CHAPTER 4
Women in Patriarchy: The Problem of Identity

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.

Examining the different facets of the modern world-culture, history, customs, religious rituals, wars, technological developments, movies, politics, international relations etc. in a broader perspective, Adrienne Rich realizes that the fragmentation of the world is caused by the power of the masculine world, that is the power-to-control and the sexual politics this power leads to. She believes that it is only women who can clearly see the destructive nature of this power, as they are marginalized in the patriarchal system and do not participate in the politics of sexuality. Her explorations into sexual politics lend her to the fact that all men are guilty of crimes against women and life as a whole. Even the protectors cannot be believed, as in “Rape”, where the neighbourhood cop is seen as the mirror image of the rapist. Rich cannot trust them and advises the daughters. “Men can do things to you”. The crimes of men reaches from the individual rape of one woman to more universal destruction:

I suddenly see the world

as no longer viable:
You are out there burning the crops
with some new sublimate
This morning you left the bed
we still share
and went out to spread impotence
upon the world.¹

This realization of the masculine world as impotent and destructive, evolves a radical feminist vision that condemns the exaggerated forms of masculinity as the evil and hails the evolution of a female power as the good. This vision is further developed in her poems that present a female imagery, speak in a female voice, and invoke women to express the “unsaid word” in a powerful female language.

(i) The Problem of Identity

The American philosopher Judith Butler in her book Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990) discusses the concept of identity and its importance for a feminist. Rejecting the notion that identity is made up of certain essential features of women. Butler proposes that identity is a construct of social and cultural ideologies. They pose themselves as natural and enforce norms that define what it is to be a woman, further they warn and intimidate to expel those who do not abide by these norms. French philosopher Louis Althusser expresses almost the same idea that ideology turns people into subjects: that is they are interpolated by forms and strategies of communication which determine their vision in a particular way and make them realize themselves as free individuals totally free to work as they wish whereas the truth is the other way round. but it is convenient for the ruling groups to make people live under this illusion.
In *Gender Trouble*, Butler says gender is considered as performative, that it depends on what one does, not on what one is. It is created by one’s acts, in the way that a promise is made by the act of promising. One becomes a man or a woman by repeated acts, which are, like acts of speech, determined by social conventions and cultural rules. So our being a man or a woman depends on the socially established ways, but this does not suggest that gender is a choice, and we can decide for us to be a man or to be a woman. Actually to be a subject at all is to be gendered:

No one can be a person without being male or female. “Subjected to gender but subjectivated [made a subject] by gender,” writes Butler in *Bodies that Matter*, “the ‘I’ neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves.” Nor should the formation of gender be considered as something achieved by a single act; rather, it is the reiterative and citational practice, the obligatory repetition of gender norms that create and constrain the gendered subject.

Making her point clearer further, Butler says that the expression “It’s a girl!” or “It’s a boy!” with which a baby is received into the world is the starting point of the construction of the subject through language. The naming of the girl commences the never ending process of girling, the making of a girl, through an “assignment” of obligatory reiteration of gender norms, “the forcible citation of a norm.” To be a subject is to accomplish this “assignment” of reiteration, but as we almost always fail to secure the expected marks in the examination, some never even completely adopt the gender criteria we are forced to meet with. Therefore a gap appears for not fulfilling the “assignment”, and for Butler, this gap opens the possibilities for resistance and change. Thus, if the repetition of an utterance on a particular occasion makes something happen (you made a
promise) for Austin, the compulsory reiteration can create social and historical realities (you become a woman) for Butler.

During the 1980s, discourses and movements based on issues of identity had a great impact on the world at large. Questions of cultural, religious, national, linguistic, and sexual identity captured the focal positions, forcing questions of economic justice, for the moment, to the background. Cultural revivalism, national liberation, religious “fundamentalism” and sexual affirmation all fused to construct some of the most vocal and perceptible political and social movements of modern times. The formation of identity is now a major concern posing difficulties for the social scientists. Identity is no more talked about in terms of identity crisis, alienation, or role conflict, but thought of in relation with the possibilities and forms of resistance expressed by fractured, hyphenated and multiple identities associated first with psychoanalytic, then structuralist and lately with post-structuralist and feminist critiques of an essentialist subjectivity on which earlier theories regarding identity were founded. One of the major issues behind this concern with identity and in identity politics is the relationship between marginalisation and a politics of resistance, and positive, empowering choices of identity and a politics of difference.

In earlier theories, the problem of identity was related to the issues of manipulation and alienation. An idealised past was always there behind the worries to define and explain identities by stable gender roles, ethnic origin, occupation, life stage and specially class. Though there was an opportunity to go beyond what they were born into through social mobility, education and through other chances that modern life offers, but it was a limited movement and they were expected not to break the stable identities.
Now the subject has been deconstructed of its centrality and identities have become multiple, fractured and layered. But this decentring of the subject is often viewed less as an indication of marginalization and oppression than as the basis for a politics of difference where marginal identities become a source of empowerment and resistance. Identity politics is now considered as an area of cultural and political resistance within society and is often seen as indicative of a turn to a new type of postmodern or late-modern society. The space of identity is heterogeneous, folded, fragmented and paradoxical in which a clear singular subject position is not possible. So, in a world where identities cannot be fixed to singular uncomplicated subject positions, identity becomes all about multiple location and performativity within that location. In this condition the main issue attached with such spatial uncertainty is identification. It is through identifications with others, identifications that can be multiple, overlapping or fractured, that identity – that sense of self recognition and belonging with others – is gained.

The reference to “the subject” here can be understood in at least three ways. Firstly, it implies the human subject and the concepts of what it means to be called, or to name oneself, ‘a woman’ or a ‘a man’. Related with this is the notion of a collective subject, ‘women’: feminists generally speak about women as a group, some even use the term “class”, with common needs and purposes. The third meaning of ‘subject’ is subject as a discourse. We can take feminism itself as a subject, a subject of inquiry, and ask what are the implications of this preoccupation with the human subject for the political and intellectual practice of feminism.

The subjectivity based on the theories of Lacan and Althusser, that decides identity as not something fixed or essential but located in language and ideology came to be regarded as the product of an interpellating process.
in which individuals seemed to be located apparently as free agents, but actually were the products of the ideologies of capitalist societies. Foucault sees subjectivity as historically and discursively constructed. According to de Certeau discourses locate subject positions within a space of power-knowledge where we can write, not life scripts but little stories, poems, language games, in which we can rearrange our identities and our identifications with others in partial and changing ways. While this space in which identities are constructed can be viewed as all pervasive, it provides to some people a freedom in which any thing and any kind of identity is possible within a post-modern world. The rejection of an essentialist view of the subject has not taken to the over determination of identity by discourse but to arguments about a new voluntarism and vitalism in which identity becomes a matter of choice and style. This is what has come to be known as identity in the post-modern world. There is no master script, a super model which we can look up to shape our own identity. Whether we accept this reality or not, it is around this issue that the current problem of identity is situated. “This is the world of identity as difference and as recognition; dominant identities which defined themselves against a host of Others, whose Otherness was something dangerous and marginal, have lost their hegemony.” However, this difference is not just at the peripheries and beyond but is prevalent and everywhere, having become, if not hegemonic, then at least something that is to be taken into consideration; a powerful place from which the vestiges of the old but significantly weakening authority of essentialism is challenged. Making this concept more clear Hall argues that the non-essentialist conceptions of identity grow around a play of difference within identity positions which are expressed through dialogues between their constituent parts. He says that a Black cultural identity is constructed through the different positions of presence Africaine,
presence Europeane. and presence Americaine and this difference is used to form a unity and sense of shared identity.\footnote{7}

For Bhabha this difference is not always an uncomplicated location. It does not clearly define what is central and what is marginal; rather it operates through a changing similitude of different locations from which identities – or pieces of identities – emerge, often in tension and partial connection with others. It is not just those who have been pushed to the margins experience the identities in difference, rather it is a condition which everyone experiences in society. We may have privileged subject positions as men, as middle class, as White, as Westerners, and so on but it is also possible at the same time to have marginal positions. A young White, rich, Western man may still have the marginal position in terms of his sexual orientation or in terms of some disability on his part. The opposite is also true. Those whose identities are situated on the margins: working class Black men, for example, may still have better positions than others – Black women for example. However, it is very difficult to say anything with certainty. There is no fixed classificatory method by which degrees of difference and marginality can be measured and ranked.

Dealing with the question of identity Julia Kristeva reaches at the conclusion that all identities are unstable: the identity of linguistic signs, the identity of meaning and consequently, the identity of the speaker. She calls this instability of language, meaning and subjectivity, the “subject in process” to convey the incomplete condition of the subject which is always becoming but never stable. Here ‘process’ beside being the process in the literal sense is also a legal process where the subject is committed to trial, because our identities in life are always questioned, brought to trial, overruled.\footnote{8}
Jacqueline Rose mentions that the prescriptive (what women should do) and descriptive (what is demanded of women, what they are expected to do) nature of patriarchal culture frustrates any attempt of stable identity. She calls it “failure” of identity. But this “failure” is not a moment to be repented in a process of adaptation, or development into normality, which ideally takes its course. “Instead ‘failure’ is something endlessly repeated and relieved moment by moment throughout our individual histories.” It can be seen not only in the symptom, but also in dreams, in slips of the tongue and in forms of sexual pleasure which are pressed to the margins of the norm. Thus “failure” is not the inadequacy of certain individuals to achieve full subjecthood but rather that “resistance to identity at the very heart of psychic life.”

Linking psychoanalysis with feminism, Rose calls it “one of the few places in our culture where it is recognised as more than a fact of individual pathology that most women do not painlessly slip into their rules as women. if indeed they do at all.” Freud also accepts this increasingly in his work. He turns from his earlier controversial description of the little girl struck with her “inferiority” or “injury” in front of the anatomy of the little boy and wisely accepting her fate (“injury” as the fact of being feminine), to an account which quite clearly explains the process of becoming “feminine” as an “injury” or “catastrophe” for the complexity of her earlier psychic and sexual life (“injury” as its price).

Both Julia Kristeva and Jacqueline Rose recognise that there are psychological and political arguments to support this figure of the fragmented, unrealized female subject. Kristeva thinks that to function in the system, the individuals need to attain a certain type of stability. Though this stability is an illusion which is frequently challenged, but it is an important illusion to maintain our everyday living. At the same time women need a different notion of subjectivity, if any political change is desired, that
can represent women as capable and purposeful. Feminism has to manage a way between psychoanalysis and politics and, as Rose thinks, the idea of the subject as at odds with social norms presents a useful point of disjunction for any radical politics. It is an inconsistency in the social system which feminism can exploit.

Catherine Belsey also explores the construction of the individual through and in language. "The subject is constructed in language and in discourse and, since the symbolic order in its discursive use is closely related to ideology, in ideology."¹² It is in this sense that ideology, as Althusser argues, constructs individuals as subjects where subjectivity appears "obvious" that they are autonomous individuals, having subjectivity and consciousness which is the source of their beliefs and actions. "That people are unique, distinguishable, irreplaceable identities is 'the elementary ideological effect':"¹³ Though the obviousness of subjectivity has been challenged by the linguistic theory originating from Saussure, Emile Benveniste argues that it is only in language that we can posit ourselves as the subject "I" of a sentence. Realization of the self is possible only through contrast, differentiation: "I" cannot be thought of without the conception of "non-I", "you", and dialogue. "Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a subject by referring to himself as 'I' in his discourse."¹⁴

But within ideology it appears "obvious" that the individual speaker is the source of the meaning of his or her utterance. Post-Saussurean linguistics gives a more complex relationship between the individual and meaning, because it is language itself which, by making difference between concepts, offers the possibility of meaning. In fact, it is only when the
individual takes up the position of the subject within language that it is able
to produce meaning. As Jacques Derrida puts it:

what was it that in Saussure in particular reminded us of? That
‘language [which consists only of differences] is not a
function of the speaking subject.’ This implies that the subject
(self-identical or even conscious of self-identity, self-
conscious) is inscribed in the language, that he is a ‘function’
of the language. He becomes a speaking subject only by
confirming his speech ... to the system of linguistic
prescriptions taken as the system of differences. ... 

Thus ideology conceals the role of language in the construction of
the subject. As a result people ‘recognise’ (misrecognise) themselves in the
ways in which ideology “interpellates” them. They start working by
themselves and “willingly” accept the subject – positions necessary to their
participation in the social formation. Here the subject is not only a
grammatical subject, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its
actions, but also a “subjected being” who succumbs to the authority of the
social formation represented in ideology as the Absolute Subject (God, the
king, the boss, Man. conscience):

The individual is interpellated as a (free) subject in order that
he shall submit freely to the commandments of the subject.
i.e. in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection. 

But this construction of identity is done differently in different cultures, so
there is no single identity. Judith Butler defines this destruction of identity
as a liberating opportunity for the construction of new subjectivities and
new political configurations. She sees feminism’s loyalty to identity politics
as restrictive and limiting. The new way for women lies in the “subversive”
practices, in the devices of performance. parody and pastiche to undermine the status of "the real" and "the natural." Butler says. "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results." Thus what our culture comprehends by feminine behaviour is not the result of a feminine identity: instead, our understanding of a feminine identity is produced, within signification, through the repeated performance of words and actions which we code as "feminine."

(ii) Understanding Patriarchy

Kate Millett is generally recognised as the first feminist thinker to introduce the term "patriarchy" into contemporary feminist debate. A radical feminist, Millett sought to emphasise the overt and often hidden "sexual politics" that men exercise to maintain their established hegemony over women. According to Millett, the important tools in this practice of male oppression are the ideologies at work in masculine definitions of gender and sexuality, a hegemonic process facilitated by the fact that social, economic and political institutions are in male hands:

... our society, like all historical civilizations, is a patriarchy. The fact is evident at once if one recalls that the military, industry, technology, universities, science, political office and finance - in short: every avenue of power within society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands.  

Millett’s analysis of patriarchy was one that tried to understand how women become conditioned into colluding in their own oppression. She answers this question that women were forced to accept inequality by the
social denouncement of those women who “sought to escape the confines of socially correct ‘feminine’ behaviour.”

Patriarchy literally means the rule of the father or the "patriarch". However, patriarchy is a problematic word as it has a narrow, traditional meaning – not necessarily the one feminists give it. In its narrow meaning patriarchy refers to the system, historically derived from Greek and Roman law, in which the male head of the household had absolute legal and economic power over his dependent female and male family members. People using the term in this sense often imply a restricted historicity for it. Patriarchy started in classical antiquity and ended in the 19th century with the granting of civil rights to women and married women in particular.

This usage is problematic because it deforms historical reality. The patriarchal dominance of male family heads over the other members is much older than classical antiquity; it starts in the third millennium B.C. and is firmly established at the time when Hebrew Bible was written. Further, it can be argued that in the 19th century male dominance in the family simply adopts new forms and is not ended. Thus, the limited definition of the term “patriarchy” tends to foreclose accurate definition and analysis of its continued presence in today’s world.

Patriarchy in its wider definition means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men control power in all the important institutions of society and that women are divested of access to such power. It does not mean that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence and resources. One of the most difficult tasks of women’s history is to trace with accuracy the different forms and modes in which patriarchy
appears historically, the shifts and changes in its structure and function, and the adaptations it makes to female pressure and demands.

The subordination that women experience in patriarchal system takes different forms – discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, violence – within the family, at the place of work, in society. The details may be different, but the theme is the same. Juliet Mitchell, a feminist psychologist, uses the word patriarchy to refer to kinship systems in which men exchange women, and to the symbolic power that fathers exercise within these systems. It is this power that creates the "inferiorised" psychology of women. Sylvia Walby in her book, *Theorising Patriarchy* calls it "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women." It is important to understand patriarchy as a system because this helps in rejecting the notion of biological determination. Kate Millett presents a far-reaching analysis of patriarchy, traced across cultures and history as the primary political intuition, the expression of the distribution of political power based on an original sexual division of labour. Patriarchy is thus seen as the hierarchical institutionalization of the unequal roles and status given to the two biological genders – "the birthright priority whereby male rules females." Patriarchal ideology ensures the socialization of individuals according to already given and thus "stereotyped lines of sex category."

Patriarchy manifests its control in almost all the spheres of society. Men control women’s productivity both within the household and outside, in paid work. Within the household women provide all kinds of free service to their children, husbands, and other members of the family, throughout their lives. In what Sylvia Walby calls the "patriarchal mode of production", women’s labour is expropriated by their husbands and others.
living there. According to a UN statistics women do more than 60% of the hours of work done in the world, but they get 10% of the world income and possess only 1% of the world’s property. Women’s reproductive power is also under control. In many societies women are not allowed to decide how many children they want, when to have them, whether they can use contraception or go for an abortion, etc. Apart from individual male control, male dominated institutions like the Church or State (i.e. religion and politics) also make rules concerning women’s reproductive capacity. This is institutionalised control. For instance, in the Catholic Church the male religious hierarchy decides whether men and women can use birth control methods, which methods are allowed, whether women can terminate an unwanted pregnancy, and so on. In almost every country, women have been continuously demanding the freedom to decide when, whether and how many children to have. It shows how strong this control is and how reluctant men are to surrender it.

The patriarchal state also tries to control women’s reproduction through various family planning programmes. It is the state that decides the size of the country’s population and accordingly, actively encourages or discourages women to have children. In India there has been an aggressive birth control programme to curtail family sizes to a great extent. In Malaysia, on the other hand, women have been encouraged to have several children, in order to develop a sizeable domestic market for the country’s industrial products. The famous Baby Boom of the 1950s in the U.S. is an apt example of the state’s intervention in the family planning and of the state’s implicit endorsement of the ideology of motherhood.

This ideology of motherhood is one of the main issues of the radical feminist analysis of women’s situation. They say that women are subjugated primarily because the responsibility of mothering and nurturing
is forced on them by patriarchal society. Furthermore, it also decides the conditions of their motherhood. It is this ideology that creates feminine and masculine character types which strengthen patriarchy; it creates and widens the gap between private and public, it limits women’s mobility and growth and reproduces male dominance.

Another very important area of women’s subordination is the control over their sexuality. Women are forced to provide sexual services to their men according to their needs and desires. A whole body of moral and legal rules exist to suppress the expression of women’s sexuality within and outside marriage in every society, whereas male promiscuity is simply ignored. Men can also force their wives, daughters and other women in their control into prostitution, i.e. trading their sexuality. Rape and the threat of rape is another way of controlling women’s sexuality through an invocation of “shame” and “honour”.

A radical feminist analysis points out that women under patriarchy are not only mothers but also sexual slaves, and patriarchal ideology typically opposes women as sexual beings to women as mothers. With the partial exception of mothers, the patriarchal culture defines women as sexual objects for the pleasure of men. The analysis says that rape may not have existed in every society, but it is a defining feature of patriarchy. It views rape as an effective political device, a political act of oppression exercised by members of a powerful class on members of the same class. Radical feminists also concentrate their attention on institutionalized prostitution, pornography and compulsory heterosexuality as other examples of control over women’s sexuality under patriarchy.
(iii) Rich on Patriarchy

It is against this background, this cross-current of feminist thinking about the problems of patriarchy that one has to study Adrienne Rich's understanding and tackling of the problem. While Kate Millett emphasises the ideological forces pressurizing women to accept the prevailing power-structured relationship of gender, Adrienne Rich visualizes the play of physical force and its threat combined with the ideological force in the subjugation of women. She writes:

Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labour – determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.35

The notion of patriarchy that Rich develops is most closely related with juridico-discursive model of power, though there are differences between, for example, Marxist, radical, socialist and psychoanalytic feminist concepts of patriarchy. The emphasis on male power as hierarchically located, oppressive and ideologically substantiated remains true for both.

Rich thinks that the time has come now when a feeling is developing among people of the world that patriarchal system cannot answer for itself; that it is not inevitable and gradually losing its autonomy: that the cross-cultural global subjugation of women by men can no longer be either denied or defended. Women writers like Jane Harrison, Helen Diner and Virginia Woolf have raised questions and challenged the prevalence of patriarchal values. Simone de Beauvoir calls this world “a man’s world.” Even male
writers like J.J. Bachofen, Robert Briffault, Frederick Engels and Erich Neumann suggest that the patriarchal family is not an inevitable "fact of nature". But according to Rich, they "still stop short of recognizing the omnipresence of patriarchal bias as it affects even the categories in which we think, and which has made of even the most educated and privileged women an outsider, a nonparticipant, in the molding of culture". Rich calls patriarchy "the Kingdom of the Fathers:" the sexual understructure of social and political forms.

It is very difficult to define the power of the fathers as it permeates through everything, even the language has not remained unaffected by it. It is diffuse and solid: symbolic and literal: universal and local at the same time. It manifests itself in everything that appears. In patriarchy a woman has only that much of power which it is willing to consent and that too for a limited period. Sociologist Brigitte Berger says that until recently an originally masculine intellect and spirit have dominated in the interpretation of society and culture - whether this interpretation is accomplished by males or females. Originally masculine assumptions have shaped the entire moral and intellectual history.

Comparing the patriarchal society with matriarchal societies, Robert Briffault in his book *The Mothers* shows that they are not interchangeable with a different sex in authority, he uses the term "gynocracy" for a situation in which women could have economic control and command through property. He indicates that the matriarchal elements in any society have had a functional source - i.e. the maternal function of gestating, bearing, nurturing, and educating children; and it was because of this function that women exercised a great deal of activity and authority which is now referred to the male sphere outside the family. In his matriarchal society female creative power is pervasive and women have organic
authority. Unlike the power men exercise on women in patriarchy which Rich calls the power-to-dominate but wants to change to the power-to-transform which for her, is the truly significant and essential power. Rich agrees with Briffault’s view that there would be a kind of free agreement about the authority of women in a matriarchal society because of her involvement with the essential practical and magical activity of that society. He therefore visualizes matriarchy as organic by nature. Patriarchy according to Briffault comes into existence when men revolt against this organic order, by forming economic domination and by controlling magical powers previously considered the realm of women.

Rich is of the view that at the center of patriarchy is the individual family unit which developed with the idea of property and the desire to see one’s property transferred to one’s biological descendants. Simone de Beauvoir links this desire with the craving for immortality:

... the owner transfers, alienates, his existence into his property; he cares more for it than for his very life; it overflows the narrow limits of his mortal life-time, and continues to exist beyond the body dissolution - the earthly and material incorporation of the immortal soul. But this survival can only come about if the property remains in the hands of its owner; it can be his beyond death only if it belongs to individuals in whom he sees himself projected, who are his.²⁸

Rich says that a crucial moment in human consciousness came when man realized that it was he not nature which impregnated woman. With this new sexual possession supported by property ownership and the desire to transcend death, came the institution in existence that we call patriarchal
family with its supernaturalizing of the phallus, its division of labour on account of gender, its emotional, physical and material possessiveness, its concept of monogamous marriage until death (and its harsh penalties for adultery by the wife), the “illegitimacy” of a child born outside marriage, the economic dependency of women, the unpaid domestic services of the wife, the submission of women and children to male authority, the fixing and continuation of heterosexual roles.

In patriarchy every mother is supposed to give forth her children within a few years of their birth to the patriarchal system of education, of law, of religion, and of sexual codes; she is, in fact, expected to prepare them to enter that system without any revolt or “maladjustment” and to strengthen it in their own adult lives. Rich says:

Patriarchy depends on the mother to act as a conservative influence, imprinting future adults with patriarchal values even in those early years when the mother-child relationship might seem most individual and private: it has also assured through ritual and tradition that the mother shall cease, at a certain point, to hold the child – in particular the son – in her orbit. Certainly it has created images of the archetypal Mother which reinforce the conservatism of motherhood and convert it to an energy for the renewal of male power.39

Rich says that women find themselves at a loss how to express the feelings of powerlessness as their identities as mothers crumble down in patriarchy. They are cut apart from their own parts and put against them and they cannot do anything against it but like mute observers see things happening to themselves. They cannot say “these are my children and I’ll keep them.” The woman submits herself and accepts the script of patriarchy
as soon as she realizes that a child is growing in her body. She succumbs to
the power of theories, ideals, archetypes, descriptions of her new existence.
though none of which have come from other women and all of which have
been hovering covertly about her since she first perceived herself to be
female and therefore potentially a mother. Rich invokes women that they
need to know what, "out of all that welter of image-making and thought-
spinning, is worth salvaging, if only to understand better an idea so crucial
in history, a condition which has been wrested from the mothers themselves
to buttress the power of the fathers."^30

(iv) Patriarchal Ideology and Its Importance

Rich uncovers yet another dimension of patriarchal domination
which leads to self destruction, a different form of violence in women.
Taking into account the suicides committed by women poets like Sylvia
Plath and Anne Sexton and many other women, Rich reaches at the
conclusion that in patriarchy self-destructiveness is "the sole form of
violence permitted to women."^31 She calls it "an imaginative obsession with
victimization and death."^32 This aspect becomes important in feminist
debate as it arises an identification in other women that can lead to many
more suicides. According to Rich there are four ways in which women
destroy themselves. The first is self-trivialization. Women take patriarchal
propaganda as the truth – that they are not capable of major creations; are
non-serious in their work: always find the needs of others more demanding
than their own: are satisfied to produce intellectual or artistic work where
they imitate men and lie to themselves and each other, in which they do not
strive to their fullest possibilities. The second is horizontal hostility –
contempt for women: "the fear and mistrust of other women. because other
women are ourselves."^33 The conviction that women are never really going
to do anything, that their self-determination and survival are secondary to

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the "real" revolution made by men, that our worst enemies are women. They become their own worst enemies when they allow their "inculcated self-hatred" to turn such shadow projections on each other. The third kind of destructiveness is misplaced compassion. Quoting an example of a woman who was raped, Rich says that her first – and typical – instinct was to feel sorry for the rapist, who forced her at knife point. Rich says that when women start feeling compassion for themselves and each other instead for their rapists, they will start to be immune to suicide. The fourth is addiction: addiction to "Love" – to the idea of selfless, sacrificial love as somehow redemptive, a female career: addiction to depression – the most preferable way of living out a female existence, since the depressed cannot be held responsible; addiction to male approval: as long as they have a man to guarantee for them, sexually or intellectually, they feel somehow all right, their existence seems to be approved though whatever price it comes for.

Thus self-trivilization, contempt for women, misplaced compassion and addiction are the four ways through which women destroy themselves. Rich says. "... if we could purge ourselves of this quadruple poison, we would have minds and bodies more poised for the act of survival and rebuilding."

(v) The Domestication of Motherhood

In Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution Rich presents motherhood as a potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children which has been constructed as a cultural institution with an aim of ensuring that potential - and all women – shall remain under male control. It has restricted over one-half of the human species from the decision affecting their lives. What Rich sees as one of the
most fundamental and bewildering of contradictions is that patriarchy has alienated women from their bodies by imprisoning them into categories of “private” and “public”. There have been societies where women as mothers enjoyed both respect and power, but for most of what we know as the “mainstream” of recorded history, motherhood as an institution has confined and degraded female potentialities.

There is a Persian myth of the creation of the world in which a woman creates the world by her natural creativity which cannot be duplicated by men. She gives birth to a great number of sons. The sons, perplexed by this act which they cannot perform, become frightened. They think, “who can tell us, that if she can give life, she cannot also take life”. And so because of their fear of this mysterious ability of the woman, and of its reversible possibility, they kill her.35

Thus, the power of the mother has two aspects: the biological power or capacity to give birth and nourish human life, and the magical power given to her by men, either in the form of goddess-worship or the fear of being controlled by her. There is no written history to prove this fact, but history proves that women have been crushed under patriarchal domain for this reason. A great number of women in history have become mothers without their choice, and an even greater number have given their lives bringing life into the world. Rich calls motherhood “a penal servitude” as it leaves no choice to women. In patriarchy motherhood becomes the great mesh in which all human relationships are entangled, in which our most elemental assumptions about love and power are concealed. Patriarchy works as a vicious circle where there is no possibility for any woman of forming any identity other than fixed by it. It is such a mirror in which if a woman looks, she finds she is becoming her mother.
Depicting this typical condition of a woman in patriarchy. Rich shows the despair and powerlessness of women while following their men:

I am washed up on this continent
shipped here to be fruitful
my body a hollow ship
bearing sons to the wilderness
sons who ride away
on horseback, daughters

whose juices drain like mine
into the arroyo of stillbirths, massacres.\textsuperscript{36}

The woman of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and other Puritan settlements, the African women brought as slaves to the American South, and the women of the mining camps and frontier settlements of the West learnt the power to survive in harsh conditions:

I never chose this place
yet I am of it now
..............................
when the men hit the hobo track
I stay on with the children
my power is brief and local
but I know my power\textsuperscript{37}

This “local” power offers Rich a place to start, a place of identity from which to speak. But her identity refuses “isolation, the dream/ of the frontier woman” and instead reach out to the community in the final line “Any woman’s death diminishes me.”\textsuperscript{38}
In this poem Rich meaningfully shows the coexistence of women and nature:

striated iris stand in a jar with daisies
the porcupine gnaws in the shed
fireflies beat and simmer
caterpillars begin again
their long. innocent climb.59

Their daily routine, rested in “plain and ordinary things” contrasts with the abstract laws of the fathers: “he with fingers frozen around his Law/she with her down quilt sewn through iron nights”.40

The concluding stanzas run through American and Western European history to the prehistoric. invoking a mythology in which female power is not domesticated:

their terror of blinding
by the look of her who bore them

if you do not believe
that fear and hated

read the lesson again
in the old dialect.41

In place of the unproductive law of the fathers, Rich invokes “The Erinyes”. The Greek goddesses of vengeance who inhabit the netherworld caves, to demand redress for the damage done to women in the Western civilization in the name of reason, logic, and intellect. Rich sees here a necessity for a new cultural direction. In an effort to repair centuries of misogyny, she now puts women at the center of history.
Adrienne Rich believes that the reality that the foundation of male-female relationships has been laid on the status of the female as the property of the male, or of male-controlled institutions creates a difficult situation for both women and men. It is quite painful to admit that women's identity has been dictated and fragmented by others, or that they have allowed their identity to depend on the fragmentation and exploitation of others. This is not easily accepted and faces resistance which is always the case when unsanctioned, long-stifled realities start to move and express themselves. This resistance can be expressed in various forms. Protective deafness – the inability to listen to what is actually being said – is one. Trivialization is another: the reduction of a disturbing new complexity to a caricature, or a clinical phenomenon. It is very striking to note that in spite of the reality that the world has been constructed exclusively by men and only for their benefit, and that they have plotted together for centuries to discriminate against their mothers and sisters, wives and daughters, lovers and friends, women do not have words to name it.

Until very recently, most of the women did not have the freedom to be or not to be a mother: even today, this freedom is under control. Rich says that:

this elemental loss of control over her body affects every woman's right to shape the imagery and insights of her own being. We speak of women as “non mothers” or childless: we do not speak of “non-fathers” or “childless men”. Motherhood is admirable, however, only so long as mother and child are attached to a legal father: Motherhood out of wedlock, or under the welfare system, or lesbian motherhood, are harassed, humiliated or neglected.42
The authority of the fathers decides how, when, and even where women should conceive, bear, nourish and indoctrinate their children, but now women are beginning to express the experience of motherhood both as mothers and daughters.

Adrienne Rich writes that she herself could understand the centrality of the institution of motherhood and how it is linked with the fear of difference that infects all societies, only when she started distinguishing the two strands, motherhood as *experience*, an enforced identity and as a political *institution*. Under this institution, all mothers are viewed basically as mothers: all mothers are supposed to experience motherhood unambivalently and in accordance with the patriarchal values; and the non-mothering woman is viewed as deviant.

Rich says that as the "deviant" is outside the law, and "abnormal", there is a tremendous pressure on all women to accept the role of "mothering". She says that:

- to speak of maternal ambivalence: to examine the passionate conflicts and ambiguities of the mother-daughter relationship.
- and the role of the mother in introducing her daughters to subservience and her sons to dominance: to identify the guilt mothers are made to feel for societal failures beyond their control: to acknowledge that a lesbian can be a mother and a mother a lesbian, contrary to popular stereotypes: to question the dictating by powerful men as to how women, especially the poor and non-white, shall use their bodies, or theindoctrination of women toward a one-sided emotional nurturing of men, is to challenge deeply embedded phobias and prejudices. 

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These realities anger and frighten, precisely because they touch women at the quick of human existence. But to avoid them, or to trivialize them, to let the feeling they arouse unexamined is "to flee both ourselves and the dawning hope that women and men may one day experience forms of love and parenthood, identity and community that will not be drenched in lies, secrets, and silence."**

(vi) **Personal is Political**

The fact that patriarchal ideology has a disorienting effect on the lives of women, also inspires them to recognize these social forces to understand and analyse their situation in a better perspective. When this very realization dawns on women, it opens a gate, for some women, to come out of the darkness and express the reality to the whole world and thus break the chains of the "private" self to be liberated in the world outside. These realities provide a motive and impulse toward a more enduring lucidity, a search for greater honesty, and for the acceptance of bigger issues of which their personal suffering is a symptom, a specific example. This breaking of mental barrier that separates private from public life is felt in itself like an enormous surge toward liberation. The effort to understand what has been named the "Personal" as part of a greater reality, has been a critical process for feminism, more crucial for feminism than it is for any other movement against oppression. There is a fundamental assumption about women's oppression that they as a group belong to the "private" sphere of the home, the hearth, the family, the sexual, the emotional, out of which men emerge as adults to act in the "public" sphere of power, the "real" world, and to which they return for mothering, for approach to female forms of intimacy, love and comfort unavailable in the world of male struggle and competition.
Rich says that when women start to think, speak, and write in terms which challenge these dichotomies, they face a prevailing reflex of fear. This fear is not simply of seeing a familiar model of the world thrown into question, but the fear of potential change that will follow it. When they start describing sexuality, motherhood, the so-called innate or natural behaviour, as part of the public world “out there” – that is, as coloured by power politics, rights, property, the institutionalized ownership by men of women and children – they face severe anxiety on the part of most men and many women. Even the acceptance that marriage is an economic institution – a fact which was very clear to the ancestors well into the 19th century – badly disturbs the modern, liberal, middle-class façade of free choice, love and partnership, “liberated marriage” and equality between the sexes in private life. “The suggestion that motherhood is not only a core human relationship but a political institution, a keystone to the domination in every sphere of women by men, evokes outcries of distress, or of vituperative denial, from people with a heavy emotional and practical investment in leaving unexamined this ‘sacred calling’.”45 It is immediately taken for granted that the experience of maternity itself is under threat, that the maternal emotions will be nullified if women examine closely the politics of motherhood.

Rich believes that the dread of change intersects with a dread that lucidity and love cannot coincide, that political awareness and personal intensity are opposites, that consciousness should destroy tenderness, intimacy and loyalty. Lucidity, political awareness, and consciousness are compared with intellectual nihilism, with depersonalization, with the spirit of objectification. It shows how western culture in its intense patriarchalism has polarised thought and feeling. In such a society which is so disjointed, incognito, and alienating, tenderness and intimacy are precious and scarce.
and – apart from all other forces that oppose feminism – it is no surprise that people dread the loss of what emotional intensity they still have.

Most of the men fear feminism because of their fear that if women become full human beings they will stop to mother men, to provide the breast, the lullaby, the uninterrupted attention given by the mother to the infant. “Much male fear of feminism is infantilism – the longing to remain the mother’s son, to possess a woman who exists purely for him.” These infantile requirements of adult men for women have been sentimentalised and romanticized as “love.” Now the time has come to identify them as arrested development, and to re-examine the concept of preservation of “the family” within which those needs are given full freedom of expression even to the point of violence. Rich thinks that as the law and the economic and social order are greatly in favour of men, the infantile requirements of adult males are justified by a system of power which does not justify the needs of adult women. “Institutionalized marriage and motherhood perpetuate the will of male infants as law in the adult world.”

(vii) **The Tragedy of Mother and Daughter Relationship**

Giving a new direction to the feminist movement, Rich says that before any bond of sisterhood between women, there has existed a relationship – “transitory, fragmented, perhaps, but original and crucial – of mother and daughterhood.” This cathexis between mother and daughter is the great unwritten story. Perhaps there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically identical bodies, one of which has rested in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has taken pains to give birth to the other. But this relationship has been reduced and trivialized by the patriarchal laws. It is the mother and son who appear as the eternal, determinative binary in all theological
doctrines, arts, sociology and psychoanalytic theories, an obvious fact that all these have been produced by sons. Rich says that like strong relationships among women in general, the relationship between mother and daughter has been extremely intimidating for men. She quotes an example from the Upanishads to show the position of daughters in the ancient times:

[The woman] nourishes her husband's self, the son, within her ... The father elevates the child even before the birth, and immediately after, by nourishing the mother and by performing ceremonies. When he thus elevates the child ... he really elevates his second self, for the continuation of these worlds ... This is his second birth. ⁴⁹

The relationship of all women as daughters with mothers is primary to their existence. The first experience, for any woman, of warmth, nourishment, softness, security, sensuality, closeness and love comes from her mother. That initial oneness of one female body with another can be denied, felt as suffocating possessiveness, as rejection, snare, or taboo; but it is, initially, the whole world. In the beginning, the son also has the same experience of a female body. The institutionalized heterosexuality and motherhood forces the girl-child to transfer those feelings of tenderness, sensuality and mutuality, from her first woman to a man, if she wishes to become what is called a “normal” woman - that is a woman whose most intense psychic and physical powers are affiliated with man.

Through her own experience Rich says that this primary relationship is gradually broken creating “old, smoldering patches of deep-burning anger.” ⁵⁰ In the institution of motherhood, women are always failures: the mother for not raising the children to the father’s expectations and the
daughter for not working according to the plans of the father. Rich writes in her book *Your Native Land, Your Life:*

For years I have struggled with you: your categories, your theories, your will, the cruelty which came inextricably from your love. For years all arguments I carried on in my head were with you. I saw myself, the eldest daughter raised as son, taught to study but not to pray, taught to hold reading and writing sacred: the eldest daughter in a house with no son, she who must overthrow the father, take what he taught her and use it against him. All this in a castle of air, the floating world of the assimilated who know and deny they will always be aliens.

After your death I met you again as the face of patriarchy, could name at last precisely the principle you embodied, there was an ideology at last which let me dispose of you. identifying the suffering you caused, hate you righteously as part of a system, the kingdom of the fathers.

This burden of fulfilling the plans and designs of the father creates a schism in mother-daughter relationship, as the mother is supposed to focus all her attention and energy to her husband, ignoring the demands of the daughter. Rich always felt that her mother had chosen her father over her, and had sacrificed her to his needs and theories. When she gave birth to her first child, her mother could not come to help her as she had married against her father’s will and had turned to be entirely different than what he wanted her to make. She had always been fighting with her father for her right to an emotional life and a selfhood beyond his needs and theories. There was an
untold tension among all of them. even Rich could not tell how much she
needed her mother when she visited her in the hospital:

... neither of us could uncoil the obscure lashings of
feeling that darkened the room, the tangled thread
running backward to where she had labored for three
days to give birth to me, and I was not a son. ... I
wanted her to mother me again, to hold my baby in her
arms as she had once held me....

Virginia Woolf in her novel To The Lighthouse created what is
supposed to be the most complex and passionate vision of this schism in
modern literature. It is one of those few documents where a woman has
portrayed her mother as a central figure. It is said that during Virginia’s
childhood her mother, Julia Stephen concentrated most of her attention in
caring for her husband and his lifework. the Dictionary of National
Biography. Both Virginia and her sister Vanessa had to seek each other for
mothering. Mrs. Ramsay in the novel. with her "strange severity, her
extreme courtesy". her care to others’ needs (especially those of men), her
charismatic beauty, even as a woman of fifty who had given birth to eight
children – she is no simple idealization. She is the "delicious fecundity ...
[the] fountain and spray of life [into which] the fetal sterility of the male
plunged itself": at the same time that "she felt this thing that she called life
terrible, hostile, and quick to pounce on you if you give it a chance."

She observes the sterility of man without any hostility, yet she does
not like women much, and spends her life in catering to the needs of men.
When the young painter Lily Briscoe, in which Woolf transcribed herself, is
sitting with her arms around Mrs. Ramsay’s knees and her head rested on
her lap, she craves to become one with her, in “the chambers of the mind
and heart of the woman who was physically, touching her ... Could loving, as people called it, make her and Mrs. Ramsay one? For it was not knowledge but unity that she desired, not inscriptions on tablets, nothing that could be written in any language known to men, but intimacy itself ...55 But Mrs. Ramsay rejects her feelings. This relationship has got double meanings: the daughter desiring intimacy with her own mother, a woman desiring intimacy with another woman, not her mother but a woman toward whom she turns her emotional desires.

Recreating the myth of Demeter and Kore in the second section of "Sibling Mysteries". Rich celebrates the nurturing and healing power of "woman's flesh". In the pre-Homeric mythology. Kore is the maiden who starts the annual growth cycle, and Demeter, her mother, represents the generativity of the earth. In the change from the growth-centered religion of the Great Mother to the male religion celebrating domination and mastery. Kore is stripped of her power to start life. In the Homeric myth of Demeter. Kore (Persephone) is raped by Hades, kidnapped and taken to the underworld: this rape and kidnap of Persephone is the symbol of the male usurpation of female energy and power. In the pre-Homeric myths, Persephone was linked with cyclic flux and the inevitable rhythms of birth, growth, and decay, but after her rape and abduction by Hades she could never regain her lost energies and powers. Demeter is sad not only because her daughter's physical sanctity has been violated but also because now men have started possessing women and controlling seasonal changes. This loss of the daughter is the loss of their shared vision of life. Demeter revenges herself for the loss of her daughter by denying the grain – of which she is queen – to grow.
When her daughter is restored to her – for nine months of the year only, as she had to return to Hades for a part of a year – she restores fruitfulness and life to the land. But the Homeric hymn tells that Demeter’s supreme gift to humanity, in her celebration at her daughter’s return, was not the return of vegetation, but the establishing of the sacred ceremonies at Eleusis. Some critics have interpreted Kore’s enforced stay with Hades as a necessary sacrifice that made her capable of attaining womanhood. But Demeter laments over the captivity and loss of her daughter’s freedom. The world of prosperity and growth has been destroyed by Kore’s abduction, and the deterioration of winter symbolizes this loss of Demeter’s bond to Kore.

In patriarchal culture, the rape of Kore symbolizes that women must be violated to experience womanhood, whereas the pre-Homeric legends give respect to women’s energies to cultivate the earth and give birth to children. When Demeter gave birth to Kore, she completed her life cycle as maiden and mother: in her daughter, this cycle was to be perpetuated. The rape of Kore gave men the symbolic power to control women’s sexuality. In the original myth, fertility, reproduction, and death are inherent to life, and male and female sexuality are part of a fundamental system that produces offspring just as the combination of seed, earth, and water produces a new plant.

In “Sibling Mysteries” Rich portrays the conflict caused by having to live in “two worlds / the daughters and the mothers / in the Kingdom of the sons.” However, the memory of the mother forms an inherent relationship between mother and daughter that cannot be broken: “Sister gazed at sister/ reach through mirrored pupils/ back to the mother.” Rich considers this relationship between two sisters and between the daughters and their mother.
as the primary social relationship, and through this poem attempts to bring this deeply rooted pattern to consciousness:

the daughters were to begin with
brides of the mother
then brides of each other
under a different law.\(^5\)

Emily Dickinson's depiction of her relationship with her sister Lavinia as "early, earnest, insoluble" and her observation that "without [Lavinia] life were fear, and Paradise a cowardice, except for her inciting voice"\(^5\) echoes the relationship celebrated in Rich's poem.

In her study of the bonding patterns of mothers and daughters, Nancy Chodorow points out that the psycho-social developmental process for women in our culture constructs a female psyche that is "relational" and a male psyche that is relatively "self-contained"\(^6\). According to Chodorow, women are mothered by women and then are supposed to transfer this love to their fathers in order to develop heterosexuality; therefore, they have an inclination to perceive themselves in terms of relationships and are more bisexually oriented than men\(^6\). The recent anthropological studies show that in prehistoric societies and contemporary hunter-gatherer groups the mother-child relationship is the strongest social force.

Rich believes that the loss of the daughter to the mother and the mother to the daughter is the real female tragedy. We recognise Lear (father-daughter split), Hamlet (son and mother), Oedipus (son and mother) as great embodiments of the human tragedy, but the schism of mother-daughter relationship is still unrecognised. Thousands of daughters perceive their mothers as having taught a compromise and self-hatred they are
fighting to get free of. the one through whom the limitations and disruptions of a female existence were necessarily transmitted. Rich says that it is very easy to hate and reject a mother than to perceive beyond her to the forces acting upon her. Daughters have a fear, which the poet Lynn Sukenick calls "matrophobia." not of one's mother or of motherhood but of becoming one's mother. But as a mother is hated to the point of matrophobia there is also a deep inherent pull towards her, a fear that if one slackens one's position one will identify with her completely.

Exploring the legacy of self-hate and suppression passed on from mother to daughter. Rich says:

Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves. the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and to overlap with our mothers': and in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery.

This mother-daughter separation, according to Rich is a modern example of the separation of Demeter and Kore of the 7th century B.C. Rich presents the Eleusinian celebration of the reunion of Demeter and Kore as an antidote to the distortion of the relationship between mother and daughter in a patriarchal culture. She emphasises that this celebration must be translated into modern experience as a need for "courageous mothering". This mothering is entirely different from the old, institutionalised, sacrificial, "mother-love". Keeping the fact in mind that culture imposes a sense of limit on women. the most important thing that a woman can do for another is to illuminate and widen her sense of actual possibilities. For a mother it is
not merely a fight with the reductive images of females in children’s books, movies, television and schools, but an effort to widen her boundaries and to refuse to be victim; and then to move forward from there. Insisting upon the need of “mothers who want their own freedom and ours”. Rich says that “the quality of the mother’s life – however embattled and unprotected – is her primary bequest to her daughter, because a woman who can believe in herself, who is a fighter, and who continues to struggle to create livable space around her, is demonstrating to her daughter that these possibilities exist.”

Rich calls for a female bonding that will acknowledge the strength and variety of women’s capabilities and powers, but this vision must be fulfilled through gentleness, as the quality defined in “Natural Resources:”

... gentle is active

gentleness swabs the crusted stump

invents more merciful instruments
to touch the wound beyond the wound

……...……...……...……

My heart is moved by all I cannot save:
so much has been destroyed

I have to cast my lot with those
who age after age, perversely,
with no extraordinary power.
reconstitute the world.65

Maggie Humm, a great admirer of Adrienne Rich, in Feminist Criticism: Women as Contemporary Critic (1986), presents a woman-centered project very similar to that of Rich. In On Lies, Secrets, and
Silence. Rich defines female consciousness as political, aesthetic, and erotic which cannot be included or contained in the culture of passivity. Re-vision, a new way of reading and analyzing, achieves a new psychic space, a new history and a new language, bringing ethics, living and thinking together. Rich’s achievement, according to Humm, was “a challenging libidinal theory of radical feminism” and “an almost pantheistic celebration of female history.”

Margaret Atwood’s Surfacing, a work of fiction about a young woman’s search for a missing (supposed dead) father as well as her internal search for memories of her dead mother, foregrounds questions about paternity/maternity, language and identity. By rewriting the myth of a questing hero, Atwood tries to repeat the social patterns of female identity by giving importance to maternal relations, which are normally devalued in classical myth. Surfacing is almost contemporary to Rich’s Of Woman Born and both the books enjoy a same climate of thinking in contemporary feminism about motherhood. Rich divides the image of motherhood into “experience”, which can be energizing section of all women’s lives, whether or not they choose to be biological mothers, and “institution” which is the social construction and diminishing of motherhood. Rich celebrates the “experience” of motherhood by connecting it to prehistory and endowing “experience” with mythic symbols and figures. Atwood’s heroine in the same way goes back to her own “pre-history” to make an effort to understand the importance of a maternal presence/absence in her life by returning to the island where she lived as a child. But her search for the father leads her to reunion with the mother, who is at home in the wilderness. Mistress of the Animals. It reminds of the reunion of Demeter and Kore, which Rich celebrates in her poetry. In a strange, subconscious way, Atwood’s heroine begins to recognise and feel her own power through
her moment of vision, her brief, surprising visit to her mother. She has tried her way back – through fasting and sacrifice – beyond patriarchy. She cannot live there: the primitive is not the solution: she has to go back and live out her life in this time. But she has had her illumination: she has seen her mother.

In *Beyond God the Father* (1973) Mary Daly accuses men of having stolen language from women, a theft enacted in *Genesis*. Consequently women should transform and get their language back. In *Gyn/Ecology* she wants to go beyond the male myths encoded within the language and beyond a male-centered logic of dyadic oppositions based on the gender division to form a new female syntax which would naturally express the female body.

The major questions discussed by the French feminists are: if literary language shapes our literary knowledge, how can we rethink literary perceptions and structures? Where does the ‘feminine’ appear in literature and what new subjectivities might it suggest? For French feminists, new literary subjectivities are already functioning in the “maternal function” which precedes our entry into the symbolic and hence into literature. The material bodies of mother, the relationship between mother and infant, form psychic, subjective images and rhythms which are never lost from our unconscious, though they may be forgotten. Aspects of literary style rewrite this maternal moment in literature. There are two critical processes in French feminist criticism. First is a reconstructive activity aimed at breaking up the “given” arrangements of meaning. Second is a re-visionary activity, which Rich talks about, aiming to find the forgotten “syntax” of the semiotic present in juxtapositions, slips of language and intertextuality.
Politics of Location

In the foreword to The Fact of a Doorframe, Rich writes:

One task for the nineteen- or twenty-year-old poet who wrote the earliest here was to learn that she was neither unique or universal, but a person in history, a woman and not a man, a white and also Jewish inheritor of a particular consciousness, from the making of which most women have been excluded.

Rich’s entire poetic life presents her rejection of the dual idealism of the unique, which seeks an authentic self repressed by patriarchal society, and the universal, which seeks a female essentialism. Recognising the differences beyond the simple binary of male/female, Rich emphasises the myriad differences among women, men, places, times, cultures, conditions, classes and movements. She discourses that she must first locate herself, hold her accountable for where she is in her particular place, historical moment and personal history: “I need to understand how a place on a map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create.”

At the beginning of her essay, “Notes Toward a Politics of Location”, Rich remembers her childhood game in which she and her friend used to write each other letters addressed like this:

Adrienne Rich
14 Edgevale Road
Baltimore, Maryland
The United States of America
The Continent of North America
The Western Hemisphere
The Earth
The Solar system
The Universe.

After a few pages she writes:

I wrote a sentence and x’d it out. In it I said that women have always understood the struggle against free-floating abstraction even when they were intimidated by abstract ideas. I don’t want to write that kind of sentence now. the sentence that begins ‘Women have always .... ’ We started by rejecting the sentences that began ‘Women have always had an instinct for mothering’ or ‘Women have always and everywhere been in subjugation to men’. If we have learned anything in these years of late twentieth-century feminism, it’s that that ‘always’ blots out what we really need to know: when, where, and under what conditions has the statement been true?

Here Adrienne Rich emphasises on three central issues: the risk of generalizing about women or the failure to acknowledge differences between women; the importance of locating oneself and one’s words, a place in history where one’s particular identity is constructed; and the misconception of considering ourselves at the center. Therefore, a politics of location is essential both in understanding the similarities and differences between women and in realizing one’s own sense of selfhood. Women need, in Rosi Braidotti’s words. "to be as aware as possible of the place from which one is speaking." They should also be aware of the locations of the other women. Rich shows a deep anxiety about the perils of speaking for other women or of taking one’s own needs and experiences as common
to all women. but at the same time there is an urgent need for feminists to speak together – in both senses of that phrase, to speak to each other to build up understanding and to speak with a collective voice to fight those reactionary forces which would happily divide and win.

Rich's dilemma of the location of the center for women is not the outsider's position which she had earlier taken with Virginia Woolf: "As a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world." Rich now changes her position and says, "As a woman I have a country; as a woman I cannot divert myself of that country merely by condemning its government or saying three times 'As a woman my country is the whole world.'" Rich's emphasis on "location" keeps her tied to the material world and away from the temptations of philosophical idealism and transcendence that try to hide the material conditions of different people's lives.

Giving this question of location an entirely different platform. Rich wants to start with the closest geography – the body. It is the place which anyone can claim with certainty, which Karl Marx called "the first premise of all human history." Rich considers body as the ground from where women can speak with authority as women. Instead of transcending body they should reclaim it. There is a need to reconstruct our thinking and speaking with the body, to begin "with the material, with matter, mma madre, mutter, moeder, modder, etc., etc." She emphasises the great importance of recapturing the body, and breaking through the limits imposed on women's understandings of the body by patriarchies, in order to both control and exploit what is perceived as women's physicality, their bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of their intelligence.
Rich considers that much real female power is inherent in female biology and through reclaiming the body women will acquire access to that power. If it is true as she once said, women are dominated by lashing them to their bodies, then little progress has been made in untying the chains. One of its reasons is the fact that a feminist analysis of women, the body, and menstruation has been so ethnocentric and universal in its claims that it cannot provide the basis for the more subtle analyses that might help. Rich’s discussion of menstruation, for example, is heavily loaded with concern about the origins of a menstrual taboo which she perceives near to universal. In her view, the menstrual taboo signifies the dread of woman and the mystery of her motherhood. But her interesting comments on impurity do not seem to have drawn a great deal of feminist attention and have not been properly followed up. Julie Marcus in her book *A World of Difference* tries to draw out the implications of the body in women’s subordination, to tell the ways in which universalizing approaches like that of Rich can be presented more precisely by making them more specific and by showing how the differences between women are narratively and structurally constituted.

Adrienne Rich’s works are often been interpreted as being biologically determinist, as she asks women to reconsider their relationships to their bodies, to female biology. Answering to this criticism, Rich argues that there is no woman for whom her body is not a fundamental problem. “In arguing that we have by no means yet explored or understood our biological grounding, the miracle and paradox of the female body and its spiritual and political meanings. I am really asking whether women cannot begin, at last, to think through the body, to connect what has been so cruelly disorganized – our great mental capacities, hardly used: our highly developed tactile sense; our genius for close observation: our complicated.
pain-enduring, multi-pleased physicality." Rich thus locates in women's reproductive capacity the source of a benevolent femininity, an identity to be enjoyed, nurtured and intensified throughout the life. Rich believes that the repossessing by women of their bodies will bring far more essential change to human society than the controlling of the means of production of workers. The female body has been both territory and machine, virgin wilderness to be utilized and assembly-line turning out life. We have to create a world where every woman is "the presiding genius" of her own body. In such a world women will definitely create new life, bringing forth not only children but the visions, and the thinking, essential to sustain, console; and change human existence – a new relationship to the universe. Sexuality, politics, intelligence, power, motherhood, work, community intimacy will acquire different meanings: thinking itself will be transformed. This is the place we have to begin.
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23 Sylvia Walby. op.cit., p. 6.


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30 ibid. p. 62.


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40 ibid. p. 81.


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