

**ISSUES OF CULTURAL, POLITICAL AND RACIAL IDENTITY OF WOMEN IN
RICH'S POETRY: A SOCIO-FEMINISTIC ANALYSIS**

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ABSTRACT: *This paper aims to analyze the socio-feministic picture of a poet who has distinguished place in American literature for her contribution in the field of feminism. The feminist struggle against patriarchal set up has been found in Rich's poetry with reference to the selected poems. In these poems women are not constantly under men's power and supremacy; they want to struggle for their rights and make an improved life even when there is no man. Women revolt and escape as they are being oppressed and burdened by male oriented society. She is different from other American poets like Plath whose poetry revolves round her. This paper will helpful in understanding the background of her poems.*

KEYWORDS: Cultural, Feminism, Issues, Political, Racial, Rich, Social.

INTRODUCTION

Rich has become one of the best dramatists, essayists and American poets of our time. There is no writer of comparable influence and achievement in so many areas of the contemporary women's movement as the poet and theorist Rich. She is one of the major prominent self-identified lesbian feminists of twentieth-century America. Over the years, hers has become one of the most eloquent, provocative voices on the politics of sexuality, race, language, power, and women's culture. Rich's poetry weaves a cultural and emotional tapestry that is bold, sometimes uneven, but always innovative and profoundly original and powerful. Certain strands persist throughout—a commitment to lucidity, authentic communication, community and social change; other threads revolutionary anger, political activism are also the main concerns of Rich. In Rich's poetry, reader is all the time with a woman who is sensitive, romantic, easy to be influenced on the one hand but on the other hand this woman is bold enough to criticize and discard the male defined—culture and civilization. Important aspects in Rich's poetry are flouting free from previous time, as a feminist and against the patriarchal culture. A conscious Woman's endurance in an Unequal Society and the fight in opposition to male power, power, marriage, the personal and the political are fused in Rich's poems. She turns her personal concerns into political issues, language, artistic ambition etc.

In this paper I am going to discuss the cultural, political, social and racial issues which are the hall mark of her poetry. Because a poet is the voice of whole society so by her work she has highlighted the problems of women in American society through her poems. She portrays

women as much more of a victim when she says later in a poem “She has no blood left in her heart”. The poems which are discussable to analyze with reference to her cultural political and social identity are: “Diving into the Wreck” (1970), “Final Notation” in the collection of “An Atlas of the Difficult World” (1991), “Leaflets” (1969) “Aunt Jennifer’s Tigers” (1951), “The Blue Ghazals” in “The will to change” (1971). Racial issues are reflecting by these poems: “1948: Jews”, “Two Arts” and “A Vision”. These are written in the collection of An Atlas of the Difficult World (1991).

The theory which is under observation to evaluate her poems is feminism. Feminism is both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms. Feminists disagree about what it means to be a woman or a man and what social and political implications gender has or should have. Nonetheless, motivated by the quest for social justice, feminist inquiry provides a wide range of perspectives on social, cultural, and political phenomena. Important topics for feminist theory and politics include: the body, class and work, disability, the family, globalization, human rights, popular culture, race and racism, reproduction, science, the self, sex work, and sexuality. Now, here are the important types of feminism. The term political in feminism of Rich can be explained as “The personal is political” by Hanisch in 1970 wasn't actually popularized until the late 60s and early 70s. The term was created to underscore what was happening in women's personal lives. Socialist feminism is a movement that calls for an end to capitalism through a socialist reformation. In short, socialist feminism focuses on economics and politics. The next term is used in sense of patriarchal culture in Rich’s collection of work. She was against male dominated society. The third most important is cultural feminism; it is a movement that points out how modern society is hurt by encouraging masculine behavior. The last term which reflects in her poetry is racism. It challenged perspectives and practices among white feminists that marginalized or excluded black women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This concise and quick literature review given here, has set the background and reason behind this study, which is the social, political, cultural and racial portrayal of women in the American society. Rich is a post-modern American feminist writer and she represents patriarchal culture as a villain in her poetry. Being a great poet her works have received much criticism. Several critics have remarked her works from diverse points.

According to Wendy (1984) through her poems Rich has attempted to create positive, public images of women to counteract the distortions wrought by the male gender.

All the poems like “Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law”, “The Loser”, “The Women Mourned by her Daughters”, “Euryclea’s Tale”, “Readings of History” reveal the sufferings of women in the cruel hands of marriage. Various images suggest the immense change in woman’s personality before and after marriage. (Rich: 1993)

A multitalented writer, polemist, and literary theorist, Rich is an exponent of a poetry of witness and dissent, a poetry that voices the discontent of those generally silenced and ignored (Nina, 1998). The period that for example Erickson (1999) terms the “late phase of Rich’s career begun, critics agree, approximately with the publication either *Your Native Land, Your Life* (1986) or *Time's Power* (1988).

Madsen (2000) notes that in her poetry of this period, "Rich writes of her personal rage in the political terms of radical lesbian feminism, which reach out to the community of women and other victims of patriarchal violence."

According to Cary (2000) Rich writes about identity, sexual politics, social justice, anti-war movement, and radical feminism. She has been called one of the most influential poets of the second half of the twentieth century.

From these volumes on, as the critic Jacobs (2001) points out, Rich has applied the core concerns of her work to the lives of a range of men and women across geographic, ethnic and religious boundaries".

According to Snodgrass (2012), *Through Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* Rich gained national prominence, in part because of the accomplishment of her lyric voice, mostly in free verse, and in part because of her treatment of feminist-related themes.

Pope (1984) the wreck represents the battered hulk of the sexual definitions of the past, which Rich, as an underwater explorer, must search for evidence of what can be salvaged. Only those who have managed to survive the wreck--women isolated from any meaningful participation or voice in forces that led to the disaster--are in a position to write its epitaph and their own names in new books.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Suleri (1992), the claim of authenticity only a black can speak for a black; only a post-colonial sub continental feminist can adequately represent the lived experience of that culture points to the great difficulty posited by the "authenticity" of female racial voices in the great game that claim to be the first narrative of what the ethnically constructed woman is deemed to want.

This question, posed by Gilbert and Gubar, (1996) is probably one of the most memorable opening sentences in feminist literary criticism: it deals with the metaphor of literary paternity in patriarchal Western culture. "If male sexuality is integrally associated with the assertive presence of literary power, female sexuality is associated with the absence of such power, with the idea – ex-

Bowles and Klein describe feminism as "a movement departed from the insight that there is a bias of women all over the world, and an action in order to discharge inequity situation both by men or women.

Cixous focuses on movement, abundance and openness. However, we see that 'victory' always comes down to the same thing: things get hierarchical. The implication is that organization by hierarchy makes all conceptual subject to man. That is why Cixous (1996) suggests that: "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reason, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into the history – by her own movement... Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it."

Analysis

Woman is always careful as the second class creature in society and feeble than man in any competitions. Some people may state that a woman's duty is to serve her husband, to raise her children, and to do household works voluntarily. In any cases, the position of woman is often being distinguished, for example woman can't do a certain job, but man can do it perfectly. This denotes visibly that in every facet of life man is energetic and stronger, therefore a lot of things are believed that man can do but woman can't.

The term 'feminism' first emerged in the English language in the 1890s, a noteworthy historical moment when there was an urgent need to name the activities of the women's association, which was exciting and accepted as never before. Late nineteenth-century feminism joined together women from different classes and social surroundings. Although the first interest was to be dampened and many found their interests disregarded by the politics accepted by the most important figures, it attained the status of a social movement. While more recent feminist criticism warns against understanding 'women' as a homogenous class and emphasizes the mistake of eradicating the unique characteristics of different groupings, in the late nineteenth century the emergence of a harmony across national and class difficulties was perceived as so novel that the common factor of being a woman was perceived as outweighing the differences. Among other things, the working conditions of female laborers were so awful that the primary objective was to struggle for some development: for instance pregnant women were rarely forced to work right up to the delivery of the baby and indeed sometimes gave birth in the factory itself. Like any politically leaning movement, the women's movements which formed in different national settings had to deal with the grossest social inequalities of their daily experience; only then could it begin to think about equal rights among its members.

First poem which explains Rich's Socio-feministic perspective is "Diving into the wreck". When this poem was written, there was a lot on in the U.S. There was Vietnam War, the struggle of man's rights and the echoes of the Civil Rights. In the 1960's Rich was a major part of the world. She was a political poet. She was angry about the war, and she was also a strong feminist voice. Rich was not shy about connecting her work as a poet with her feelings about social justice.

This poem also presents the cultural facts in the form of patriarchal culture, that culture always devalues female. She also criticizes the impact of patriarchal society on Motherhood in of woman born. In this poem "Trying to talk with a Man," Rich writes of nothingness in a relationship with a man. Trying to talk with him is like "testing bombs," the landscape they inhabit is a "desert" with "deformed cliffs" filled with "dull green succulents," images of the destruction and ugliness. The experience of nothingness and the courage to see are at the heart of this poem. The wreck into which the poet dives is the dark outside of marriage and politics in the patriarchal world. The quest for something beyond myths, for the truths about men women about the "I" and the "you" the he and the she, or more generally (in the references to wars and persecutions of various kinds) about the powerless and powerful is presented throughout the book through a sharp, clear style. A darker resume might murmur that Rich writes like she is the first poet laureate of her self-styled post-gender era: 'I am she: I am he'—Diving Into the Wreck. The poet hopes to achieve the ultimate change, whether the change means gender equality, a new era in which only the female gender is relevant or a post gender era is to begin, it is for the reader to decide. The 'treasures' probably refer to good attributes of women that have been hidden, but have not been destroyed in the wrecked patriarchal structure of traditional society. The poet bitterly reflects on women as the 'half-destroyed instruments'

of atavistic [traditional and backward] society. She implies that women's inner sense of direction or 'compass' has been fouled by historical rules and traditions, a fact hidden by the myths of normal society. She is set on changing this in a radical way.

In 'Diving Into The Wreck' Rich's imagery, on one level, implies that science must bow the forces of nature:

'we are the half-destroyed instruments that once held to a course the water eaten log the fouled compass'. (Diving in to the Wreck: 98)

Here Rich expresses her exhilaration at surviving the power imbalance of marriage by ending it.

Self-empowerment is a theme of 'Diving into the Wreck': 'the sea is not a question of power I have to learn alone'.

In this poem, we see that there was a ceremony of her famous Book "Diving into the Wreck", she dedicated to the occasion to the community of women that transcends race and class" The poet, the housewife...."

Rich is a 20th century intellectual who seemed to have hand in everything. The next poem which presents her socio-feministic perspective is "Final Notation". It is a cultural, political and personally emotional poem which has been written in a simple and neat style with the careful economy of words. The poet is experiencing new life styles, sexual issues, motherhood tensions, friendship or even doctor patient relationship. This poem shows the last message of the poet or The New World Order of a colonial power when it is coming to control it. It is thematically an ambiguous poem. Final Notation is infinite in its interpretations. First is the policy of colonial powers with poor nations. The poem does have imperialistic allusions in its structure and the American attitude towards the world at large. The lover beloved relationship and sexual Harassment is also prominent in this poem. For example in the very first two lines of this poem reflects her ambiguous nature.

"It will not be simple, it will not be long.

It will take little time, it will take all your thought". (Final Notation: 92)

The themes of the poem range from personal to social, medical, psychological, political and emotional.

The third poem which we have to analyze her socio feministic picture is "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers". It is one of her earlier poem which reflects a core theme that would occur in Rich's work throughout her writing career. She wrote this poem when there were fewer options for women in terms of careers and family planning. Financial independence of women was also there. Rich mocks male dominance through the image of:

'The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band'. (Aunt Jennifer's Tigers: 88)

While Aunt Jennifer's tigers 'do not fear the men beneath the tree', clearly she does:

'When Aunt is dead, her terrified hands will lie

Still ringed with the ordeals she was mastered by'. (Aunt Jennifer's Tigers: 88)

Leaflets (1969) was also more individual but this volume dealt with more explicitly with the political issues of the day. Leaflets documents the political upheavals of the 1960's: the turmoil of the Vietnam war, Algeria, The student revolution in France. At this time she views as:

"I am thinking how we can use what we have

To invent what we need"; (Leaflets)

". Adrienne Rich is a southern Jew who grew up in the forties. As she grew up, her father hid the fact that they were Jewish. Her father acted like he was fully assimilated and didn't show ethnicity in any way. He did this to fit into society that was against Jewish people. This quote reflects one of many themes Rich deals with in her poetry. The theme is racism, hate, and bigotry.

In many of Rich's works she talks about being oppressed. In the poems, "1948: Jews", "Two Arts", and "A Vision" there is a theme of oppression. In the poem " 1948: Jews", Rich refers to her college years. At her college, she was to stay away from Jews. No matter how brilliant a person was, she couldn't unite with them as a group because socially it was less acceptable. She couldn't let herself get attached; she had to avoid her own ethnicity to survive in American culture. "Never mind just going to sleep like an ordinary person" Rich says about the situation in the end of the poem. An ordinary person; this portrays the feeling she had about the great discrimination that was going on at the time. Rich didn't feel like an ordinary person. She felt hate from society due to her background.

Another great poem by Adrienne Rich was "Two Arts". One theme in the poem, similar to "1948: Jews" is racism, hate, and being a southern Jew in the forties. In the poem, Rich talks about sculpting a perfect person free of any limiting factor, such as race or gender. This creation is great art. She talks about presenting this perfect person or work of art to the art instructor. I thought this represented her presenting her person to the public. It was socially acceptable and it was a piece of art. "This time they will love you, standing on the glass table, fluent and robed at last, and all your origins countered" Rich says. In this quote, Rich describes putting all your origins behind and being on a glass table for everyone to see. You are robed and ready for life. You have been molded into the ideal person. This is another example of the theme of racism that Rich brings up in her poetry

CONCLUSION

This paper concludes Rich has tried her level best to live for other's emancipation. This article also verifies that Rich has proved her in describing the woman's identity on her own, on woman's own term. Rich suggests the substitute for women to break free at all the restraints. The poem "The Roofwalker" tries to make women realize that they too are competent of accepting confronts in life. At the same time Rich exposes that the road of revolt is not very easy. Rich no doubt is attentive of the actualities of life but at the same time she is very optimistic. The volume ends with a positive note.

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