entrapment within patriarchal culture. However, this question provokes a sarcastic retort: "Yes, think/of the odds ! or shrugs them off forever" (24). This is followed by a piercing description of woman as "Time's precious chronic invalid,—" In these lines, Rich resorts to tactics where she masks her critique of patriarchy by presenting a portrait of a woman. She, then turns her attention to the role women play in contributing to their sorry state of affairs. She does not shirk from charging women with their own faults: "Our blight has been our sinecure:/there talent was enough for us—" (24). Rich, there strikes to warn women against complicity in their mistaken notion of what constitutes "power" in patriarchy.

The speaker, then uses sarcasm (the use of irony to mock or convey contempt) and wit to elaborate on the concessions women can enjoy by accepting and living within the conditions prescribed by patriarchy:

> Bemused by gallantry, we hear
> our mediocrities overpraised,
> indolence read as abnegation,
> slatern thought styled intuition,

every lapse forgiven, [. . ..]. (24)

But the last two lines of the stanza, forcefully conveying a harsh reality, stand in bold relief. Here, Rich spells out, the only alternative for a woman who seeks selfhood, although it would be considered a criminal act— "Our crime/only to cast too bold a shadow/or smash the mould straight off" (24). These lines suggest a provocative image that a woman need not be confined to that category "woman". The distinction of gender is a shell or costume which can be discarded. While Rich realizes that breaking the "mould" of gender involves great risks, she also believes that it is the only way a woman can acquire an identity outside of her relationship with men.

In the final section, Rich envisions hope and deliverance for all those "eyes" that "Inaccurately dream/behind closed windows blanketing with stream" (23). Although she realizes the perils that such a journey would entail, Rich also affirms that freedom can be attained only if a woman is prepared to be "more merciless to herself than history" (24). The woman whose dreams have most often resulted in "martyred ambition" can now look toward a new era and foresee the emergence of the new woman a future heroine who will be in full command of her energy and power. Rich's vision of women's liberation takes on a personal and passionate tone of expression:

Her mind full of the wind, I see her plunge
breasted and glancing through the currents,
taking the light upon her
at least as beautiful as any boy
her helicopter,
poised, still coming,

her fine blades making the air wince. (24)

The striking images indicate the courage and determination that will ultimately deliver women from social oppression. Although, in this poem, autonomy is still identified with masculinity ("as beautiful as any boy"), Rich affords a glimpse of the feminist vision that would shape her life and career in the future. The poem also helps her to establish a woman's tradition that is "palpable" and "ours" (25).

In order to realize selfhood beyond the patriarchal definitions of woman one has to know the writing of the past not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold on women. Rich attempts to understand this old tradition by exploring the minds of mothers and daughters in "A Woman Mourned by Daughters" (1960). The death of their mother unleashes a flood of conflicting emotions of anger, frustration, pity and sorrow. Ironically, it is in death that her presence seems overwhelming:

You are swollen till you strain
this house and the whole sky.
You, whom we so often
succeeded in ignoring !
You are puffed up in death
like a corpse pulled from sea;
we groan beneath your weight. (*Snapshots*, 35)

The intense visual imagery embodies the mother's stifling grip over her daughters. Mothers who are a vital part of the institution of marriage, are also the source of emotional security for their daughters. Therefore, a woman who is "once a leaf/ a sorrow blown on the bed", but has since her marriage, "become/crisp as a deal insect", reflects the passive and dispirited life that a daughter can look forward to in her life as

a wife and mother. The emotion is expressed in the form of hostility directed towards other women, suggest the speaker's frustrated attempt to understand the psychological demands that would induce a woman (who has suffered victimization) to restrain the freedom of her daughters.

While attempting to understand the position of mothers in patriarchy, Rich refuses to condone the mother's passive nature. It is this sense of bitterness that the speaker conveys in the following lines:

> You breathe upon us now
> through solid assertions
> of yourself: teaspoons, goblets,
> [. . .] a forest
> of old plants to be watered,
> .....
> And all this universe
> dares us to lay a finger
> anywhere, save exactly
> as you would wish it done. (35)

The antagonism is expressed in the poem exemplifies a lack of female identification between mothers and daughters. But, mother does identify intensely with her daughter and hostility is aroused because it is through weakness not through strength that she often relates to her child. By resenting the "role" model that a daughter finds in her mother, the speaker indirectly lashes out at the social institution of marriage where a man often denies the "ego-support" to his wife. In such a situation, a women is unable to resolve the split in herself. Rather she attempts alternately play the hostess and

please her husband as her mother did. It is painful legacy that has been transmitted from mother to daughter through the generations. The poet seeks emighten her readers of the necessity for a strong mother-daughter bond that seeks to transcend the divisive attitudes of patriarchy.

A mother's attitude towards her daughter depends largely on her own relationship with her husband. The nature of this interaction between a husband and wife is explored in "A Marriage in the 'Sixties" (1961). Although there is a little evidence of suppressed anger in this poem Rich views the prospect of a successful marriage as only an interesting impossibility. The poem begins with a picture of a seemingly well-shared existence between a husband and wife. The passage of time has made their marriage "As solid-seeming as antiquity" (45). The years have also mellowed their natures and increased their tolerance for each other:

> I feel the gears of this late afternoon
> slip, cog by cog, even as I read.
> "I'm old", we both complain,
> half-laughing, oftener now. (9–12)

But their individual experiences through time have also drifted them apart from each other. The intimacy resulting from youthful passions is contrasted with the more complicated circumstances that bring them together now:

> When
> I read your letters long ago
> .....
> every word primed my nerves.
> .....

Today we stalk
in the raging desert of our thought
whose single drop of mercy is
each knows the other there. (45-46)

In these lines the moment of felt separateness between husband and wife is seen as a kind of intimacy. The lines describe a desert that is "raging" full of pain and in which the only oasis is the fact that each is aware that the other also inhabits the same separate place. But, even such consolation becomes momentary as the speaker's focus closes in on the two people: "Two strangers, thrust for life upon a rock". Their final afford to communicate and "have at last the perfect hour of talk/that language aches for", is thwarted by the mental separation signified by two minds, two messages" (46).

The last two stanzas lament the lack of identification and mental compatibility with each other: "Will nothing ever be the same/even our quarrels take on a different key,/our dreams exhumes new metaphors ?" This separation has reduced them to being mere "characters in the fiction of marriage", phrase that Rich uses in a 1977 essay to describe the self-delusions that hold a marriage together. "A Marriage in the 'Sixties" depicts Rich's effort at understanding the incongruity between external and internal worlds that inevitably leads to loneliness and isolation. The poem also indicates the beginning of a self-awareness and calls into question society's assumptions about men and women both separately and in relation to each other.

"The Roofwalker" (1961), the last poem in the volume, brings the theme of selfhood and its relation to the unfair demands of the institution of marriage to a remarkable conclusion. Here, a tone of anger is coupled with an overt rejection of societal standards suggest Rich's effort to define herself "at last/on [her] own

premises" (*Poem*, 85). The poem begins with a casual description of a group of roofers winding up their work for the day. Nevertheless, the lines are characterized by existential overtones.

> Giants, the roof walkers,
> on a listing deck, the wave
> of darkness about to break
> on their heads. The sky
> is a torn sail where figures
> pass magnified [. . .]. (*Snapshots*, 63)

The sight of those roofers heightens the speaker's sense of her own vulnerability. The event on the roof is now strangely akin to the speaker's state of mind:

> I feel like them up there:
> Exposed, larger than life,
> and due to break my neck.

In voicing her fears, the speaker feels she is exposing to dangers that might jeopardize her own existence . These lines convey, in addition to its speakers precarious position, a sense of impatience with the uninspiring tasks she is expected to perform. In the lines that follow, the poet uses the roof as a metaphor for the "formal", manner in which she has constructed her own life. But she wonders if it was worth the effort "to lay- \ with infinite exertion- \ a roof I can't live under?" It is a roof designed to fit patriarchal expectation. Moreover, this roof was constructed for a life that was alien to her experience as a woman:

> A life I didn't choose
> chose me: even

my tools are the wrong ones

for what I have to do.

The life of a daughter, wife, mother and poet that was considered successful by patriarchy were for her only painful compromises performed to please and survive.

The final lines of the poem are rendered in a tone of anger and irony where the poet sees herself as,

a naked man fleeing

across the roofs

who could with a shade of difference

be sitting in the lamplight

.....

reading- not with indifference

about a naked man

fleeing across the roofs.(The Roofwalker 27-34)

Here again, in an attempt to resolve the conflict between her two selves, Rich chooses male identification to signify her determination to risks. In the 'fifties and 'sixties it was difficult for a woman to escape the fact that poet was a masculine noun. Therefore, the standard of beauty and achievement in this volume is still male . Nevertheless, the lines convey the poet's intention to discard the external "feminine" self and flee from her well-constructed world. This same man, who perhaps represents a gender-free reality, could in other circumstances be just a passive observer within the protected walls of patriarchy. The poet implies that she would rather break the "mould" and take chances than have these impulses reduced to mere fantasies, daydreams, instead of her own reality.

Rich's determination to create a self unimpeded by gender restrictions is also conveyed by her dedication of "The Roofwalker". The 1963 volume marks her movement towards a poetry that validated women's experience and took their existence seriously as themes and source for art. Rich's involvement in the independent women's movement of the late 'sixties through her poetry, prose and lectures helped her shape a feminist theory based on female experience, and remain connected to a radical imagining of social transformation. The influence of this movement is reflected in her assertive poetry and radical prose writings of the 1970s and 1980s Rich's final break with patriarch came in the early 'seventies when she began to identify herself as a radical feminist and a lesbian.

Rich's willingness to take risks as a woman and poet, although it is implied the breakdown of the world as she has always known it, makes the poetic work *Snapshots of a Daughter - in- law* an important milestone in her life and career. In a 1962 poem, Rich challenges the women while, at the same time warning them of the dangers that lurk beyond the door: Either you will/ go through this door/ or you will not go through (59)

She reminds them that if one does go through "there is always the risk/ of remembering your name." On the other hand, in refusing to participate in change "it is possible / to live worthily." But, a passive existence where in "much will blind you, /much will evade you,/ at what cost who knows?" is not one that she espouses. These lines suggest that Rich herself has taken that risk and gone through the door.

Rich's decision, needless to say, was mostly influenced by her observation and experience that heterosexual marriage often confines and diminishes a woman. She believes that a relationship between two people should be one that is a continuation

of the woman's creation of herself Rich's contempt for the husband who lacks consideration for his wife is expressed in "A primary Ground, " a poem included in *Diving into the Wreck* published in 1973. In a bitter tone, she addresses the husband:

> And this is how you live : a woman, children
>
> protect you from the abyss
>
> you move near, ...
>
> .....
>
> drinking the last wine
>
> from the cellar of your wedding. (38)

The stagnating life of a woman within the confines of marriage is further conveyed through images of mundane and uninspiring tasks she is expected to perform :

> It all seems innocent enough, this sin
>
> of wedlock: you ,your wife ,your children
>
> leaning across the unfilled plates
>
> passing the salt
>
> down a cloth ironed by a woman with aching legs

Although "Emptiness" is an inevitable result of such an existence, the final section of the poem speaks to a very poignant aspect of a woman's nature:

> But there is something else:
>
> your wife's twin sister, speechless
>
> is dying in the house
>
> You an your wife take turns
>
> carrying up the trays,
>
> understanding her case, trying to make her understand. (39)

In these lines, the poet introduces a "twin sister" whose existence has no apparent relevance to the familial atmosphere created in the poem. This is perhaps Rich's way of suggesting the existence of the less visible side of a woman, an independent and assertive side that she is less inclined to reveal due to societal restrictions. The lines also indicate the devastating effect of such suppression on women. Rich emphasizes the need for reciprocity and freedom of communication as the most important factor in a relationship between two people.

However, Rich's poetry and prose indicate that such an empowering and reciprocal relationship can be sustained only when women associate with each other. Much of her later poetry is an effort to connect with and validate physical and emotional experiences that are so essential to a woman's growth. Rich's fervent commitment to women finds ultimate poetic in *The Dream of A Common Language* (1978). The poems in the volume are about women and are written for a female audience. Unlike the frustration and anger that dominated her earlier poems, a tone of idealism, sympathy and quiet optimism accompanies the anguish Rich shares with the condition of women in this collection. A poem that clearly depicts the communal strength of women and their empowering effect on each other is "Phantasia for Elvira Shatayev." Here Rich assumes the persona of the leader of a women's climbing team, all of whom died in their effort on Lenin Peak in 1974. The initial stanzas describe the severe conditions that caused their death. But their collective effort and a common cause have provided them with courage to face risks:

> through changes elemental and minute
> as those we underwent
> to bring each other here

choosing ourselves each other and this life

whose every breath and grasp and further foothold

is somewhere still enacted and continuing. (*Dream*, 5)

Although, Rich appears to be narrating the life of Shatayev, she speaks with a "voice no longer personal". The trials and courage of these women transcend the limits of time and place. Here again, Rich reinforces her belief in the selfless cooperation that women are capable of providing one another.

Such a shared sense of cooperation between women is contrasted to the husband's love for his wife. Addressing her husband who climbs the mountain in search of their bodies, Shatayev says:

While my body lies out there

flashing [. . .] into your eyes

how could you sleep you climbed her for yourself

we climbed for our selves. (5)

While the husband's responsibility ends "When you have buried us told you story," Rich feels that the women move on to new possibilities ends "When you have buried us told your story," Rich feels that the women move on to new possibilities. "Ours does not end we stream / into the unfinished, the unbegun / the possible." Separating the selfish love of her husband from her present experience, Shatayev writes in her diary:

[. . .] I have never loved

like this I have never seen

my own forces so taken up and shared

and given back.

This is the kind of relationship Rich envisions for women. By widening her sphere to transcend time and mortality, Rich moves from the personal to the universal thus attempting to give voice to the struggle for self-determination of all women.

Rich's refusal to be overcome by patriarchy and her determination to function as an independent member of society is conveyed in Poem 8 of the "Twenty one love poems" included in *The Dream of a Common Language*. Such a life, Rich insists, would include freedom to make one's own sexual choices. Voicing her determination to challenge the male-defined values in society, Rich asserts:

> [. . .] the woman who cherished
> her suffering is dead. I am her descendant.
> I love the scar-tissue she handed on to me
> but I want to go on from here with you
> fighting the temptation to make a career of pain

The love poems treat the emotional complexities as well as the satisfaction derived in a relationship that allows both partners to retain their identity. Nevertheless, as Rich realizes, even such a mutual relationship between two women involves.

> [. . .] work
> nothing in civilization has made simple,
> two people together is a work
> heroic in its ordinariness. (Poem, 19)

In this volume, Rich gives frank expression to her deepest emotions and urges women to understand and accept their own womanhood and "Hold back nothing / because we [are] women" (Dream, 44).

The importance of Rich's poetry lies in its ability to bring about a heightened consciousness for the cause of women. Her poems attempt to articulate a woman's sense of reality, which Rich feels has been undermined in a culture which validates only male experience. Her efforts to dispel myths regarding women's role in matrimony have followed the process of re-vision of a woman's power and social position advocated by Rich's poetry and prose through the years. Out of these processes of exploration and re-vision comes Rich's next book of poems. *Time's Power* (1989), in which she looks back and confronts her "many-lived" past (*Dream*, 76). The poems in this volume are rendered with an ease of an individual who has learned to recognize time's healing power on the wounds inflicted on her psyche. Recalling "great bodily joys, much pain" that enriched her varied and complex roles in life. Rich, in her poem "One Life," writes:

> I had four lives at least, one out of marriage
>
> when I kicked up all the dust I could
>
> .....
>
> One life with the girls on the line during the war,
>
> .....
>
> one life with a husband, not the worst,
>
> one with your children, none of it just what you'd
>
> thought
>
> .....
>
> [. . .] A lot of lives
>
> worse and better than what I knew. . . .
>
> My hear doesn't ache; sometimes it rages. (43-44)

Although Rich admits that her heart rages occasionally, the acting sense of guilt and anger of her earlier poems have now been replaced by her inclination to come to terms with her past and to acknowledge "Time's Power" in sustaining her belief in the dream that has been her life's focus.

"The Demon Lover", extracted from the anthology *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose*; describes the seasickness experienced by a woman redefining her relationship to the patriarchal system. Echoing Byron, Poe, and countless other romantic writers, the title introduces a disorienting and multivalent ambiguity which challenges the persona's basic mode of thought. The ambiguity is to some degree arbitrary. Its emotional impact on the persona as she experiences her internal and external contradiction is unquestionable.

Beginning with "Fatigue, regrets," she experience an overpowering sense of weariness as she remembers old stores and dreams of war: both images of the social forces conditioning her experience. Doubtful that either language or touch truly, the persona feels the urge to withdraw into an inanimate silence. Rich dissatisfies with the withdrawal strategy. She presents a reconstructive vision in which the person's "heart utters its great beats/in solitude"(30). Likewise, she imagines a "new era" which leads to the first explicitly demonic image: a young girl replaces the weary woman who had imagined the new era simply as an extension of her familiar isolation.

Sexual tensions radiate in the third stanza, which concerns the person's failure to touch or speak with an unidentified (by sex or name) companion during the northeastern blackout, a momentary abatement of technological/patriarchal power. In the eighth stanza, while "hands and minds/erotically waver" (32), the persona questions the "dear child" concerning the importance of sex. The erotic energy seems

implicitly lesbian. When the persona says "I'd like to be gay", it is difficult to read the phrase as a veiled assertion of Rich's repressed sexual orientation.

As a preliminary venture into the water in which Rich would later immerse herself, "The Demon Lover" can only hint at the sexual implications of the "seasick way/this almost/never touching"(33). The words of the "gay song" remain unspoken by either the person or the demonic young girl: "How could a gay song go ? Why that's your secret, and it shall be mine." The erotic wavering of the hands intimates a profoundly disturbing truth leaving the personal to her patriarchal demons.

Rich seems to believe that only where is language, there is world. She return to the world where voices "press" her down, where language, despite its necessity, seems futile. Give this fertility, she can only lie nerveless and unquestioningly endure a sequence of metaphorical rapes. She wrestles with language taken hard by things.

Her return to the patriarchal context, however, is not entirely a withdrawal from experience. Even as she falters, accepting her isolation, the person nurtures the image of the demon lover, the part of herself where sex and language remain vital: "your tongue knows what it knows." She commits herself to articulating the secret knowledge she shares with the apparition: "I want your secrets—I *will* have them out." The italicized word *will* suggests a traditional patriarchal attitude.

Given the inadequacy of the necessary language, the person's desire to articulate the secrets, especially when imaged in terms of domination, recasts her as rapist rather than victim. The persona is confronted with the presence of the patriarchal tendency in her emerging lesbian sensibility. The splits between self and other, language and experience public persona and repressed desire, all reflect the person's reconstructive sensibility.

Since culture is created by people, and social reality is an elaborate network of agreed-upon perceptions, it is time for *her* to try to save the world, even if the monolithic patriarchy threaten to render such efforts futile. The ambiguity of the phase "we have to make it" conveys the sense of possibility coupled with precariousness of survival:

> *The world, we have to make it.*
>
> my coexistent friend said, leaning
>
> back in his cell.
>
> Siberia vastly hulks
>
> behind him, which he did not make (32)

Rich has developed from being a sensitive observer of her life to a woman intent on coming to grips with the political sources of her pain: her mission as a poet is to break down existing social reality to create, or re-create, a new world. Her poetry becomes a record of his transforming process, and for this reason it is intensely political; for Rich poetic language does not simply involve reflections about cultural experience, but can be a means for changing consciousness and for creating social change.

Adrienne Rich brings the struggle for a distinct women's identity started by Dickinson and advanced by Moore, to a glorious culmination. Rich's initial acceptance of the traditional roles of wife and mother was based on her response to mid-twentieth century feminism which defined a women's success by her ability to manage a successful marriage and carrier. Nevertheless, this was an important step that initiated her inward journey into the self and helped her address issues that are so vital to a woman's experience and survival. Rich's work is invaluable for its

commitment to a feminist vision that affirms and validates a woman's value and integrity. Her work also challenges here contemporaries and successors, inviting them to pursue alternatives, to think anew, to reconstitute the world.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion: Rich's Commitment to Women's Freedom

Rich's determination to resist masculine mode of expression have rocked the established relationships mostly pronounced within matrimony. Her poems have attempted to recover a woman's place in society through her explain.

The emergence of women's poetry from the dark shadows of patriarchy to its present form, is necessitated a revision of the unfair hierarchy caused by gender-polarized relationships in marriage. Poetry of Rich has contributed greatly to the advancement of women's poetic tradition in America. Her poetry marks a definite movement towards resolving the conflict between gender and vocation that has often restricted women's progress in the poetic world.

In order to assert their intellectual autonomy, women poets have had to struggle to break free of the patriarchal notion of marriage and wife's role in it. Rich has resisted the prevailing conventions of her time. Her life and work record the advancement of feminism from a private struggle for selfhood to open criticism of the norms that determine a woman's social standing by her marital status.

Rich's poetry has worked as a landmark for feminist movement. Her career begins as a delicate wife, and a liberal feminist to a radical feminist and lesbian. In this sense her works change life: her own and ours. She wants to describe a new female identity. Rich points out a woman is to be a leader rather than a follower, an explorer rather than a cultivator. She remythologizes that a woman is a hero, and the treasure (re-reads) is the knowledge of self. They have to have not the patriarchal association for their own tongue for speech. They must deny the patriarchal

dominance in language. Denial is an essential precondition. In as much, Rich assets that the power of language depends upon the capacity of women.

Rich denies the patriarchal politics and civilization due to its nakedness and unabashed failure. She wants to make an accurate record of human feelings by rewriting the stories and myths that represent the deepest reality. She determines that the sexual myth underlying the human condition can and shall be recognized and changed.

Rich, through her poetry, shows us a glimpse of power generated by love, especially the love of women for women. Sexuality is physical intimacy but the love is between two people. It is not physical which defines love as lesbian but the absolute and primary attention at the other. Love is not only or hetero sexuality. Indeed, sisterhood is a bonding love for women. Motherhood is a capacity, not a destiny. it must be chosen, exercised by acts of will. So to say, Rich demands the woman centered, woman–identified and woman-created civilization. According to her, the patriarchal civilization is destructive, oppressive, contradictory and shocking. Two woman lovers in heterosexist society can be odd but exist in lesbian world.

The meeting of lovers who are women is unique because it is anti-patriarchal. Lovers who are disloyal to patriarchal civilization strive to free themselves from its attitudes even their relations, even in themselves. More importantly, love between women becomes a way of discovering fresh ground. It is a way of defining world that can only be described by women. Placing woman–woman relationships at the center is a unique way of romance. Heterosexist culture confines female desires, as Rich expressed in her poetry. She remarks heterosexuality as an institution that has also drowned in silence, the erotic feelings between women.

Rich's love poems are feminist in a sense that they are woman identified. They acknowledge, define and explore the possibilities of love between women. They recognize the connection, the primary bond between woman as a source of integrity and strength. Her poems are also radically feminist since they constitute a critique and a revision of patriarchal notions of love. Her stand against an order that is male governed and that keeps women alien themselves and each other. Women have always supported every human liberation movement. They have tremendous powers of intuitive identification and sympathy with other people. Male transcendence negates and masters but female transcendence moves to acknowledge and interact. Significantly, Rich envisions a woman as an explorer, a miner whose head lamp casts a ray. She creates experiences that exclude men. She ushers a world of women, a kind of love in which men play no part.

Rich has focused primarily on her struggle to bring personal conflict to consciousness. She has emphasized the synthesizing her lesbian feminist political insights and her complex personal experience. She extends the political focus emphasizing the historical origins and oppression of patriarchal culture to operation or action. Rich's growing prominence among feminists explores the impact of patriarchy on individual experience. Her lesbian feminist awareness tests her perceptions against the ambiguous personal experiences which motivate political development. She presents personal integrity and political extension as complementary aspects of a single process. She writes for the still fragmented parts in her, trying to bring them together.

In this way, Rich through her poetic expression has resisted the patriarchal and marital institution. More importantly, her critique of patriarchy, matrimony and her

commitment to the freedom of all women focuses on the oppressive institutions of males and their repressive impact on individual consciousness.

Works Cited

Beavoir, Simone de. *The Second Sex.* Penguin Harmonds Wroth England, 1972.

Buechler, Steven M. *Women's Movements in the United States: Woman suffrage Equal Rights and Beyond*. Rutgers University Press, New York, 1999.

Diekie, Margaret. *Stein Bishop, and Rich. Lyrics of Love, War and Place.* The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

Gerpi, Barbara Charles Worth and Albert Gelpi. *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose.* Eds. New York: Norton, 1993.

Lorde, Audre. *Sister Out Slider*. The Crossing Press. New York, 1984.

MC Quade, Moliy. "An Interview with Rich". *Publishers Weekly*. 29 Nov., 2993.

Rich, Adrienne. . *Arts of the Possible Essays and Conversations*. Norton and Company. New York, 2001.

- - - . *Blood, Bread and Poetry*: selected Prose 1979-1985. W.W. Norton and Company, New York London.

- - - . *Collected Early Poems, 1950-1970.* Norton. New York, 1993.

- - - . *Diving into the Wreck*. Norton. New York, 1973.

- - - . *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. Norton. New York, 1986.

- - - . *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law Poems, 1954-1962*. Norton. New York, 1963.

- - - .*The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977.* Norton. New York, 1963.

- - - . *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*. Norton. New York, 1986.

- - - . *Your Native Land, Your Life*. Norton. New York, 1986.

Rupp, Leila J., Verta Taylor. *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Rights Movements 1945 to the 1960s*. Oxford University Press. London, 1987.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. Colombia University Press. New York, 1993.

Showalter, Elaine, "Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness". *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. Ed. David Lodge. Longman. London, 1988.

Templeton, Alice. *The Dream and the Dialogue*. Adrienne Rich's Feminist Politics. University of Tennessee Press. Lexinton, 1994.

Todd, Janet. *Women Writers Talking*. Ed. Holmes and Meier. New York, 1982.

Woolf, Viginia. *Three Guineas.* Penguin. Harmondsworth. England, 1977.