

## A Feministic perspective of the selected poems of Adrienne rich

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### Abstract

This article focuses on the themes of feminism in the selected poems of Adrienne Rich. The poetry explores the common theme of power, the poet as feminist, relationship and marriage, power of oppressive men and women in patriarchal society. Finally, it sums up the feministic approach to the poems.

**Keywords:** feminism, relationship, oppression, truth, self-discovery

### Introduction

Women poets write from their personal lives and in spite of the use of autobiography, they also write about war, poverty, starvation, nature and environment. Thus a women poet's aesthetic is tied to her political sensibility. Mostly they are essentially interested in the female psychology and they give language to the sensibility as well as real experiences of life of women. One of America's most distinguished poets, Adrienne Rich has become a major voice in the feminist movement in America. She is an astonishing woman who has used her writings to confront matters of women's oppression and the need for women's liberation from a world of male domination. Adrienne Rich writes about Feminist poets: The feminist poet finds "woman" and "poet" to the political words, through art that reflects, expresses, creates her life, she both validates herself as she is and works towards the revolution, the transformation that desires: breaking down the artificial barriers between the private and public, between and the lover's bed(PAM 24)

In Rich's poetry, we see a combination of a conscience, an impassioned poetic imagination and an engagement with political issues. Feminism has provided Rich with a new way to understand her power as a woman and a poet. She wants to bring reconciliation between womanhood and power. Over the years Adrienne Rich has inspired many writers and critics to follow her example of poetic creativity.

Adrienne Rich has depicted women in patriarchal society, their liberation and restriction and their struggle for existence. The difficulties women face is result of the nature of the society in which they live. The society is biased towards the male and the consequence of this that women are never given opportunities to communicate their true feelings and desires. One of the aspect where women's oppression takes place was language as clearly portrayed in the poem *Our Whole Life*. This poem states that the role of men to dominate language and the history of women's position is noted only in the language used by oppressed men.

The next poem *Aunt Jennifer's Tigers* depicts a woman trapped within the cultural constraints and responsibilities of married life. Aunt Jennifer's situation and character is contrasted with her artistic creation that portrays her aspiration. The tapestry on which she has knitted tigers is very symbolic of what she wants to be in life. Fearless, assertive, noble and powerful like the

tiger. The tigers are depicted as prancing across the screen and the use of colours implied that the tiger is confident, self-assured and happy.

In the second stanza, the present state is depicted. Aunt Jennifer's hand reminds us that her marriage responsibilities weigh her down which makes her to realize her full potential as a woman in a male-dominated society. She escapes from her critical situation through her art work. She attains freedom through her imagination.

Aunt Jennifer's Tigers are fluttering because of the sign of agitation. The speaker does not provide any information about uncle, but it seems uncle is having negative effects on Jennifer's emotional state. Uncle causes Aunt Jennifer's anxiety and that he is dominating her through his mastery. Therefore, uncle is oppressive. According to her, Marriage is a convention, a tradition. Perhaps, Aunt Jennifer is anxiety-ridden because of her choice to be traditional and get married into an oppressive institution.

Finally, the poet shows that Aunt Jennifer is a nervous and fearful wife. She lives a life of inequality. The wedding ring is described as her husband's property 'Uncle's Wedding Band'(7). Rich focussed on the condition of women in a dominating society through this poem.

The poem *Diving into the Wreck* is about a woman's quest for discovery as she journeys alone to seek the truth. The speaker of the poem makes the readers to understand the risks and rewards of the speaker's pursuit. It is not only the journey of self-discovery but also as a mission to understand the truth of humanity. Within the first three lines of the poem, Rich presents three concrete images which have symbolic meaning. The first image, 'the book of myths', represents the historic view of women and their roles of male-dominated society. The second image, where the speaker is preparing her camera, shows her need to be able to capture the truth so that she can use as proof of the truths she will discover. The third image is knife in which she probably knows that she realizes the dangers that may lie ahead for her.

Simply it is the story of a diver going into the water to observe a wreck, but as the seawater is deep and mysterious likewise the meaning of the poem is so deep. Basically the poem is the struggle for women rights in the patriarchal society. It is not only of Rich's ideals, but also the changing conditions of American at the time when the poem was written. Rich becomes

'Androgyny' and wants to observe the damage that was done to the female race and the treasures that prevail in their rights. Her struggle for the voice of rights is only done by her, it is her own experience. She travels to find the women's position in the society, and quest for something beyond myths, for the truths about men and women is represented as powerful and powerless.

In the poem *Diving into the Wreck* the poet states that women's values are not mentioned in any historical books:

We are, I am, you are

.....

A book of myths in which

Our names do not appear (88-97).

She came to explore the wreck. The wreck can be of marriage or of sexuality or of sexual identity. The fact that the book of myths will remain, but our names will not appear in it, is very hopeful. The poem shows that as a woman if we look into the wreck deeply and steadily, we must learn whatever dreadful information it contains, to accept it not as victim but as survivor. Women who isolated from any meaningful participation in forces that led to the disaster.

*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law* is a feminist poem depicting a woman of the period of transition, especially the sixties and the seventies when women had become conscious of the many restrictions and burdens upon them by the male-dominated society, family, culture and literature. Women were not able to overcome the limitations both in reality and in this poem. Rich wrote the present poem over a period of two years when she herself was married the Harvard economist and was a young mother with three children like the daughter-in-law in the poem. Rich herself was living within patriarchal structures that contained a woman's intellect. The speaker in the poem sees herself as a daughter-in-law without personal identity of dignity or a person who exists in relation with other people. The sense of frustrations, guilt and suppressed anger is a major theme in the poem. In the beginning of the poem, the speaker addresses an older woman, her mother-in-law. She mentions her not only for making her life miserable but also for not making her own life meaningful. Her mother-in-law is the only agent of limiting her life and prospects.

The first four parts of the poem set up the strained relationship between the two women. The poem is a mixture of sympathy and outrage toward the women. In the next section the young woman realizes that she is too losing her personal identity. She considers her mother-in-law's uselessness and in the second part the younger woman reveals her dissatisfaction with domestic life. The poem indicates the true beginning of her open treatment of relations between women. The focus is a consciousness of the difficulty of a woman's maintaining a sense of personal identity or a sense of community with other women.

Rich not only considered the question of women's aspiration and achievement directly, she placed it within defining social and cultural contexts. The poem is a radical critique of a woman's place as a beautiful object in a man's world. She examines in detail the question of female identity, the position of women in society and the relation of women to one another. Rich explores the anger and helplessness of a woman who lives in a society. Women are expected to sacrifice their needs for the institution of marriage and motherhood defined by men.

The poem *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law* draws attention to

the patriarchal society where men and women are clearly divided into the classes-providers and sufferers:

Your mind now, moulding like  
wedding-cake,  
heavy with useless experience, rich  
with suspicion, rumor, fantasy (11-14).

The poem is a clear illustration about the potential in women which remains unrealized. Women are compelled to the submissive will of men. Rich speaks about the concerns of a generation. *Snapshots* is also the first of Rich's equally ongoing series of poetic sequences: non-linear multipart poems becoming verbal holograms of the subject matter, a narrative with a cinematic accretion of images, personae and ideas made coherent by the numbered breaks in the poem. There are numerous memorable lines, even epigrammatic couplets. She uses wit and satire in the poem. There is an 'I' in the poem and it is the narrator's voice possessed and providing all those allusions, angry, only hopeful at the conclusion.

The poem *Aunt Jennifer's Tigers* was an early attempt by Rich to define male and female relationships. She voices the poem in a third-person narrative which sets herself apart from Aunt Jennifer. The prevailing theme of the poem is Aunt Jennifer's oppression through marriage and the utilization of embroidery as her form of self-expression. Marriage is an ordeal that has mastered this lady; that in some sense has ruined her life.

Marriage is presented as a 'massive weight' that troubles this woman in the poem *Aunt Jennifer's Tigers*: "The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band/ Sits heavily upon Aunt Jennifer's hand" (7-8). Marriage is an ordeal that has mastered this lady; that in some sense has ruined her life.

Rich is perhaps best known as a feminist writer and many of her poems deal with the oppression of women by men and the relationship between men and women. Marriage, in particular is viewed as a tool by which women are kept under the thumb of men. Her themes are daring and conventional. She speaks about myths about men and women. She often talks about animate object, which she believes should be suppressed in men and women. Her messages are often expressed in extended metaphor or conceits, because she speaks about inner and outer realities.

Dorothy Richardson wrote in *A Long Day*: "They (women) have no faith in their ability to change their environment, because they have taught that women cannot make it through life-economically, socially, emotionally or sexually without men. Their only choice is to take a relationship on his terms" (PAM 16).

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