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Contribution of Adrienne Rich to the Feminist Literary Movement

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ABSTRACT

The research paper attempts to analyse the contribution of the American poet, Adrienne Rich to the feminist literary movement. The article comprises of mainly two parts, beginning with the evolution of feminism in the United States it clearly focuses on the need, role and impact of feminist literature on the society.

The second part deals with the detailed biography of the poet, Adrienne Rich. It brings out her merit as a poet, prose writer, critic, educationist, social reformer and radical feminist. The paper traces her growth as a poet and thus presents her contribution to the feminist literary movement.

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FEMINISM IN AMERICA

Feminism is the promulgation of the rights of women. It aims to change women's position in society. "It is an assertion of a woman's social and political rights for equality: negation of stereotypic sex roles, gender bias, job discriminations, compulsory heterosexuality, imposition of wifehood and motherhood, oppression and sexism. It recognizes woman's power of independent decision making, her competence, intelligence and her status as an equal, as an individual, as a human being, as a person capable of contributing to social and national progress and development". (Gupta, 1996)

According to ***The Encyclopedia Americana,*** feminism "encompasses the conditions of women's entitlement to live their fullest human potential, as human beings in equality. It asserts that women's rights are human rights that have been withheld from women because they are women." (The Encyclopedia Americana: International Edition, Vol. 29,1829)

The Women's Studies Encyclopedia points out that feminism reveals the importance of women and their contributions to the society. It contemplates a future where women are respected and encouraged to the optimum level such that they participate in public life without any restrictions and fear.

Feminists work against oppression evolving out of racism, sexism, heterosexuality etc. Feminist activists have joined hands to revolt social, religious, institutional, habitual practices that create second class citizens. The desire to achieve women,s rights, like the right to live free of battery and abuse, the right to be free from sexual exploitation, the right to have their own consent for bearing children, the right to vote, the right to have good health, the right to support themselves and others dependent on them, the right to equal wages for equal work, the right to have freedom of choice, the right to make independent decisions concerning the very personal phases of their lives, the right to own high official positions and the right to property.

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The feminists examine the ways by which women have been marginalised by the social practices and they also increase the consciousness of women. "Feminist consciousness is an awareness that the individual woman is part of a larger social group and that her personal problems, as a woman, are problems that effect all women and hence are political problems—that the personal is political". (Women's Studies Encyclopedia, 1991)

Female body is the basic reason for women's oppression in private as well as in public life. The sexual exploitation of women produces physical and to a great extent psychological infliction. It ruins women's individuality, sense of identity and self-confidence. This detrimental to their development in terms of full human potential and they fail to represent themselves as able and useful citizens. The sexual and reproductive exploitation of women, sets women apart from the public life. Home is the place from where this exploitation originates. Women are denied full and equal access to resources. Their labours are devalued. They are forced to be dependent and disabled physically, mentally and economically. They are made to believe that they are handicaps and second-grade citizens. The policy of first destroying her talents and capabilities and then blaming for having none has been an age old criteria. As society develops these exploitations take on public dimensions in the social, economic and political worlds. Thus personal sufferings gain political significance.

The great majority of men who conquered United States came from Europe landed with Bible and swords in their hands. The desire to Christianize others made them colonise the United States. The number of European men here was far greater than women. Single , independent and confident were graded as witches, because according to the societal norms women were supposed to be dependent on men. A lot of killing and witch burning took place between 15^{th} and 17^{th} centuriesin order to eradicate female dominated pagan religion. This led to the distortion of male-female ratio.

British and Northern European families settled in New England, while single women arrived in the Virginia colonies, to escape forced marriage, poverty and prostitution. There were three times more white men than white women in these colonies, thus efforts were made to import brides. Many girls were kidnapped from the streets of London, unmarried women were offered free land in Maryland and women prisoners were forcefully exported there. Women

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were used to reproduce and populate the United States and the also served as cheap and free labour. The pressure to populate the new country, hard work and disease posed a restriction to their survival. Out of one hundred forty four marriageable women brought to Virginia in the year 1619, only thirty five survived six years later. On an average each family had two mothers: one who died in childbirth and another who took care of her precursor's children and also produced several of her own. Rapes and forced pregnancies became common. The condition of the Negro women was even worse, the suffered twice as much as the white women, due to their weak sex and black skin.

In the United States the feminist movement resulted due to the combined influence of:

- the Evangelical movement,
- the life style and culture of the native American people, and
- the anti-slavery movement.

The Evangelical movement that reawakened religious enthusiasm in the United States and England was based upon individuals personal experiences of conversion. From this personal experience of salvation came the desire to convert others. The religious enthusiasm and moral indignation of these Evangelists made social and moral reforms. Special stress was laid on the removal of vice, drunkenness and slavery.

In the opening years of the nineteenth century women were prominent in the revivalistic campaign. By 1830 a lot of ladies' societies developed in England which also had numerous regional branches. Women now involved themselves in charity works and provided the provisions for deaf, blind, destitute and insane. In the United States the Evangelical revival led directly to feminism. These women were inspired by the revivalistic preaching of Charles Finney and the missionary work of John R. McDowell. The spreading of women's associations in the 1820s led women into variety of activities and brought them in touch with the poor. They made praiseworthy efforts to help the prostitutes. This led to the foundation of the New York Female Moral Reform Society in 1834, which was established to convert New York prostitutes to Evangelical Protestants.

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Much negative criticism was hurled on these women for taking such bold initiatives. In return these women published various articles refuting the charge that moral reform was destructive of female sensibility, and repeatedly wrote for women's right to individuality. During 1840s the articles challenged the idea that woman's only happiness came through marriage. They held low wages for women responsible for prostitution. In 1846, they attacked the male monopoly of professions and skilled work. They also advocated the vote for women as a means to compel law makers to listen to their arguments. In New York in 1845 women decided to make seduction a state crime, and they struggled for three years until a bill was introduced and made a law in New York. By 1850s the journal ***Advocate of Moral Reform*** became an expressly feminist publication arguing for women's need to be independent, attacking their low wages and demanding expanded employment opportunities.

The feminist leaders began their career as active temperance workers and moved to feminism at a later stage in their lives. Susan Anthony one of the most important leaders of the early suffrage campaign became closely involved with the temperance cause. It was in 1850s that she became interested in feminism and became a close friend of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the prominent feminist leader.

The feminist movement in the United States was also influenced by the culture of native American people who gave due importance and respect to women. The native tribes had liberal laws for women. The Iroquois Confederacy, a system of self-government evolved by the six major north western tribes, guaranteed the social and political power of women. Every tribe had clan mothers who nominated the chief of each tribe and they also continued as advisers, while making future plans. The Red Indian women had the right to divorce and control their own fertility. According to many native American creation myths, the earth and all living things were created by a female spirit. The worship of female as well as male deities symbolized the balance of power between men and women.

Historian Sally Roesch Wagner was the first to discover the Iroquois influence on women's rights activists in United States. She points out the report by Alice Fletcher, a suffragist and ethnographer:

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> ***The man owns his own ponies and other belongings which he has personally acquired; the women owns her horses, dogs and all the lodge equipments …. A wife is as independent as the most independent man in our midst***. (The Readers Companion To U.S. Women's History, 1998)

The concept of illegitimacy did not exist. Each child had his place in a matrilineal group formed by the child's mother, her sisters, and the men they married. Fletcher quoted an informant saying: "Your laws show how little your men care for their women. The wife is nothing in herself." (The Readers Companion To U.S. Women's History, 1998)

In ***The History of Women's Suffrage***, Matilda Gage cited Native cultures as her inspiration for a reformed world. Stanton inspired by her Seneca neighbours, insisted on women's right to divorce. Reverend Anna Garland Spencer said in a speech:

> ***When we tried to divide the lands of American Indian, we did violence to all his own sense of justice and cooperative feeling when we failed to recognize the women of the tribes in the distribution. We then and there gave the Indian the worst of white man's relationship to his wife.*** **(**The Readers Companion To U.S. Women,s History, 1998)

These feminists were also impressed by the costume that Oneida women wore. Elizabeth Smith Miller, Stanton's cousin adopted this soft tunic and loose trousers as an alternative to tight corsets and heavy skirts. This attire got the name of `Bloomers' after Amelia Bloomer who popularised it. This style of dressing freed women from the tight and heavy traditional costumes, which even allowed them to use bicycle, which was a new means of transport and liberation for them.

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The condition of the slaves was pitiable in the United States. Fenny Kemble, the wife of a slaveholder witnessed sexual diseases, tumors and temporary insanity among the women who laboured in the field. In the words of Harriet Jacobs, a slave, "Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women …. they have wrongs and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own." (The Readers Companion To U.S. Women,s History, 1998)

The Negro women in order to escape such tortures married the native men and became a part of their culture. It was there they realised their rights to equal status both socially and sexually. Soon there began an anti-slavery movement. It is in the anti-slavery campaign we find the most important links between the Evangelical movement and feminism. Most of the early white suffragists like Matilda Gage and Stanton were abolitionists who were inspired by the native cultures.

The Quaker women played a leading role amongst the early feminists. The reason behind this is the special place given to women in their organization. Among the larger religious groups it were only the Quakers who allowed women to speak at meetings and also provided them the opportunity to become ministers. Lucretia Mott was active in founding women's anti-slavery groups in the early 1830s. Later she joined Mrs Stanton, the leading feminist leader and remained an active and out-spoken feminist until her death.

Thus the first wave of modern feminism is said to have begun from 1848, with hundred women and men meeting at Seneca Falls Convention. There Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott threw a challenge for women's suffrage. Women of America got the right to vote in 1920. After getting this right, the feminists continued to struggle for further rights but at a slow pace. Between 1920 to 1960 not much was done on the feminist front. Only small number of women stayed with the political fight, striving for the Equal Rights Amendment and for loosening of work restrictions. It was only in 1960s that a new impetus for renewed feminist activism arrived. The second wave of feminism began with the publication of Betty Friedan's book ***The Feminine Mystique*** in 1963. In this book the American women found the reflections of their own dissatisfaction.

America in the 1960s was plagued by the civil rights movement, the Cold War and the surging of the Vietnam War. Many women were working alongside within these

movements and other political movements called for change. They also became the members of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the civil rights activist group: Student Non Violet Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The growing sexism compelled these women to work for themselves. They created the modern women's liberation movement.

The second wave of feminism was mainly the movement by young, educated, white urban women. These women were educated with few family responsibilities and could support themselves. Some of them were lesbians. These women were joined by middle class educated women who were from the suburbs and small cities. They raised their voice against the lack of opportunities for advancement into high paying jobs. They raised groups where they talked about the problems of sexism. One by one women raised their consciousness and were determined to seek change. "The personal is political" (***Women's Studies Encyclopedia: Revised and Expanded Edition***, A-F,1991)became their watch word.

The leftist politics gave birth to Women's Liberation, a radical arm of feminism that sought complete equality. According to radical feminists gender is the root cause of oppression. They worked hard to increase the women's consciousness. For this they established the rape crisis centers, battered women's shelters, women's music production companies—associated with women's culture. For the radical feminists, "women's experience is the central human reality with respect to their intellectual work, their political activism, and their personal life-styles. Women became focus of goals and measure of achievement. The male dominated society became in a sense irrelevant". (Wandersee, 1988) Radical feminists also promoted emotional and sexual commitment to other women.

The radical feminists also worked to find new theological beliefs. According to them theology has justified the exclusion and subordination of women. Christianity holds women as the origin of sin. All this reinforce women's social subordination by claiming that this is the way women must pay for having brought evil into the world. Therefore the radical feminists feel that the religion must be reformed if women are to attain their full human dignity. Mary Daly, leading radical feminist refused to accept the Male God of Christian tradition. She said that "the new wave of feminism had to be ultimately religious in its vision in order to reach outward and inward, beyond the Gods that had stolen women's identity". (Wandersee, 1988)

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The second wave brought fruitful results. The President's Commission on the status of women was established, the equal pay act was passed, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 Title VII amendment banning sex discrimination in the workplace was voted into law. The equal employment opportunity commission (EEOC) was established to enforce the law. Changes in the court continued, like the laws excluding women from jury duty were abandoned. The Equal Rights Amendment won Congressional approval in 1972. Congress passed Title IX the Education Act in 1972 prohibiting sex discrimination in any federally assisted educational programme.

In the 1990s the third wave feminism began. The long term active feminists and their sons and daughters, and those of the second wave feminists were the members. These feminists enjoyed all the privileges for which the second wave feminists fought for. Their claims were related to the issues like parental leave and day care for the children of working class women, gaining high official positions in corporate and government offices, sustained worldwide development and a global awareness of feminist causes.

The women's movement had a profound and lasting influence on women's writing. New subjects and new techniques of writing emerged. The sixties was an era of war and violence abroad as well as in the US. The war in Vietnam, the Civil Rights movement, the women's suffragist movement forced the Americans to make discoveries about themselves and their country. The realisation of women of their own marginality transformed American literature in permanent ways.

In the recent past women were not accepted in the field of literature. Only men were supposed to have the literary power, so women writers often wrote under pseudonyms in order to make their works acceptable. Firestone says: "culture is so saturated with male bias that women almost never have a chance to see themselves culturally through their own eyes".(Kapoor, 1996) The male bias against women writers was so severe that they charged their works with negative criticism without even reading them. A male critic Silas Weir Mitchell makes fun of the articles written by women in the following words: "The monthly magazines are getting so lady like that naturally they will soon menstruate". (Kapoor, 1996)

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Thus fighting all negative criticism and road blocks, feminist literature has emerged as a genre. Feminists are of the view that imagination has no gender and what really makes a good work is the innate talent. It is the power of concentration, endless source of ideas and originality that determines a good writer.

Feminism is not just a post-modernist concept. The desire to live more independently is an innate urge in women of all times as evidenced in Buddhist "***Therigatha***" [1](Songs of Nun) of the 6th century B.C. These songs express their feelings of freedom, happiness and peace on being set free from a life of domestic drudgery:

A woman well set free! How
Free I am,
How wonderfully free, from
Kitchen drudgery.
Free from harsh grip of hunger,
And from empty cooking pots,
Free too of that unscrupulous man.
The weaver of sunshades.
Calm now serene I am
All lust and hatred purged . (Tharu and K. Lalita, 1996)

In the 16th century Mary Wollstonecraft in her book ***A Vindication of the Rights of Women*** (1972) raised her voice against male domination and projected the identity of women in patriarchal society. Margaret fuller revealed the uniqueness of women in her book ***Women in the Nineteenth Century*** (1845). In the twentieth century Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, Rebeca West, Simone de Beavoir and Germaine Greer initiated the feminist consciousness movement in literature. In America too the feminist movement was gathering force. Many books like the ***Feminine Mystique*** (1963), ***Thinking About Women*** (1965), ***Sexual Politics*** (1969), ***The Mad Women in the Attic*** (1979) were published which portrayed the socio-political, historical and economic condition of women. These books not only brought out the innate talents of women but also exposed the way their talents were crushed in phallocentric society.

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Feminism in literature soon gained momentum due to several reasons. First, the desire to propagate feminist views over a wide range of public needed a medium and literature served as the medium of communication. Second, the feminist wanted to establish a separate culture and ethos strikingly varied from male mythology. Third, it was not possible within the patriarchal system that women could become financially independent, thus the only solution was to set up a business entirely controlled by women. Feminist publication outlets were the only sector where women had their sovereign hold. So it became all the more important to promote, support and popularize the feminist literature.

Journalism entered and intermingled with the traditional forms of serious literature. The first feminist publication was ***Voice of Women's Liberation Movement*** launched in March 1968 by Jo Freeman. It did the work of uniting the radical feminists and promoted the publication of other feminist works. More than hundred feminist periodicals existed in 1971, dealing with various areas of feminist concerns. ***Amazon Quarterly, Quest*** and ***Heresies*** presented various ideological debates. ***Spokeswomen***, ***Changing Women*** and ***Women's Political Times*** gave a report of the success and failures on the legal front. ***The Second Wave*** favored the idea of anarchism, while ***Ms.***, fostered inter feminist recollection. It also gave the profiles of prominent women.

The feminist publications gave women the bonds necessary for the daily life. The publications were also used as open mail box to establish links between various feminist groups and other women. The basic advantage of such publications was that a woman could become an active member of the movement without revealing her name and identity.

Women's literature provides the women to speak of their own experiences in clear and bold terms. The autobiographical note is prominent. Mostly those experiences are focused which have universal significance. The literature reveals the isolation and loneliness experienced in the midst of family life, thus shattering the idea that family is a self-fulfilling area for wives and mothers. Often in the women's literature there is abundance of images of enclosure as in Adrienne Rich's ring, Anne Sexton's inverted bowl and Sylvia Plath's bell jar. These images of enclosure show the creators personal experiences to a collectively suffered social problem.

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Women's literature mainly deals with the theme of women's empowerment. The only aim is to regenerate self-confidence and this is done by bringing out the talents and capabilities of women. Seeking liberation from male dominance is one of the vital issues of feminist writing. These works motivate women to break their silence. It fosters the idea of struggle to win over all kinds of oppression. This literature chiefly attempts to explore, expose and redefine the position of women in every field. The violence done to the body and psychology of women with the support of culture, religion, politics are vividly projected. These works clearly reveal the fact that men's commitment to domestic responsibilities is mostly peripheral.

The struggle for self-realization becomes the text of most women writers. Often in such literary works we have violent, frenzied female figures, like Bertha Rochester in ***Jane Eyre*** revealing the anger, anxiety and frustration of the ***dansemacarbe*** writer. The uncontrolled fury of Diane Wakoski is revealed through her lines in:

> ***and I will dance, dance, dance/ on your grave, grave,***
> ***because you are a son of a bitch,/ a son of a bitch***
> ***and dance dance on your grave / one step for every time***
> ***you done me wrong*** . (Wakoski, 1978)

That the test of language has been met and the feminist literature is far from peripheral to American The various national and regional honours have been achieved by feminist writers. These awards suggest writing.Feminism is a very wide term. From the beginning, women have been different in their ideologies and approaches to change. Today the feminism, radical feminism, eco-feminism, electoral feminism, lesbian feminism, working class feminism, and cultural movement has grown varied with various feminist approaches like the liberal feminism, socialist male feminism.

CONTRIBUTION OF ADRIENNE RICH

Adrienne Rich has dedicated her life to bring change in the political and national temper. Her poems are chiefly concerned with the waking of feminine consciousness. She wants to make

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women aware of the destruction caused by male oppression. The disregard shown to women in patriarchal society is the cause of her anger. The feeling of being historically doomed is there, however a desire for new energy is also present.

Adrienne Rich is a well-known feminist writer, born in Baltimore, Maryland on May 16, 1929. Adrienne Rich is the daughter of Dr. Arnold Rich, a physician and Helen (Jones) Rich. Her father a cultivated man and encouraged her to read and write and she was sensitive to his criticism and praise. But Rich later recognized her father's influence as a patriarchal pressure. She said:

> ***For about twenty years I wrote for a particular man who criticised and praised me and made me feel I was indeed `special'. The obverse side of this of course was, that I tried for a long time to please him or rather not to displease him***. (***Current Biography Yearbook 1976)***

After attending the Ronald Park country school in Baltimore, Rich entered Radcliffe College, where she became a member of Phe Beta Kappa and obtained her B.A. degree in 1951. Rich was married on June 26, 1953 to Alfred Haskell Conrad, an economist who taught at Harvard, and had three sons— David, Paul and Jacob before she was thirty.

> ***I was married in 1953 …. My parents refused to come. I was marrying a Jew of the `wrong kind' from an orthodox Eastern European background …. At the same time, my father's personality***
>
> ***haunted my life. Such had been the force of his will in our household that for a long time I felt I would have to pay in some terrible way for having disobeyed him*** .(Rich, 1986)

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During this period Rich continued to write and publish poetry. She worked in Swarthmore College, Columbia University, Brandeis University, and City College of New York. After the death of her husband in 1970, Rich lived in New York and continued with her teaching profession. Since 1976 she has lived with the writer and historian Michelle Cliff.

During the early years of her marriage she was gripped by an overwhelming emotion of anger.

> ***Every journey into the past is complicated by delusions, false memories, false naming of real events …. I avoided this journey back into the years of pregnancy, child bearing and the dependent lives of my children …. which seemed to me the most painful, incomprehensible, and ambiguous I had ever traveled, a ground hedged by taboos, mined with false-namings***. (Rich, 1976)

> ***I was haunted by the stereotype of mother whose love is `unconditional'. If I knew parts of myself existed that would never cohere to those images, weren't those parts then abnormal, monstrous***? (Rich, 1976)

This anger created a clash between her roles of a wife, mother and a dedicated waiter. This anger forced her to move away from her cautious patterning style of writing and made her speak of her immediate mind, however disturbing.

During the late sixties, Rich taught disadvantaged urban students in the SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge) programme in several universities. This work of teaching such students, her involvement in anti-war demonstrations, and her growing awareness of the need to understand the connections between political and personal experience

emerge as a theme of four volumes of poetry published in late 1960s and early 1970s: ***Necessities of Life*** (1966); ***Selected Poems*** (1967); ***Leaflets*** (1969); and ***The Will to Change*** (1971).

Rich's first volume of poetry was ***A Change of World*** published in 1951. Rich was only twenty one when she got the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize for ***A Change of World***. The book was selected by W.H. Auden for the Yale Series of Younger Poets. Auden introduced the book in a foreword saying that "the poems a reader will encounter in this book are neatly and modestly dressed, speak quietly but do not mumble, respect their elders but are not cowed by them and do not tell fibs". (Auden. 1951)

Rich learned a lot from the major models of her college days: W.H. Auden, Robert Frost, Dylan Thomas, Louis MacNeice, Wallace Stevens, W.B. Yeats and John Donne. She practiced the craft with skill and grace. At that time the dominant poetic virtue was that of objectivity, that is expressing the universal by restraining the open personal emotion. Thus Rich tried her best in this volume to maintain objectivity. Her major themes, too, were in conformity with those often employed at that time. The poems in ***A Change of World*** concern with sterility and loss in modern life.

Rich also received Guggenheim Fellowships in 1952 and 1961; the RidgelyTorrence Memorial Award of the Poetry Society of America in 1955, the Grace Thayer Bradley Award of Friends of Literature for ***The Diamond Cutters*** in 1956. She was named Phi Beta Kappa Poet at the College of William and Mary in 1960, in Swarthmore College in 1965 and in Harvard in 1966; the National Institute of Arts and Letters award for poetry in 1961; Amy Lowell Travelling Fellowship in 1962; the Bess Hokin Prize of poetry magazine in 1963, the Eunice Tietjens Memorial Prize of Poetry Endowment in 1968, a National Endowment for the Arts grant in 1970; and the Shelley Memorial Award of the Poetry Society of America in 1971; Ingram—Merril Foundation grant in 1973; National Book Award for ***Diving into the Wreck*** in 1974.

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Adrienne Rich has produced more than twenty volumes of poetry and considerable body of nonfiction prose. She has made a significant contribution as a critic, a scholar and a teacher, but she most importantly is a poet.

With the changes in her personality and consciousness her poetry changes in form and tone from volume to volume. During the year of the birth of her first son her collection ***The Diamond Cutters and other Poems*** (1955) was published. This was her second volume. Some poems in this volume gives the glimpse of feminist concerns that were to become the central theme in her later works.

The third volume, ***Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*** (1963); the sense of frustration, guilt, suppressed anger and doom are the major themes. This volume mainly reveals Rich's views on what it means to be a female in a male dominated society.

Necessities of Life (1966) concentrated primarily upon erotic experience. The poet is in search of a comfortable relationship with a woman that will give her the womb like security she has lost.

The Will to Change (1971) deals with the problems of continuing and compromising with the male dominated patriarchal society. Here Rich involves herself to the complete sexual-political warfare. In the volume ***Diving into the Wreck*** (1973) Rich has given a harsh depiction of males. She has drawn a very brutal, unpardonable and parasitic picture of men showing her total antipathy with them.

In ***Your Native Land, Your Life*** (1986), Rich revolts against the oppression and injustice done to all minorities— Red Indians, blacks, Jews and lesbians. She reveals her own experiences as a Jew, woman and daughter.

In ***Times Power*** (1989) Rich recalls her childhood loneliness and a life mixed with laughter and grief. In ***An Atlas of the Difficult World*** (1991) she raises above the role of a feminist and is more concerned about humanity as a whole. Here the themes deal with the victims of concentration camps to the injustice done to a woman at home. ***Twenty One Love***

Poems (1977) and ***The Dream of Common Language*** (1978) deals with the themes of lesbian love.

Rich believes that the true purpose of language is to give a sense of personal and communal fulfillment. Rich intends to reconstitute language and restore its life giving power. Through her poetry she desires to bring about a new world where the emotions, wisdom, identity and unity of women are duly recognized and valued. "Rich's vision centres upon women as the hope for survival of the world— a world that she sees as having denied to women". (***Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Poets Since World War II)***

Rich proposed the concept of "lesbian continuum"(Rich, 1986) which includes "a range through each women's life and throughout history of woman identified experiences, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman". (Rich,1986) She observes that it "embraces many forms of primary intimacy between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support". (Rich, 1986)

Rich has been a prolific writer. She drew out inspiration from the feminist movement and in turn guided the movement to new realms of reality. Her work has been both a reflection and guide to the transformation in women's consciousness.

NOTES

1. Therigatha (Songs of Nun) 6th century B.C. is the earliest known anthology of women's literature perhaps in the world but definitely in India.

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