

**Tribhuvan University**

**Queer Gendering in Adrienne Rich's Selected Poems**

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Requirement for Degree of Master of Arts in English

by

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## **Declaration**

I here declare that the thesis entitled,

"Queer Gendering in Adrienne Rich's Poetry"

Is my own original work carried out as a master student at the department of English at Rajyalaxmi Campus except to the extent that assistance from others in the thesis design and conception in presentation Style and linguistic expression are duly acknowledged

All resources used for the thesis have been fully and properly cited. It contains no material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree at Tribhuvan University or any other Educational institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the thesis.

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Janaki Tamang

May 2018

## Letter of Approval

This thesis, entitled "Queer Gendering in Adrienne Rich's selected Poetry" submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, by Janaki Tamang, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## **Abstract**

Adrienne Rich is one of the most famous American feminist poets in the modern world. She stated that women are gendered in the patriarchal society to be inferiors, victims and weak. In Rich's poems proposes that re-gendering discourse will help women to prove their own female identities away from the patriarchal heterosexual discourse which oppressed women along history. Being a feminist activist, she ultimately deals with the female issues, but her method of dealing is not the usual attack on males; her emphasis is on creation of females' own community for the consolidation of their strength. While doing so, she supports lesbianism, which is the strategy to downplay the importance of men for women. Advocating a lesbian relationship among women, she challenges the notion of heterosexuality as a natural biological phenomenon. What is called natural is in fact constructed, and heterosexuality is also constructed by males for their pleasure. Thus, to challenge this masculine opportunism, she celebrates love among women.

## Table of Contents

Declaration	ii
Letter of Approval	iii
Acknowledgment	iv
Abstract	v
Introduction: Rich and Female Identity	1
Lesbianism: The Politics of Identity	9
Opposition to Heterosexuality and Rich's Poetry	10
Conclusion: Rejection of Heterosexuality	22
Works Cited	

## **Rich and Female Identity**

This paper explores the queer gendering in the selected poems of Rich. Adrienne Rich discovers the influence of gender expression on queer women's experiences of identity, social interaction and discrimination through the selected poems. Rich presents gender expressions, their experience of discrimination, from the general population. Rich's indication of gender expression can relate awareness of sexual orientation and gender expression, experience of discrimination and social interaction, and valuing of femme identification within the queer community.

According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*: "Queer is an umbrella term for sexual and gender minorities who are not heterosexual or cisgender" (146). Furthermore Morgan Holmes says: "Originally meaning 'strange' or 'peculiar,' queer came to be used pejoratively against those with same-sex desires or relationships in the late 19th century. Beginning in the late 1980s, queer scholars and activists began to reclaim the word to establish community and assert an identity distinct from the gay identity" (24). This statement clears queer originally meant 'strange,' 'odd,' 'peculiar,' or 'eccentric.' It might refer to something suspicious or 'not quite right,' or to a person with mild derangement or who exhibits socially inappropriate behavior.

In academia, the term queer and the related verb 'queering' broadly indicate the study of literature, discourse, academic fields, and other social and cultural areas from a non-heteronormative perspective. It often means studying a subject against the grain from the perspective of gender studies James Roffee says: "Queer studies is the study of issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity usually focusing on LGBT people and cultures. Originally centered on LGBT history and literary field the field has expanded to include the academic study of issues raised in biology, sociology, anthropology etc. and other fields by an examination of the identity, lives,

history, and perception of queer people" (22). This statement clears that queer in literary studies is an approach to literary and cultural study that rejects traditional categories of gender and sexuality.

Adrienne Rich's long poetic career rejects the traditional categories of gender and sexuality. She places her position as a female artist witness to the violence, exploitation and injustice, not only in America but also all over the world. The writing of Rich has helped to transform the current understanding of women's experience and of such facet of identity as motherhood, lesbianism, gender and ethnicity. Over the past thirty years, she has become one of the most eloquent, provocative voices on the value of art and the politics of sexuality, behind the well accepted paragon of women's stories encouraging the modern women to revise the old literature from female perspective.

Rich in many poems has depicted her anxiety regarding the limitations placed on women in the society. She views the heterosexual structure in the society as the root cause of oppression on women. Within such society, for a few years, many women spent their intellect, time, energy and lives in search of their own individual identities but they could not pay attention to dismantle the existing views, values, traditions and limitations given to women. But Rich argues that within the heterosexual world, women cannot achieve their identities and liberation. In *Arts of the possible* (2001) Rich says, "Every group that lives under the naming and image-making power of a dominant culture is at risk from the mental fragmentation, and needs an art that can resist it" (49). Living in heterosexuality, it is impossible to have female identity.

In Rich's view, if a woman, in the past, got her identity in the patriarchal world, other could not, and even that identity could not contribute for living to other



women. Because existing monolithic patriarchal world is constructed in the perceptions of men that wields women. The exclusion of women, in this way, is a politics of heterosexuality. The politics of heterosexuality has veiled women identification implicitly, and explicitly. As a result, a woman has a traumatic relationship with another. Even if they have a healthy relationship, they are tagged with a social stigma. For a 'token women' like Marry Currie, Rich, in the poem, "Power" (1978), states that Marrie Currie became a famous woman, a great scientist and got her identity and had a power, but that did nothing to cure women's ill. She failed to understand the 'truth' of her own experience. Rich argues that Curie's life became a metaphor for women's lives in heterosexual society, and not for women. Though, Marrie Curie spent her intellect, energies, time, and life to be a woman scientist, her efforts and identity could not dismantle the boundaries of heterosexual world. Women could not get space of the 'truth' of female body and rights. Even today, women are in search of their identity. Rich asserts when women utilizes their intellects, visions, energies and time for the betterment, they will understand female body and transfigure it.

Through her political essay, "*Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian existence*," Adrienne Rich argues that heterosexuality is not "natural" or intrinsic in human instincts, but an institution imposed upon many cultures and societies that render women in a subordinate situation. It was written to challenge the erasure of lesbian existence from a large amount of scholarly feminist literature. From this text Rich argues that heterosexuality is violent political institution which supports the patriarchal society. It always puts forward and supports the role of male and dominates to female. So she argues women to drive their feeling towards female rather than male and portrays Lesbianism as an extension of feminism.

For Rich, her politics and personal life are hugely interconnected and overlapping. Therefore, when she sees an erasure of lesbian representation in art and literature, she explicitly moves forward to create this representation within her own poetry. Because of her intense political identity, Rich often uses her poetry to focus on representations of the lesbian existence that she finds so lacking in society. For her, a lesbian existence is easily intertwined with her feminist politics as she writes that there is a nascent feminist political content in the act of choosing a woman lover or life partner in the face of institutionalized heterosexuality. Furthermore Dr. Anne Angeline Abraham says:

Rich tried to analyse society in relation to the ethical relationship between the male principle and the female one. She defines these two principles according to the traditional Western thought, in which the male principle stands for separation and objectivity while the female one stands for relationship and subjectivity. Rich distances herself from the traditional Western definition of these two qualities and their interrelationship. She thinks that the patriarchal society divided these two principles, which caused what she calls a terrifying dissociation of sensibility. (22)

Abraham declares Rich poems analyses the society in ethical relationship between male principle and female one. Her writing is against the western tradition of patriarchal thinking. Similarly Rich's literary writing is hugely interested in exploring issues of lesbian identity. She is particularly interested in in the issue of lesbian existence.

Rich though lesbian relationship, tends to recreate mother daughter emotion and connection but most feminist's agree that objective economic dependence on men

make the option of primary sexual bonds with other women unlikely. Regarding the obligatory heterosexual preference, Rich describes:

This compulsory preference is neglecting the covert socialization and the overt forces which have channeled women into marriage and heterosexual romance, pressures ranging from the selling of daughters to silences of literature to the images of the television screen is stuck with trying to reform a manmade institution. (34)

Rich wants to prove that lesbianism is not erotic, it is emotional bond that the compulsory heterosexuality fragments the erotic from the emotional in a way women find impoverishing and painful. Rich affirms that it is lesbian sexuality, usually and incorrectly included under homosexuality since long, and has glided so silently in to the foundation of thought.

Rich poem "Twenty one Love poems" discuss the oppression of women and female artist. This poem argues patriarchy has also forbidden women's mutual love in order to subjugate all the women to its heterosexual institution. This poem is a set of lesbian love poetry but the poems are less romantic then political as Rich puts more emphasis on criticizing the patriarchal heterosexual society for it's purposeful silence and ignorance about lesbian existence and for its purposeful silence and ignorance about lesbian existence and for its suppression of women's communal affections.

The second section of the poem describes the lesbian couple suffering and isolation in heterosexual society. The speaker mentions that they became stranger for them. No one cares them; they look them as the curse of the society. They are not allowed to show their love relation openly. The lesbian lover put their hands together to comfort each other to comfort each other against the pain which was caused not only by their physical illness but by their mental anguish.

Through this poem Rich tries to expose all kinds of patriarchal oppression upon women and issue a severe criticism on the patriarchal civilization for having obstructed the development of women's civilization. Prior to "Twenty- One Love Poems" Rich has made effort in a retrospective way to original herself as a female poet, to raise her female consciousness. Her poems are also famous for their feminist elements. One such poem is "Power", which in this poem; she discusses the element of power and feminism. More specifically, it tackles the problem that Curie was slowly succumbing to the radiation she acquired from her research, to which Rich refers in the poem as her source of power. This poem is said to be discussed the concept of power, particularly from a woman's point of view.

Similarly her poem "Aunt Jennifer's Tigers" criticizes patriarchal as well as heterosexual oppression women. Preceding this poem Rich's observation about oppression is implied in her poetry where oppression of women is presented as in the suffocated lives of married women, in the inner conflict of women artist, and in the unspeakable love between women. Through this poem we perceive a housewife who silently indulges in art craft as protest.

Adrienne Rich is also famous for raising the significant voice of female. She is taken as prominent postmodern writer who raise the voice of female through her writing. She is well known for her argument of 'gender bounding'. She does not only blame the patriarchy for the suffering of women, women themselves are equally responsible. When women fight with each other they can never fight against the patriarchy. So gender bounding is the first step to protest against the patriarchal social structure. She raises the voice of gender in her poems like "The Snapshots of Daughter-in-Law," "Driving into the Wreck" and many other poems.

Adrienne Rich is an American poet, essayist and feminist. She is highly

acclaimed by the critics and scholar during her period. Adrienne Rich is recognized for bringing the oppression of women into the poetic discourse. Rich's work has explored issues of identity of lesbian, sexuality, and politics; her formally ambitious poetics have reflected her continued search for social justice. She is also remembered for her role in the anti-war movement, and her radical feminism. Basically her writing raises the issues of Lesbian identity. She raises the voice of female basically the voice of lesbian for the political representation through her writing. Another critique Julie R. Enszer Reviews on her book "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence".

Rich prods heterosexual feminists to understand heterosexuality as an institution and defines a "lesbian continuum" as a range of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. The lesbian continuum for Rich includes the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, [and] the giving and receiving of practical and political support. These essays and many others situated Rich as an important intellectual and theorist. (16)

Julie R. Enszer reviews her Essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" raises to think about and inspire change about lesbian visibility, structures of lesbian sexuality, and the role of literary criticism in relationship to lesbianism. Furthermore it challenges the erasure of lesbian existence from a large amount of scholarly feminist literature. Furthermore Jade Craddock Views about the "Twenty one love poems"

Twenty-One Love Poems by Adrienne Rich is a poetry collection where, as lesbian poets, gender and sexuality play an important role.

Twenty-One Love Poems draw on the tradition of sonnet sequences; a tradition defined by strict structure and gendered power dynamics. As lesbians with female speaker-poets writing about other women, Rich subvert themes and tropes, highlighted by their playing with the prescribed structure. Viewing the collections through the lens of sonnet sequences provides an intriguing perspective for examining the depiction of gender and, by extension, sexuality. (9)

Jade views that "twenty one Love poems" Adrienne Rich focuses on the gender identity and sexuality. Furthermore he views through this poem Rich's attempts to sustain women's and specifically, lesbian, experience in heterosexual society.

Furthermore Annmarie Faiella views:

Adrienne Rich is one of the most famous American feminist poets in the modern world. She stated that women are gendered in the patriarchal society to be inferiors, victims and weak. In Rich's poem, *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, she proposes that re-gendering discourse will help women to prove their own female identities away from the patriarchal heterosexual discourse which oppressed women along history. Kristeva states that the semiotic is maternal and the symbolic is masculine, and both of these modalities are needed in the signifying process. Therefore, Rich regains to language the feminine principle which is the only way to create an unprejudiced language that is fair to the masculine and feminine needs. (7)

Annmarie views Adrienne Rich wants to Re- Gendered the discourse through her writing. Women are gendered as the weak and submissive by the patriarchal society so women are marginalized by this society. As the feminist she wants to re-gender the

feminist discourse through tracing the semiotic elements and patriarchal language.

Colette Ann Peters says:

Throughout both her poetry and prose, Adrienne Rich acknowledges the dynamic between poetry as language and poetry as a kind of action, probing, burning, stripping, placing itself in dialogue with others out beyond the individual self'. In 1974, Rich published the "Twenty-One Love Poems," her first collection of poetry with explicit lesbian content. Since their publication now almost twenty years ago, these poems have inspired an incredibly wide range of critical response, varying from complete denial of their lesbian content to complete acceptance of it. (32)

American poet and activist of the twentieth century, Adrienne Rich's poetry explores socially relevant and self-probing topics, including feminism and lesbianism. She criticizes patriarchal domination and celebrates womanhood. Rich accepts her triply marginalized position of being a woman, a Jew and a lesbian. She examines her life as a woman in a patriarchal society, explores her roots of being a lesbian, unlike other lesbians and exercises her lesbianism by writing and living her own life. She overcame her marginalized state by writing about it. She is known as a celebrated poet and an activist who dared to defy the norms and live her life as a woman in her own terms.

### **Lesbianism: The Politics of Identity**

Identity politics is, in part, the act of adopting an identity for the purpose of making a political point. In the case of "political lesbianism," lesbian is reduced to a social identity that informs others of your political ideology, rather than a factual description of a woman's private sexual behavior. As with all identities, "political

lesbian" demands external recognition in order to exist. If others do not acknowledge or understand you as a "political lesbian," there cannot be any resulting social influence. "Political lesbian," then, functions primarily as a social performance.

A predominant focus of lesbians is female society and their location within the larger society and poetry has been central to the self-conscious construction of lesbian identity and community. Regarding the roots of lesbian feminists poetics, Linda Garber states:

The self-reflective possibility of the lyric and the myth making potential of the epic for white lesbians rests largely in the historical figure Sappho, poet of Lesbos. While Radclyffe Hall adopted the sexologists' terminology to plead for acceptance in her novel *The Well of Loneliness*, Renee Vivien and Natalie Clifford Barney, her contemporaries in the lesbian literary subculture of 1920s Paris, translated and rewrote Sappho, geographically and symbolically linking lesbians and lesbian writing to the central figure of lesbian myth making. (11)

Thus, Sappho is the central figure in the lesbian subculture, and lesbian poetry has self-reflective dimension. Sappho represents women's identity and community because her presence in history provides a foundation on which lesbians could build a lineage and create a possibility of surviving into the future.

Lesbian poetry is a social constructionist project. Although some lesbians in the 1970s tended to essentialism, early radical writers questioned the institution of heterosexuality and self-consciously worked to create lesbian identity and community. However, Garber says; "Lesbian is a socially constructed category. Over time this construct became more rigidified in practice, in some communities leading to censure



of certain lesbian behaviours and ideologies" (13). After 70s lesbianism had a split. For this, many queer theorists in the 1990s dismissed lesbian feminism in wholesale as an unsophisticated essentialist politics. Diana Fuss says, "lesbian feminists have both deployed and lapsed into use of identity categories, however it is for the latter that they are most well-known today" (12). She argues that the 'risk' taken by a variety of lesbian feminist writers, laid the groundwork for lesbian subjectivity by the 1990s.

Lillian Faderman, however, argues that lesbian feminist in the 1970s created community by building cultural institutions with their consensus. She says it was like a 'Utopia' and 'an amazon dream'. Much of the early theorizing of lesbian feminism took place in literature and political essay writing. They believed in the beginning of their movement that the commonality of committed lesbianism would be sufficient to help them build a unified lesbian community. And language became an important indication of political awareness and a tool to raise consciousness.

Hence Lesbianism, in the beginning, seems to be trying for unity of women through pamphleting in order to raise consciousness among women. And being selective or inventive about the language systems and discursive rules with which women compose themselves is major endeavour of lesbian feminist work.

Lesbians are 'map makers' in that they brought sexuality as a discourse in arts, even though, they were taken as social stigma. Louise Tyson describes how lesbians are taken in the academia; "Hey, wait a minute; I'm not a lesbian. . . .many literate professors simply avoid addressing lesbian issues" (318). Because they are unaware about that the work of lesbian writers form a major part of literary canon. Lesbians opened an avenue for "how sexual orientation of an author affected his/her life and literary production; most importantly how ones sexuality suffered oppression or was ignored or overlooked" (19). Lesbian, thus, go as far to study writer's life.

Lesbians are opposed to 'homophobic reading'; a reading informed by the fear and loathing of homosexuality. Despite the momentous 'stonewall' where women renounced their victim status and stood up collectively for their rights, homophobia is still evident in many forms of discrimination. Through her writing Rich argues women being controlled by patriarchal motherhood, economic exploitation, the nuclear family, compulsory heterosexuality. According to her, these institutions are validated by legislation, religions fiat, media imagery and efforts at censorship due to homophobia.

Although, lesbians are oppressed people, they share in common the political, economic, social and psychological oppression with gay men but they are 'polar opposites'. Because many lesbians identify exclusively with women while many gay men identify exclusively with men. In this regard, Tyson further explains: "Lesbians are closeted and have experienced the gender oppression, the all women straight or gay have experienced, while closeted gay men have had the opportunity to enjoy the patriarchal privileges extended to gay men" (323). Lesbians, hence, are what Rich calls 'double biased' by racism and homophobia. Heterosexuality as an institution rejects the realm of literature which depicts woman bonding and woman identification as essential for female survival from the women in general and lesbians of colour in particular by profoundly erasing them from academic feminist scholarship.

### **Opposition to Heterosexuality and Rich's Poetry**

Rich, in her poetry, has played the significant role to social and political change. She has largely influenced women's lives. Her poetry reflects challenges to heterosexuality and a chronicle of the evolving consciousness of the modern women. Rich raises the voice of opposition in accepting patriarchal definitions of femininity by separating from the political and social reality that trivializes and subordinates

females.

Adrienne Rich's book *Dream of Common Language* which represents the socio-political condition of Lesbianism. Through the book she explores the concept of a common language, to be achieved through poetry, art, and feminist ideas. The book is an integration of the author's personal life and social and political beliefs. The first section of the book represent a socio-political situation of lesbianism both in terms of the body of her poetry, response to it Gelpi Albert says: "Twenty-one Love Poems" have been resistant to recognizing it as lesbian love poetry, and have reinforced the historical silencing of lesbian experience in a number of ways." (31) Adrienne Rich adopt Lesbian- feminist approach of combining lesbianism with feminism by envisioning lesbian love, women intimacy and mutual support to explore the power of women.

The expansive definition of lesbianism helps to reclaim repressed elements of women's culture and history. Such definitional strategy seeks to drop the sexual component of lesbian in favor of an emotional commitment or preference for women. This tends to lead feminists to downplay the historical importance of the movement for sexual liberation. Cheryl Clarke writes:

This culture oppresses, silences, and destroys lesbians, even lesbians who do don't call themselves "lesbians." I name myself "lesbian" because I want to be visible to other lesbians. I name myself "lesbian" because I do not subscribe to predatory/institutionalized heterosexualit.

(7)

Cheryl Clarke explains patriarchal society's culture; history dominates and silences the lesbian identity, and determines what part female's identity. It is fact that women are excluded from the practical and political realm.

As radical feminist and lesbian activist Adrienne Rich opposes the patriarchal dominated norms and value. In the first part of the poem "Twenty one Love Poems" Rich expressed her anger towards the patriarchal society for polluting the society by silencing the female identity. In this section by using the symbol of wicked environment of city she means to present patriarchal civilization as the polluted and corrupt world. She expresses her feeling:

Whatever in this city, screens flicker  
with pornography, with science-fiction vampires,  
victimized hirelings bending to the lash, (1-3)

Here Rich express the city is full of phonographic, illusions and practices and people are psychologically used to victimization. However these lesbian lovers do not want to give up this unfavorable urban space but show their determination to stay with rotten dreams and foul words. Rich uses the term lesbian existence for the historical and contemporary presence of Lesbian creation and Lesbian continuum to include the entire range of a woman-identified experience. She feels that new understanding and language must be created to counter the limited and clinical terms that society has used to describe those it view as deviant.

Adrienne Rich focuses her writing in the creation of art and culture reflective of its visions of female-centered societies. Lesbian separatism critics also advocates for the separation of lesbian from the heterosexual society. Regarding it Marilyn Frye describes: "Lesbian separatism posits female separatism as a strategy practiced by all women, at some point, and present in many feminist projects one might cite women's refuges, electoral quotas or Women's Studies programmes" (26). Marilyn Frye holds that opposition to patriarchy is best done through focusing exclusively on women and girls. Frye believes that men cannot make positive contributions to

the feminist movement and that even well-intentioned men replicate the dynamics of patriarchy. Like Marilyn Frye Rich as well Rich urges women to direct their energies towards other women rather than on men, and portrays lesbianism as an extension of feminism. She challenges the notion of women's dependence on men as social and economic supports, as well as for adult sexuality and psychological completion. She believes that once such an understanding is obtained, these boundaries will be widened and will be able to experience the 'erotic' in female terms.

We need to grasp our lives inseparable  
from those rancid dreams, that blurt of metal, those disgraces  
and the red begonia perilously flashing. (7-9)

Through this line Speaker elaborate for the lesbian existence she prefers separation from heterosexual society, because heterosexual society silenced and dominated their feelings. Speaker Questions why they still assert on living in such an offensive world where even their existence is rarely recognized.

While discussing about transgender people they are not disappeared but, heterosexual society silenced them by mistreatment, and discrimination. Everyone has a gender identity. But conventional society does not accept it. Heterosexual society believes that there is direct connection between body and soul so the love attraction between same sexes is restricted by the social code and norms. Through the concluding part of "I" "Twenty-one Love Poems" Adrienne Rich picks up the anxiety and depressed emotion of lesbian lover faced in heterosexual society:

No one has imagined us. We want to live like trees  
sycamores blazing through the sulfuric air,  
dappled with scars, still exuberantly budding,  
our animal passion rooted in the city. (13-16)

Rich is, in fact, raising lesbian invisibility and stating that her project is a response to the past oppression. Rich is using pronoun "we" which initially seem to refer her and her lover. Speaker has used the word like "Blazing through the sulfuric air", and "still exuberantly budding." By this line Rich is calling for a love based in reality and the lesbian life she wants is not in exile not hidden and not located on the fantasy island, but there in the contemporary island of Manhattan, as full and public life" (Peters 20). From the above expression it is clear that Adrienne Rich asked the women not to escape from the realities and oppression or to regard themselves as isolated exiles but encouraged to keep on walking and living like energetic nature. Adrian Oktenberg suggests that "the pronoun "we" in this poem can mean two women lovers as well all the women community. Lesbian love and their intimacy have been expanded into women communal experience" (14). Poem "II" also contains an image which connects living and writing, this time in direct relation to Rich's lesbian lover. In the poem, Rich relates a dream

and I want to show her one poem  
 which is the poem of my life. But I hesitate,  
 and wake. You've kissed my hair  
 to wake me. I dreamed you were a poem,  
 in the pull of gravity, which is not simple, (10-14)

From the above expression Rich wants to bring her experience of her lesbianism love before her reader. In the above stanza persona reveals her inner desire to show her female lover and to make her lesbian love and life visible. "Rich has used the symbol "gravity" which indicates the power that Rich would like to utilize to disclose the unspeakable and ignored love of women" (Gelpi10). This statement clears women are more capable than male.

Rich expresses her anger regarding the position of women in the culture constructed by heterosexuality. This cultural construct is represented in the form of old myths that presents women as dualistic creature as well as the 'other'. Domination, depersonalization and dehumanization of women's sexuality are the treatments that women have been getting from males since mythical time. Thus taking a humanistic perspective, Rich wants to reconstitute the prejudice culture, which has silenced women's identity. To uplift the silenced female identity she has focused in women-women relationship. Regarding the continuum of lesbianism Jacquelyn Zita suggests that the lesbian community must defend it's integrity against all attempts at infiltration and co-optation. She further suggests:

Trust becomes a major concern in accepting a woman as a lesbian, especially when infiltration and exploitation of the lesbian community have been all to common occurrences. Lesbian community is a place where lesbian can relax; where the worry of offending straight women no longer exists; where homophobia is erased, where the women you meet share common interests and experiences, and desires; where Lesbian sensibility and erotic caring are given. (175)

Rich also likes sharing in women relationships inner potentials, receiving and giving mutual supports in the community of women against all kinds of atrocities, and suggests that only then would they ever be able to realize the great expanse of women. She believes in connection among all women against the suppression of heterosexual society. This theme can found in "V" part of the poem:

such hands might carry out an unavoidable violence  
with such restraint, with such a grasp  
of the range and limits of violence

that violence ever after would be obsolete. (24-27)

Rich reveals her faith in love for she could believe the world in her lover's hand. Here "Hands" not only represents the lovers support and warmth but also the power of women. "This poem emphasizes the reflective change on heterosexual society when they unite together and think the oppression in new way" (Enszer 10). Beside it Rich highlight's the oppressive nature of heterosexual tradition over the minority Lesbian. So she is challenging if the heterosexual society still mute their voices these oppressive voice might carry out the "Unavoidable Violence." In her poem XII she has broadened her lesbian love to raise the power of women. Rich believes "sisterly relationship and the bound of mother and daughter also can bring forth a communal power of women. She says:

But we have different voices, even in sleep,  
and our bodies, so alike, are yet so different  
and the past echoing through our bloodstreams  
is freighted with different language, different meanings—  
though in any chronicle of the world we share  
it could be written with new meaning  
we were two lovers of one gender,  
we were two women of one generation. (10-17)

Here Rich desire to bring bonding between women. Rich declares her passionat love for other women explicitly. In the above poem two women are in relationship and they are extremely happy in their choice. "We were two lovers of one gender/ we were two women of one generation" (16-17). Here Rich used pronoun "we" which indicates the private relation between two lesbian lovers to the public spare of contemporary women. Beside it Rich writes "and the past echoing through our



bloodstreams/ is frighten with different language, different meanings—" (12-13). From this line Rich wants to express historical language and their meaning has always oppressed the women. She means to say women are always symbolized with the passive and dominated language and images so historical language have always frightened them. That is why Rich continues calling for women new language that can inscribe new meaning for women. Further she says: "Though in any chronicle of the world we share/ it could be written in new meaning" (14-15). This line indicates the new meaning for women that separates them from patriarchal language. That is possible from the existence of lesbian.

Adrienne Rich Poem XV provides an excellent symbolic representation of the challenges the lesbian faces in seeking voice. In this poem Adrienne Rich expresses that she and her lover faces a number of challenges due to the heterosexual patriarchal ideology, which always mutes the voice of female and marginalized lesbian identity. She expresses her challenges following way:

the beds were narrow like prisoner's cots  
and we were tired and did not sleep together  
and this was what we found, so this is what we did-  
was the failure ours? (36-39)

Here Adrienne rich is expressing about she and her lover, are facing challenges from patriarchy. She is presenting beautifully that patriarchy will not welcome their lesbian love attraction and they will appear against them. Due to the restriction of heterosexual norms two lesbian lover sleeping in same room seem "narrow like prisoner's cots" to them because it is unable to speak to their experience.

Rich argues that historically women are forced to have relation with men and punished them for coupling with women. This heterosexual preference and taboo on

homosexuality. Rich says that heterosexuality, like motherhood, should be considered and studied as a political institution. Rich suggest that to breakdown the patriarchal heterosexual norms beside lesbian attachment there must be sisterly relationship and bound of mother and daughter to bring communal power of women.

Although, lesbians are oppressed people, they share in common the political, economic, social and psychological oppression with gay men but they are polar opposites. Lesbians are closeted and have experienced the gender oppression, Heterosexual ideology privileges lesbianism. Regarding it Louise Tyson writes:

Their 'biological essentialism' although lesbians constitute an oppressed political minority, all human beings have the potential for same sex desire or sexual activity. It is a social constructionism. Because 'same sex desires are the products of social, not biological forces" (321).

Adrienne Rich also shares that all human beings have the potential for same sex desire or sexual activity. This theme is found in poem "XII." This poem glorifies lesbian love. Rich clearly knows this relationship cannot be accepted by the heterosexual society so she is doubt in their love because their love relationship cannot be accepted by the heterosexual society. Like Louise Tyson's above mention statement Rich figures out Patriarchal heterosexual society as obstacle to continue their relationship. So she argues to achieve complete sense of freedom from all those fixed rules, responsibilities, function and position that of patriarchal society women should unite together. It is fact that today as well lesbian could not 'come out from closet' it means they are hesitated to say I am Homo, lesbian or gay due to the restriction of the society. It is fact lesbians are suppressed and silence by the heterosexual society. Through her poem "XV" Rich express real obstacle faced by lesbians:

And could instruct those after us  
 this we were, this is how we tried to love,  
 and these are the forces they had ranged against us, (12-15)

Here Rich is express her dissatisfaction towards the heterosexual society because these forces are obstacle for the unification of lesbianisms. So Rich expresses her anguish towards heterosexual society which is trying erased women's and lesbian identity.

Adrienne Rich's poem "XX" explores emotional difficulty and contradiction faced by the lesbian lovers addition to the pleasures and Joys of a relationship this poem admit the loneliness and separation that result from failed love:

I discern a woman  
 I loved, drowning in secrets, fear wound round her throat  
 and choking her like hair. And this is she  
 with whom I tried to speak, whose hurt, expressive head  
 turning aside from pain, is dragged down deeper  
 where it cannot hear me,  
 and soon I shall know I was talking to mv own soul (6-12).

Although the poet's lover fails to accept the relationship publicly, these poems affirm shared love while accepting pain, anger, and fear. Above stanza of the poems emotionally present Rich's concept that institutionalized heterosexuality robs women of their freedom, dignity, and sexual potential, which also includes the potential of loving and being loved by women in mutuality and integrity. Beside it, above stanza points out the harsh reality of lesbian it is truth that lesbian relationship is not accepted by the norms of heterosexual society. They take this relationship as the insane, taboo so lesbian cannot come in front of the society.

Rich tries to analyze society in relation to the ethical relationship between the male principle and the female one. She defines these two principles according to the traditional Western thought, in which the male principle stands for separation and objectivity while the female one stands for relationship and subjectivity. Rich distances her from the traditional Western definition of these two qualities and their interrelationship. She thinks that the patriarchal society divided these two principles, which caused what she calls a 'terrifying dissociation of sensibility'. This kind of dissociation means that society reduces the importance of woman and the female principle to the masculine notions of what is fit and unfit to them. Therefore, these two principles are kept separate. This separation deems the priority of the male principle and the dislike for everything related to the female principles.

### **Conclusion: Rejection of Heterosexuality**

In this thesis, I have tried to analyze the poetic career of Adrienne Rich in terms of her lesbian politics, and her changing attitudes towards them. Poetics and politics are intimately woven in her poetry. Her energy, time and life are not for individual purpose but for the cause of entire women's community. For her transformation goes beyond personal realm, and extends and reaches to culture and society through poem's ability to challenge the given assumptions and established values, and offer a new vision. Rejecting art as an aesthetic end in itself, Rich actively participates in the political and social debates in her poetry.

Rich has questioned the heterosexual institution in her poetry and has consciously worked to re-create women identity taking oppositional stance towards heterosexuality and trying to establish women's positional stance. Heterosexuality as a political institution is so pervasive that it has not only controlled women's body by various means but also has controlled their consciousness. That is why, women should

seek their primary emotional and erotic tie in themselves in order to have women-identified experience, and towards freedom.

Heterosexuality distorts women experience. It is so powerful that it has made women believe that heterosexuality is a compulsory union among sexes. Rich says that women who believe that women's primary emotional and erotic energy is towards men is their 'false consciousness'. It is the propaganda of heterosexual politics that percolates false conviction regarding sexuality to cramp women's creative potential, and to strip women of their autonomy by implicating them in more than profit motive. So, a male genital fetishist perspective like pornography has influence on consciousness and the like forces have convinced women that marriage and sexual orientation toward men are inevitable. But it is an implied tactics of heterosexual politics to wrench women's intellect and energy regarding their self-identification.

Women should free up their thinking regarding sexual preference and choice from heterosexual 'double bias'- racism and sexism, if they are to explore new paths, shatter the great silence to establish their identity. Women's history is a history of erasure, disruption and silence. In this context, lesbian experience, as motherhood, is a profoundly female experience with particular oppressions, meanings and potentialities, which cannot be comprehended until sexually stigmatized existence is unbracketed. Unbracketing is a crucial value for the freedom of women and the celebration of their 'self', and reviving their silenced voices.

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