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FEMINIST CONSCIOUSNESS IN ADRIENNE RICH'S *SNAPSHOTS OF A  
DAUGHTER-IN-LAW: POEMS 1954-1962*

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ABSTRACT

This research paper attempts to critically analyse the poetic volume *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954 – 1962* in the light of feminist literary theory. This paper is divided into two distinct parts: Introduction and Critical analysis of the volume *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962*.

Beginning with feminism as a concept the article introduces feminism in literature revealing its impact on the society and the counter effect on the feminist writers. This section also presents biographical details of the poet, Adrienne Rich.

Focusing on Rich's innate talents, her courage, her vivacity, her determination, her will to change the gender bias, this article precisely and systematically analyses the volume *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962*.

This volume shows a kind of movement from mild objections against patriarchal norms to harsh allegations against destructive masculinity crushing life out of women. Rich has realized that sufferings of women are universal. Marriage and motherhood have been made tools for oppression. Home is not the only source of happiness, rather satisfaction comes only when one is able to experience the full flowering of one's personality.

**Key Words:** Patriarchy, Oppression, Marginalisation, Gender roles, Heterosexuality

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INTRODUCTION

The desire to live freely and independently is an innate urge of humankind and women are no exceptions to it. Looking at the world from women's point of view is feminism. Revolting against oppression, exploitation, sexism, job discrimination, domestic violence and stereotype sex roles is feminism. Discarding destructive masculinity is feminism.

Feminism acknowledges women as competent, intelligent and responsible human beings, capable of making independent decisions and contributing to social and national progress. Feminism is the strife to achieve equality in society.

Literature too was dominated by the male sex. Women were considered to be lacking in wit, intelligence and creative talents. At the most they were offered translation work. Under such situation many women writers chose to express themselves under male pseudonym. Initially feminist literature was severely criticized. The writers had to face an uphill task. They fought against all negative criticism and road blocks and have emerged with a feeling of retribution.

Feminist literature is a process of self discovery, self assertion and self reliance. Margret Fuller was the first American woman to assert her uniqueness and limitations in a patriarchal system in her book *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845).

In the twentieth century Rebeca West, Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson imitated the feminist consciousness movement in literature. In America too this movement was gathering force.

Adrienne Rich was the daughter of Dr. Arnold Rich and Helen (Jones) Rich. She was born in Baltimore, Maryland on May 16, 1929. She attended the Ronald Park Country School in Baltimore. She became a member of Phi Beta Kappa and obtained B.A. degree in 1951 from Radcliffe College.

Her father was a physician and cultivated man. He owned an extensive library. He encouraged Adrienne Rich to read and write and she was sensitive to his criticism. At the age of twenty one Rich received the Yale Series of Younger Poets Prize for the volume *A Change of World*

Rich has contributed as a poet and prose writer. She has also been a well known critic, scholar and teacher. She is one of America's best poets.

#### **Critical Study of Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law:**

##### **Poems 1954 – 1962**

As a poet and theorist Adrienne Rich has cast a sagacious impact on contemporary American Literature. She had worked slowly and steadily over the years to be honoured as a titanic figure amidst the American poets. Her poetry candidly and boldly expresses the politics of sexuality, race, language, power and women's culture. In *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, Rich reveals her emerging feminist consciousness. She says:

I was writing at the beginning of a decade of political revolt and hope and activism .... Even before I named myself a feminist, or a lesbian, I felt compelled to bring together, in my understanding and in my poems, the political world<sup>1</sup>.

Towards the close of 1950s an autonomous women's movement was gaining momentum. The feminists held economic exploitation, terrorism, colonialism and imperialism responsible for women's oppression. Exploitation of women within the family, in married life, in the heterosexual relation and in childbearing were also considered oppressive. The feminist wanted to break free the stereotype sex roles forced on women.

*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* is her third volume published in 1963. It is considered her transitional work. Rich's own real life experiences and her observations of life concerning the true situation of women in patriarchal society has found way in this volume. The pitiable condition of women in and out of the family, the exploitation of women in every field, the continuous tortures inflicted on them and the corresponding shattering of their nerves all influenced Rich so much so that she decided to write for women's situation. *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* is her break through volume. It is here that Rich for the first time asserts herself as a feminist writer.

Rich's early poems show a marked influence of Frost, Yeats Stevens and Auden. Rich's early poems are formally rhymed and metered. The craftsmanship of her early poems was applauded by Eliot. Auden praised *A Change of World* for its careful sculpted form, elegant techniques and discreet emotional content. She had ideally matched the theme and the style which includes versification, proportion, consistency of tone and diction. The conflict between faith and doubt, the feeling of isolation and the historical apprehension had been her major themes.

1. Adrienne Rich, "Blood, Bread and Poetry: The Location of the Poet," *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. xxiv, No.3, Autumn (1983) pp. 533-534.

Since 1956 Rich started inventing new stylistic patterns of poetry. She wanted to be independent and free, free from all rules and established norms. Contemporary rhythms and images of collage and jump cuts were adopted by her. In *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* she turned to a "longer looser mode than I'd ever trusted myself with before"<sup>2</sup>.

The poems here have fragmentary sections instead of regular stanzas, and have an immediacy and force, which Rich did not attempt earlier. The change also includes the dropping of the initial capital letter in each line, use of speech cadences, increasing enjambment and limiting the use of rhyme. Here Rich for the first time identifies herself as a feminist poet. She celebrates the most desirable freedom and liberty of women:

her mind fully to the wind, I see her plunge  
breasted and glancing through the currents,  
taking the light upon her  
at least as beautiful as any boy  
or helicopter,  
poised still coming,  
her fine blades making the air wince<sup>3</sup>.

What Auden praised in his introduction to the *Change of World* has metamorphosed to a fresh kind of beauty, new formal freedom and the presentation of a dominant personal tone.

After the break of eight years Adrienne Rich wrote this break-through volume. She says:  
*I was writing very little, partly from fatigue that female fatigue of suppressed anger and ; loss of contact with my own being; partly from the discontinuity of female life with its attention to small chores, errands, work that constantly others undo, small children's constant needs .... I felt .... guilt toward my own being*<sup>4</sup>.

*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* shows shattering of Rich's dream of becoming an accomplished poet in the hands of ever demanding traditional social values. The unending responsibilities of a housewife, the constant needs of little children and the continuous poking of the society in her most personal matters caused much irritation in her. Managing the conflicting responsibilities Rich became tired of the stereotype roles meant for women. The uphill battle she faced in her life became part of her poetry. The tone of her book suggests how the author has been grievously exploited by the patriarchal society.

The major themes that Rich explores in this volume deal with the sense of frustration, guilt and suppressed anger. On being asked why her poems never speak of her children, Rich replied: "for me poetry was where I lived as no one's mother, where I existed as myself"<sup>5</sup>. She penetrates into her own experiences and reveals what all happens in the career of an artist. In this volume Rich mainly traces the problems of growing up females and especially female artist in America.

Rich insists that traditional and typical roles of wife and housekeeper are like funeral preparations for women:

*Soon we'll be off. I'll pack us into parcels, stuff us in barrels, shroud us in newspapers*<sup>6</sup>.

2. Qtd. in Blanche Linden-Ward and Carol Hurd Green, "Literature," *American Women in the 1950s: Changing The Future* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993) p. 296.

3. Adrienne Rich, "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law: Poems 1954-1962," *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 149.

4. Qtd. in "Adrienne Rich," *Dictionary of Literary Biography: American Poets Since World War II*, part II::L-2, Vol. 5 (Detroit: Gale Research Company, 1980) p.188.

5. Anne Bernays, "Motherhood: A 'Primal Agony'?" *Harvard Magazine*, Jan-Feb. 1977: p. 89.

6. Adrienne Rich, "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962," *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 150.

*A thinking woman sleeps with monsters  
The beak that grips her, she becomes*<sup>7</sup>.

The aim of the feminist writers is to depict the real situation of women in a society that devalues her. Their emphasis is on advocating the rights of women, there by rousing their consciousness. Rich reveals in concrete terms the true condition of women in many of the poems like “*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*”, “*At Majority*”, “*From Morning-Glory to Petersburg*”, “*Knight*”, “*The Loser*”, “*Merely to Know*”, “*A Woman Mourned by Daughters*”.

The title poem “*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*” of this volume presents the picture of a woman as a daughter-in-law, bound into the set of roles, which men have established and which women have augmented. Here Rich focussed on the impact of age-old practices in day to day life. Rich brings out the corresponding frustrations, resentments and experiences of a daughter-in-law who is the focal point of this poem. This woman is fully aware of the forces that limit her and other women; and there is a gradual progression from her feelings of restriction, helplessness and subdued rage toward a hope for change.

The poem begins with the introduction of a housewife who had been a beautiful and impressive girl from Shreveport. She still carries on with the fashion of her youth days and is interested in playing ‘Chopin’. The song she plays reveals her delight in remembering the good old days of youth. At present she is a mad house wife whose mind is filled with all sorts of troubles,

*her mind now mouldering  
like a wedding cake, ....  
Crumble to pieces under the knife-edge  
Of mere fact*<sup>8</sup>.

Her daughter-in-law is a nervous and angry looking woman who reacts in the same situation in a different way.

In the next section the young woman realises that she too is losing her personality and identity. Many times the angels or her inner voice incites her to revolt against this persisting state of affairs:

*She hears the angels chiding, ....  
Only a week since they said: Have no patience  
The next time it was: Be insatiable  
Then: Save yourself; others you cannot save*<sup>9</sup>.

But crippled by the never ending meaningless tasks she cannot heed the voice. She has lost the capability to sense the physical pain, as if nothing hurts her anymore, as it does not hurt a lifeless thing.

The third section reveals the idea that an intelligent, talented and qualified girl has to live in adverse circumstances after marriage and is forced to accept the atrocities inflicted on her. In return she hurls them down on her daughter-in-law. Thus becoming a means of inflicting women’s oppression. She draws life out of her daughter-in-law in the same way in which she herself has once suffered. Thus in this section there is a distressed recognition of women against each other:

*All the old knives  
That have rusted in my back, I drive in yours*<sup>10</sup>.

These women are quite aware of the merits and demerits of each other. They use all their might to attack each other. Waiting in ambush to find the right occasion to attack, till they realise : “My life had stood a Loaded Gun”<sup>11</sup>.

Thus a gloominess and darkness entraps their day to day existence.

This poem also presents modern versions of entrapment and repression:

7. Adrienne Rich, “*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962*,” *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 146.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
9. Adrienne Rich, “*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962*,” *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 145.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 146.

*She shaves her legs until they gleam  
Like petrified mammoth tusk*<sup>12</sup>.

These lines reveal Rich's anger at the role of women as an object, which she sees as the imposed ideas of our society. Rich in her essay "*Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*" says that these useless activities have been imposed on women under a cunning plan of confining them physically and preventing their movement in the external world. The fashion of high heels, feminine dress code, foot binding and purdah are various means to achieve this end.

Rich in section seven says that women who seek individuality are regarded as "harpy, shrew, and whore"<sup>13</sup>. Highlighting further on the needs of oppressed women, she insists on the need to break the mould which forces woman to suffer the same plight as her mother and mother-in-law have gone through. Rich ends the poem with a picture of women enjoying full flight of freedom and self discovery. Thus this poem revolves round the theme of oppression, human relationships, theme of isolation and women's empowerment.

In the poem "*A Woman Mourned by Daughters*" too Rich projects the true situation of a housewife, who is considered as something unimportant—a leaf, a straw. In this poem the daughters are mourning the death of their mother, yet they don't have tears, since all the stock has been utilised in the struggles of their personal lives. The daughters realise that they have never paid any importance to her and it is only after death, she is being given such a lot of attention otherwise all her life she has been ignored:

*You, whom we so often  
succeed in ignoring ! ....  
You had long since become  
Crisp as a dead insect*<sup>14</sup>.

The fact that midwives exist as lifeless beings is projected clearly in these lines. Irrelevant and unimportant is what society considers women to be.

The poem "*The Loser*" is about the thoughts of a man who thinks of his beloved after her wedding and then about a decade later. It is in the words of this man Rich projects the problematic situation of women who don't even have the scope to protest. The time a girl gets married marks the end of all the life and vivacity in her. She is like the ripe apple ready for deterioration, having no scope to mould her own life, her own world according to her choice. It is as if the enormous grandeur, virtue and piety of human nature is supposed to be destroyed and forgotten. Thus the lover hints at the tragic fate which the girl would have to suffer in future:

*.... One  
more golden apple dropped to ground,  
without the least protesting sound,  
and you would windfall lie, and we  
forget your shimmer on the tree*<sup>15</sup>.

The man reveals how the beauty, charm and grace of women is wasted in the hands of those who have sworn not to be pleased by her efforts. The same happens to this woman, within the span of nine years she lost all her delicacy and attractiveness. The pressure of bearing five children and undergoing the death of her son shatters her. The ever increasing duties, unending responsibilities, and the constant taunts, fights and tortures inflicted by her husband have been responsible for her present situation. The lover finally ends his words by wishing luck to the beloved's husband:

*I turn my head and wish him well  
Who chafed your beauty into use  
And lives for ever in a house  
lit by the friction of your mind*<sup>16</sup>.

The idea that women have to pass through various hardships before reaching the serenity of old age is precisely made clear in the poem "*At Majority*":

12. Adrienne Rich, "*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962*," *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 146.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 147.,
14. *Ibid.*, p. 159.
15. Adrienne Rich, "*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962*," *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 139.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

Your face that I see ravaged now  
 By youth and its oppressive work ....  
 Of villages that had to burn  
 And playgrounds of the will destroyed  
 Before you could be safe from time <sup>17</sup>.

This poem has a great universal significance in the sense that it is not only relevant for women but for each and every individual. The wrinkles, the blotches, the scars and the tired looks of the old age are the proofs of the hardships undergone throughout youth. Various dreams, hopes and desires have to be sacrificed and effaced before attaining the peace and serenity of old age.

Childhood is often very simple and easy, but this happiness is short lived. The harsh realities wait in ambush to attack the moment we grow up. The stark realities make life unbearable and painful. All efforts to evade the obnoxious facts fail. The darker aspects, the realities of life never fail to reach the individuals. This idea has been brought out in the poem "From Morning-Glory to Petersburg":

Now knowledge finds me out;  
 in all its risible untidiness  
 it traces me to each address  
 dragging in things I never thought about <sup>18</sup>.

All the security and peace gets destroyed the moment we enter the blind alley of youth. The truth of the world, the knowledge of mere facts make us mad.

This poem also has a universal significance. It is not only limited to the womankind but reveals the common plight suffered by every human being. However, the fact remains that life is more troublesome for women in a society that disregards her.

**Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law** is mainly concerned with the portrayal of women's condition in America in 1950s, when the patriarchal view of husband as breadwinner and woman as house maker prevailed.

Women were forced to accept the secondary status. They were limited to domestic role, and their only satisfaction was to become a mother. Legal and economic discrimination of women was common. Women were provided less employment opportunities and were paid less as compared to men for the same job. Apart from their roles as mother and wife, all their efforts were discarded.

Women did not have any right over their own bodies, for that too male approval was required. After the five hectic years of bearing and rearing three sons Rich decided to get sterilized. According to her she was quite fortunate as she had rheumatoid arthritis. This weakness of hers added weight and made her petition acceptable to the **male** panel who sat on her case.

Rich cites another case of a local woman, the mother of eight children. She had been in severe depression since the birth of her third child, and had recently murdered and beheaded her two youngest ones. Rich through this example in her essay "Anger and Tenderness" wants to suggest that many women lose their mental balance while making an effort to cope up with the great responsibilities. Thus the feminist writers aimed to publicize these facts before the women folk to make them realise that they were being deprived of their rights.

**Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law** mainly concentrates on the domestic sufferings and problems of a married woman. This volume reveals the fact that women lose their identity, beauty, personality and talents once they get married. Their lives revolve round frustration, tension, stings of criticism and unending responsibilities. Though Rich is not against marriage and motherhood, yet if these institutions tend to be oppressive they become the greatest mishaps of woman's life. Their world is limited to the stings of criticism, frustration, tension and unending responsibilities.

17. Adrienne Rich, "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962," *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 135.

18. Ibid., p. 136.

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. From “Golden apple”<sup>19</sup> she becomes “a leaf a straw”<sup>20</sup>. This journey from “Golden apple”<sup>21</sup> to “dead insect”<sup>22</sup> has been faithfully traced by Rich.

The troubles faced by Euryclea is quite different from other women depicted in this volume. Euryclea’s husband left her alone with a child thus causing her to suffer the pain and problems of isolation. While in all other cases men have been projected as oppressive, dominating brutes endlessly criticising their consort and mercilessly squeezing life out of women. Thus there again women suffered loneliness but this time amidst the family.

Rich in this volume intends to enhance women’s consciousness. The tortures afflicted on women was till now concealed from the world under the name of personal fate. Rich boldly projects such cases in her poetry. Thus pointing out that what happens to one happens to all: the personal is political. Rich made it clear that the treatment given to women was wrong and it cannot be accepted just because it has been accepted by their mothers and grandmothers. Even though this requires some efforts and incites struggle yet she is desirous of making women aware of what they are capable of. Thus she boldly says in the poem “*Merely To Know*”:

*Let me take you by the hair  
And drag you backward to the light, ....  
What if you cringe, what if you weep?  
Suffer this and you need suffer  
Nothing more*<sup>23</sup>.

Rich here proposes to take women out of darkness, away from the life denied of human rights, freedom and identity, to the realization of their own capabilities, talents and success in terms of a complete individual. Rich wants to make women feel and experience the absolute happiness that comes from self satisfaction. She also hints that achieving this aim is difficult but not impossible.

*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law* revolves round the central theme of oppression. The tendency of imposing one’s views, whims, and desires on others and simultaneously robbing away their basic human rights is hateful according to Rich. In this volume Rich is determined to fight against the oppression inflicted upon women. To propagate this idea she proceeds from real life experiences while explaining the universal problem.

Feminist writers talk about the personal experiences and at the same time there is a journey from the personal to the universal. The *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law* is inspired by real life experiences and the poet has been very careful in selecting only such experiences which have a universal significance.

Rich married when she was twenty three. Soon her husband and in-laws awaited eagerly for the children she would have. She had no idea of what to do and what was expected by women of her own standing. She knew that in order to be respected like other women she will have to give way to the traditional role of a woman – the role of a child bearer. Though this meant the shattering of her dream, her career, the full flowering of her personality.

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19. Adrienne Rich, “*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962*,” *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 139.

20. Ibid., p. 159.

21. Ibid., p. 139.

22. Ibid., p. 159.

23. Ibid., p. 152.

Within five years she became the mother of three children. It was a difficult time for her. The constant yearning of little children caused her most exquisite suffering of which she had no idea. She said in her essay "Anger and Tenderness": "At times I envy the barren woman who has the luxury of her regrets but lives a life of privacy and freedom"<sup>24</sup>.

It was not that she disliked children. Infact she was much fascinated by their charm, beauty, softness, innocence and presence. The trouble was caused by the preconceived societal norms, strict rules and code of conduct for mothers and housewives. The rules which did not allow any individual modification. Women, says Rich were expected to love their children every moment, without showing any fatigue and irritation.

Women were not allowed to have any time for themselves, for their exclusively personal lives. But Rich realized:

"I could love so much better, I told myself, after even a quarter hour of selfishness, of peace, of detachment from my children."<sup>25</sup>

The tortures a woman suffers is a universal problem. It is not difficult to understand the true situation of woman who is the victim of the same oppressive patriarchal culture. This idea has been presented in the poem "Sisters". Here Rich describes her journey to Germany where she happened to meet the blue-eyed lady. The poet and the women had been co-passengers and it was there Rich realized the striking similarity with her. Her mind like that of Rich was engaged in considering the significance of her life:

.... that blue eyed stranger  
self-absorbed as myself ....  
Face to face all night  
her dream and whimpers  
tangled with mine,  
sleeping but not asleep<sup>26</sup>.

Her desires, hopes and soft sigh of pain was just the same as that of the poet. Such great was the dissatisfaction and uneasiness from life that even sleep could bring no relief.

The poem "The Afterwake" hints at the mechanical routine and busy schedule of a housewife.

I'm like a midwife who at dawn  
has all in order: blood stains  
washed up, teapot on the stove,  
and starts her five miles home  
walking, the birthyell still exploding  
in her head<sup>27</sup>.

All the poems in this volume have universal significance, as the condition of women all over the world is essentially the same. The theme of oppression is further expanded in the poems like "At Majority" and "From Morning-Glory to Petersburg" to encompass humanity as a whole. The poems "Passing On", "The Raven", "Merely to Know", "Antinous: The Diaries", "Juvenilia", "The Afterwake", "Apology" etc. all make use of the first person pronoun 'I', but 'I' here is not only Rich but any woman who feels suffocated in patriarchal society.

**Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law** points out how patriarchy is oppressive for women. In her poetry Rich probes the effect of such a society on woman and it moves towards personal and political ways of breaking out of it.

24. Adrienne Rich, "Anger and Tenderness," *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976) p. 21.

25. Adrienne Rich, "Anger and Tenderness," *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1976) p. 21.

26. Adrienne Rich, "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962," *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 178.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 167

**Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law** explores the lives of women whom men dominate, tyrannize, choose or reject, women who gain their identity only through their relationship to men. It portrays the puppet like condition of women in the hands of men highlighting their essential powerlessness. For everything woman has to take permission and put forward constant petitions to achieve her aim. These continuous appeals and the constant refusals involves a great part of struggle in their lives causing mental troubles and anxiety.

The institutions of marriage and motherhood are very pleasurable. These institutions according to Rich give a complete meaning to their lives. At the same time Rich makes it very clear that marriage and motherhood are not the only spheres which can give satisfaction to women. The feeling of completeness would come only when women apart from their roles in family become capable of standing up before the society as responsible, competent and powerful individuals. The oppression and exploitation of women that follows after their marriage is hateful according to Rich. The various physical and mental tortures inflicted on women make them abhor this pious relation of man and wife.

Through the lines: "Time is male and in his cups drinks to the fair", <sup>28</sup> Rich makes a satirical comment on the approach of men, their attitude of applauding women on the basis of their utility. Women have always been an object of use for them, who are sooner, or later discarded when the need have been satisfied. Time according to Rich is male and praise women who are beautiful and nurturing.

The isolation and loneliness which women are forced to encounter in the hands of men is brought out in the poem "*Euryclea's Tale*". The poem shows the pain and loneliness of a girl who married a stranger. The man after begetting has escaped, leaving a son behind:

*the grown boy fretting  
for a father dawdling among the isles ....  
to receive one speck, only for years  
and years withheld* <sup>29</sup>.

**But this man has since then never returned and made his wife cry in dejection:**

*And that speck, the curious man, has kept from home  
till home would seem the forbidden place, till blood,  
and tears of an old woman must run down  
to satisfy the genius of place* <sup>30</sup>.

The man never returned to see in what conditions his wife and son are living. Nothing can be done about the sorrows of this woman. She still has the hope, but now she is aging and old.

The evil attitude of men has been very well portrayed in this poem. Their cunning and deceitful methods of seducing innocent girls and then leaving them all alone at the mercy of their fate has been projected here.

Apart from the sufferings of Euryclea, the poem also presents the pitiable plight of her son who have been deprived of father's love. The immense agony suffered by him is projected in the way he searches for his father.

The poem "*The Knight*" presents the picture of a knight with his heavy armour and helmet, riding in the noon time. The immense weight of his armour the heavy breast plate and the helmet chokes and suffocates him. With all his attire on, he scarcely looks like a living creature. It is only his eyes which are living, the rest is a metallic machine.

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28. Adrienne Rich, "*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962*," **Collected Early Poems 1950-1970**, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 148.
29. Adrienne Rich, "*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962*," **Collected Early Poems 1950-1970**, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 142.
30. Ibid., p. 142.

The poem is highly symbolic in nature. The armour and the helmet suggests the patriarchal society circumscribing women as if with metallic walls. The scorching heat of the sun is symbolic of the tortures, pain and discomfort suffered by women. Rich at the same time warns the followers of patriarchy that women are not blind, their "eye is living"<sup>31</sup>. They are observing and witnessing the real state of affairs, the prejudices, the oppression and tyranny of men.

Finally Rich puts forward a pertinent question:

*Who will unhorse this rider  
And free him from between  
the walls of iron, the emblems  
crushing his chest with their weight ?*<sup>32</sup>

"Readings of History" is divided into six parts, having separate titles for different sections and the idea is conveyed through fragmented sentences. Every section presents a different story but the central idea revolves round the hardships and sufferings of women in heterosexual relation. Section second, "The Confrontation" tells about Luige Pirandello, a bald headed, thick bearded old man with looks much like that of an old historian. He has been torturous on his wife and at present he is least interested in reconciling with her.

It has been fourteen years since he has been domineering over his wife till the poor horrified being has become mad. At present he persists with the same attitude, making her a mirror showing his real self:

*For fourteen years facing  
his criminal reflection  
in his wife's Grand Guignol mind,  
he built over and over  
that hall of mirrors  
in which to be appears  
to be perceived*<sup>33</sup>.

In projecting the true picture of patriarchal society Rich points out several ways in which men have tortured women - "The Loser" points out that a deaf ear is turned to the needs, desires and wishes of a girl in the home of her in-laws. "Euryclea's Tale" show how after sexually utilizing men escape from the sight leaving the girl alone to bear the storm. The title poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law" also projects the use and throw attitude of men towards women. "Readings of History" presents the idea that the condition of the wife is directly reflective of the true nature of her husband. The mad wife in this poem truly reflects the nature of her husband. All the poems present different cases and underneath these differences there lies a unifying link binding them together. This is essentially Rich's notion that patriarchy has ruined women.

These poems by Adrienne Rich also reflect her concern for the subject of power, the women's power, to mould and modify themselves, their lives and their nation. The basic aim behind the portrayal of patriarchal dominance and manifesting the true condition of women is to increase women's consciousness, which would be conducive for empowering women. Rich points out that women's empowerment is not possible without women's liberation. Rich also motivates women to break their silence and stand up boldly against the wrongs done towards them.

Rich through her poetry is attempting to bring change in the present state of affairs. The poem "The Well" symbolically highlights on the idea of women's empowerment advocating that efforts should be made to return the lost charm and vitality of women.

"The Well" is essentially a poem with feminist zeal and enthusiasm. Rich here reveals herself clearly as a feminist writer attempting to revive and rejuvenate women through her poetry. She believes that her words have the power to drag out women from the drudgery of old patriarchy, and provide a new life to them.

31. Adrienne Rich, "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962," *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 138.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 138

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 161-162..

In this poem Rich describes an old well with fallen leaves, eaten apples, scrapes of paper and old dustbin lying at its base. The month is of November and nothing new grows, nobody comes. It is only the poet, who has come to breathe in a magical word to the well. This word can make the dead leaves and fallen fruits to adorn the trees once again. It can transfer the scrapes of papers to a number of letters reaching out the poet.

Here the old well is symbolic of the age old patriarchal culture and norms which causes a drain of women's vitality, their efforts and talents. All these merits could have flourished if women had favourable circumstances, but the fact is that they have been crushed and wasted away. All this is suggested by the image of dead leaves and eaten apples lying at the basement of the well. November is suggestive of the winter season, the cold weather, a time when there is no hope for verdure and new growth. A month when nature appears dead and woody. The condition of the society is much like frayed November with no hope of rejuvenation.

However it is only Rich who comes up in this dilapidated situation to breathe in her enchanting words which has the capability to return women's lost virility.

*But I come, trying  
to breathe that word  
into the well's ear  
which would make the leaves fly up  
like a green jet  
to clothe the naked tree*<sup>34</sup>.

The poem "Passing On" preaches that time should be used to fulfill the dreams and achieve satisfaction out of life. The protagonist of this poem is a lady who is packing up her things. They are tenants and would soon leave the house in which they have been living. The wife is ready to pack up and move but suddenly she muses on the promising opportunities which she never seized.

The title and the subject matter both hint at the passage of life from one phase to another with a resentment in woman to not have done anything to achieve self satisfaction and now is the time when perpetual emptiness is about to enter her life. The motion of something missed out, something lost, something wasted away is gravely portrayed.

*Oh, all the chances we never seized !  
Emptiness round the stoop of the house  
minces cat wise, waiting for an in*<sup>35</sup>.

The last section of the poem "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law" projects strong, influential, creative women in terms of a helicopter delivering the precious cargo. This woman is free of all restricting forces and in her daring flight lies her defiance:

*poised still coming,  
Her fine blades make the air wince*<sup>36</sup>.

This woman is confident, and determined to revolutionize the world.

This section clearly portrays Rich's desire to see women as powerful, strong, influential, free and individual human beings. Rich here uses the imagery from the world of modern technology to show the journey from oppression to freedom. In "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law" the poet applauds the new woman who has the courage to plunge

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34. Adrienne Rich, "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962," *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 185.
35. Adrienne Rich, "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962," *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 150.
36. Ibid., p. 149.

*breasted and glancing through the currents  
at least as beautiful as any boy  
or helicopter*<sup>37</sup>.

In "*The Roofwalker*" the poet finds herself similar to the roof builders trying to build anew herself, but their firmness and sureness still are lacking in her. This poem is a search of women for self satisfaction and individuality. This presents a clear contrast between the two lives—one, which the poet has rejected, and the other, which she is desirous of achieving. The old life is represented by an image of woman reading in the lamplight about the heroism of men. The image at once projects the idea that women are restricted to home and are provided a life which separates them from the external world. Such a life the poet didn't choose, but since she was the part of the common group of sufferers it chose her: "A life I didn't choose chose me."<sup>38</sup> Rich puts forward a pertinent question:

*Was it worthwhile to lay -  
With infinite exertion -  
A roof I can't live under?*<sup>39</sup>

Rich uses an untraditional metaphor of the construction worker to depict the search for new life. The roof builders are powerful "Giants",<sup>40</sup> who master their environment with strength, courage and tools. The poet too is a builder, creating and building her own life and her own world.

"*The Roofwalker*" is Rich's formal declaration of joining the political activism. She is determined to lose the protected environment as she doesn't want to remain a distant observer of women's plight, but intends to plunge deep in the feminist movement. Rich however makes it clear that neither of the two lives is easy and comfortable. Yet she has a desire to be heroic as the "giants, the roof walkers"<sup>41</sup> working outside in the storm.

The poem "*Prospective Immigrants Please Note*" speaks out to the new women and reminds that the society offers only one door to them. This leads to the traditional roles of a housewife, but there is always the fear of losing self identity: "There is always a risk/Of remembering your name."<sup>42</sup>

In rejecting this life style one can be worthy in one's own eyes. In revolting the male oppression there lies a possibility to live according to one's own standards:

*If you do not go through  
it is possible  
to live worthily  
to maintain your attitudes  
to hold your position  
to die bravely*<sup>43</sup>.

Passively accepting male oppression is wrong according to Rich. An intellectual woman who absorbs it becomes her own enemy. This leads to the turning of energies inward or causes eruption on others. The problem is that, women accept the male oppression passively and then they themselves become an abettor in propagating it. They reflect all the wrongs that have been done to them: "The sole of his feet glitter/and his palms flash in reply."<sup>44</sup>

37. Ibid., p. 149.

38. Adrienne Rich, "*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962*," *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 193.

39. Ibid., p. 193.

40. Ibid., p. 193.

41. Ibid., p. 193.

42. Ibid., p. 188.

43. Ibid., p. 188.

44. Adrienne Rich, "*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962*," *Collected Early Poems 1950-1970*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 138.

The tendency as Rich observes is to take revenge for the wrongs done to her on one who is weaker in position and power.

It is women, more particularly mothers who teach their daughters to be in harmony with the patriarchal norms. They teach them to accept passively all that comes to them:

*All this universe  
dares us to lay a finger  
anywhere, save exactly  
as you would wish it done*<sup>45</sup>.

Human relationships and particularly the man-woman relationship is also focussed by the feminist writers. Here in this volume Rich clearly reveals what it means to be a man and what it means to be a woman. Home has turned to be a perpetual battlefield. The continuous fights taking in such relations is projected in the poem "Novella":

*Two people in a room, speaking harshly  
One gets up, goes out to walk  
(That is the man)*

*The other goes into the next room  
And washes the dishes, cracking one  
(That is the woman) ....*

*She has no blood left in Her heart ....  
He ring's at his own door  
and hears sobbing on the stairs*<sup>46</sup>.

Heterosexual relation is a dead relation for Rich. "I knew beyond/all doubt how dead that couple was",<sup>47</sup> says Rich in "Readings of History".

Rich's poetry revives what all has been known and experienced by women from times immemorial. Women all over the world had to suffer the same plight before women's activism came in. ***Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law*** presents the necessity of restructuring social values and structures.

From this volume Rich begins her journey as a feminist. The volume also reveals this journey motive. Initially the charges are mildly imposed on the patriarchal society in the poems "At Majority", "From Morning-Glory to Petersburg", "The Knight", gradually Rich proceeds to directly point out how men have been predators and parasites in ruining women. The poems are no doubt written with feminist zeal, but they are also very true for the whole mankind.

The next group of poems like "The Loser", "Euryclea's Tale", "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law" etc. Particularly pinpoints the male atrocities. Further Rich moves to advocate various ideas which would perhaps add value to women's lives. She at the same time tries to enhance women's consciousness in the poems like "Passing On" and "Merely to Know".

In the poems "A Woman Mourned by Daughters", "Readings of History", "The Afterwake", "Novella", "A Marriage in the Sixties", Rich points out the rugged man - woman relationships.

Finally at the end Rich proposes an alternative for women to break free at all the restrictions. The poem "The Roofwalker" attempts to make women realise that they too are capable of accepting challenges in life. At the same time Rich reveals that the road of revolt is not very easy. Rich no doubt is aware of the realities of life but at the same time she is very hopeful. The volume ends with an optimistic note.

45. Ibid., p. 160.

46. Ibid., p. 186.

47. Adrienne Rich, "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law: Poems 1954-1962, " ***Collected Early Poems 1950-1970***, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) p. 161.

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