ABSTRACT

The present study entitled "A CRITICAL STUDY OF ADRIENNE CECILE RICH’S WORKS IN A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE" has been divided in five chapters followed by a conclusion.

The introductory chapter entitled "The Dynamics of the Feminist Movement" attempts to discuss the different facets of the feminist movement. Tracing the history of the feminist movement it tries to focus on the philosophical forces working behind it. Through the Anglo-American and the French feminist perspectives it tries to uncover several efforts in literature to render women to a lower subject position and perpetuate their subordination in society.

Chapter Two, "The Dialectics of Adrienne Rich’s Thought". is a study of the biographical details about Adrienne Rich with a view to trace the history of the growth of her poetic and literary attitude. It is a fact widely acknowledged by critics that the formative influences upon a writer play a vital role in shaping and designing the artist’s attitude to, and the modes of meeting, the realities of life that call for a response. We also propose to include those aspects of Adrienne Rich’s early spectrum of circumstances and influences that most strongly reflect themselves in her
attitude to art and literature and are finally responsible for her evolution as a radical feminist thinker.

Chapter Three. "Language, Power, and Politics of Sexuality", discusses new developments in the field of language that have changed all the concepts about it. Now, it is not merely a passive mode of communication conveying ideas and experiences but it has rather become a living thing which plays with human beings and shapes realities. Adrienne Rich shows great awareness of the politics of literature to keep women silent, restricted and, therefore, powerless. Her poetry is a continuous process of exploration of how language has trapped women and how they have been led to believe and practise what patriarchal order has asked them to do. But she wants a change, a change that comes through women looking at literature differently than they have ever looked at; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over them.

Chapter Four. "Women in Patriarchy: The Problem of Identity", discusses in detail the condition of women in patriarchy and women's constant struggle to dismantle the image of women projected in patriarchy that confines their whole existence. Identity emerges as an unresolved question for women as patriarchal ideology leaves no space for women and tries to disintegrate their very existence in the world. Adrienne Rich considers the patriarchal structure of society as the root of women's
oppression, and her entire poetic career is an effort to change this social structure in which women are relegated to a lower position in comparison to men and are constantly in search of their identities. Her work offers an alternative vision, one that condemns the sins of patriarchal order and goes on to praise the strengths and virtues basic to everyone, precisely the life-reclaiming strengths and virtues of women through the ages.

Chapter Five. "Lesbian Continuum: A Celebration of Women's Liberation", is an attempt to give a brief sketch of the Lesbian movement and the theoretical basis of lesbianism. Drawing insights from Michel Foucault's theory of sexuality and the workings of discursive power, Rich writes about the images of male power and the way it operates. Rich attacks the institution of compulsory heterosexuality as a theoretical and political stumbling block for feminism and proposes the concept of lesbian continuum which comprises the giving and taking of political support, exchanging difficulties and ideas, and evolving a culture of sisterhood which recognises and strengthens women's resistance to patriarchy and power. The chapter also gives a detailed criticism of Rich's theory and its importance in today's theoretical world.

In "Conclusion" an attempt has been made to bind up the present study. It will consist of the various findings arrived at during the course of the present study. The poetry of Adrienne Rich presents a clear-sighted
example of a poet whose work had begun in a formal self-regarding manner
devoid of politics: but a poet who has gone on, by virtue of attention to
experience, to establish a major voice in forms clearly political. Her poetry
attained maturity when she started realizing that politics was not something
"out there" but something "in here" and the essence of her condition. Her
political poetry should be read in two ways: as an exploration of the life of
women in contemporary culture and as an exploration of general human
concerns for identity and community. Her themes revolve around two poles:
the power and potential of language to determine consciousness and our
lived reality and the importance of personal experience and reflection in the
creation of social community.