Introduction

I was angry with my friend
I told my wrath, my wrath did end
I was angry with my foe,
I told it not, my wrath did grow.

(Blake, Selected Poetry and Prose 44).

All critical theory entails a relationship between the text and the context. Literature can never be divorced from the social and cultural concerns it mirrors. In the process of this 'reflection' (Abrams 32) of customs, practices and attitudes, literature may become an instrument of engendering a new consciousness capable of not only challenging existing social structures but even changing them. Adrienne Cecile Rich's is one such intense, angry voice that pervades the feminist literary scene, challenging the existing patriarchal social structure. In fact, her writings provide the right context for studying woman as an institution.

Till the first half of the twentieth century women writers were caught in a double bind which could be defined as an apparent dichotomy between poetry and femininity. Poetry was certainly not considered a feminine activity and the nature of lyrical poetry was held in opposition to the essence of femaleness. Fulfilled womanhood was supposedly the result of feminine subordination which supported male domination. Coventry Patmore's The Angel in the House (1835) professed:
Man must be pleased
but to please him
Is woman's pleasure (111)

A few deviant women poets who strayed from the beaten track wrote on themes validated in a patriarchal society since male and female areas of poetic activity had been clearly defined. While 'serious' poetry was the privilege of male poets who had access to the formalistic virtues of ancient classics, women were expected to pen elegant, feminine verse. Love, then, became the sanctioned theme for women poets who would write either about the 'fulfillment' of romance or its tormenting absence. However, male critics refused to concede the writing of poetry itself as a source of women's fulfillment. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe:

In view of this critical obsession with womanly 'fulfillment'—clearly a nineteenth century notion defined by twentieth century thinkers for their own purposes—it is not surprising to find out that when poetry by women has been praised it has usually been praised for being 'feminine' just as it has been blamed for being deficient in 'femininity'...

(Shakespeare's Sisters 30).

The cliched themes for women writers, then, were reduced to either romantic love (Edna St. Vincent Millay, Elinor Wylie, Sara Teasdale) or dry, cerebral ideas which led them to suppress their emotions (Marianne Moore, Elizabeth Bishop, Louise Bogan). The breakthrough in women's
poetry came with their furious awareness of man’s power over them. In order to analyze the dynamics of this masculine power which dominates, controls and tyrannises, Rich proposed the concept of re-vision which she perceived as a process of consciousness – raising by transforming the individual fears of women into 'a shared awareness of the meaning of them as social problems, the release of anger, anxiety, the struggle of proclaiming the painful and transforming it into political' (Mitchell, 61). On re-visioning, the institution of patriarchy emerged not only as the major victimizer of women’s psyche and their concomittant suffering but as an extension of every atrocity and act of violence. This patriarchy was defined by Rich as:

. . . the power of the fathers : a familial, social, political system in which men- by force, direct pressure or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquettes, education and division of labour – determine what part women shall or shall not play and in which female is everywhere subsumed under the male (OWB 57).

Various contemporary American political and social movements – the Civil Rights movement, the protests against the Indo-China War, the Bay of Pigs incident, the Vietnam War, the Sit-ins and marches in the South - all sought to heighten the awareness of this menacing patriarchal power. Women were now more articulate about domination, not just in terms of economic exploitation, militarism, colonialism but also within the family, in marriage, in child rearing itself. By the 1960s an autonomous
women’s liberation movement was declaring that “the personal is political”. In this crossover from personal to political women writers succeeded in extending the limits of their experience as it had hitherto been reflected in literature. They questioned patriarchy more severely than ever before now and sought an alterative social order that would recognize them on their own terms. Rich reiterates:

To write directly and overtly as a woman, out of a woman’s body and experience, to take women’s existence seriously as theme and source for art, was something I had been hungering to do, needing to do, all my writing life. It placed me nakedly face to face with both terror and anger (Italics mine) it did indeed imply the breakdown of the world as I had always known it, the end of safety, ... But it released tremendous energy in me, as in many other women, to have that way of writing affirmed and validated in a growing political community. I felt for the first time the closing of the gap between poet and woman. (Blood, ARP &P 249)

Women writers had begun to realise the urgent need for a literature of their own that would remind them of their history and reflect their real situation, a literature that would dig into the myth making tradition and articulate for them the unsaid, the muffled, the silent. This new awakening, then, provided the impetus for women to shift from mainly androcentric to gynocentric modes of writing.
At this point Rich began to explore the pain and attendant rage of a creative woman writer in a culture that has denied her the most essential aspects of her existence. Rage, which essentially arose out of the act of re-visioning, was to become a great source of empowerment for women. As women got in touch with their anger and expressed it without inhibitions, they began to realize the invaluable power of this emotion, if channelized, in the shaping of their creativity and potential. This rage burst forth with full force in Rich's poetry, challenging the institution of patriarchy as the primeval source of power. This rage, however, is to be distinguished from anger in that it is acquired over a period of time and is more enduring. Mary Anne Caws underscores this subtle difference which charges rage with so much of its positive energy when she explains:

Rage is general, as I see it, and is in that quite unlike anger - specific or motivated by something - which can, upon occasion, be calmed by some specific solution, beyond what one can state or feel or see... Rage is, I have come to think, one of the greatest marvels of the universe, for it is large, lithe and lasting... (65-75)

It is rage, then, that becomes therapeutic for women writers hitherto caught in a double bind. In Shakespeare's Sisters Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, however, talk of a triple bind. They argue that if women writers emulate the ancient classics their scholarship is ignored or even mocked, if they remain unfamiliar with the ancients they are derided
and held in contempt but the most difficult situation is that in which their attempts to establish an alternative tradition is almost invariably thwarted by male critics (32-33). Rage acts as powerful medium that helps in breaking this triple bind by becoming a source and a resource for female writers. It engenders a whole gamut of new themes through which women writers can redefine themselves as members of their own sex.

Rich also believes that the more angry women are, the nearer they come to redefining themselves as women. Their poetry is then actively charged with a fiery energy and the expression of rage helps in purging them of enervating and debilitating states of mind whereby they can arrive at some semblance of composure. These achieved states of composure are integral to a whole recurring process which is seen as sequential one and is illustrated below:

Awareness of being ► Re-visioning ► Pain and suppressed in a patriarchal culture

Anger Internalised

Rage

Over time

Expressed through

Art/Poetry

Leads to

Awakened Consciousness

Catharsis
Instead of paralysing, then, rage becomes a source of empowerment to greater and greater states of awareness and performs a very important function as Rich testifies:

...if it is unnerving it is also cathartic, the blowtorch of language cleaning the rust and ticky-tacky and veneer from an entire consciousness... (Review on Monster 3)

Rage can thus become an effective device in the hands of the writer for the purgation of all the pain, anger and betrayal that every woman has experienced at one point of time or other. In a conversation with Albert and Barbara Gelpi, Rich had once remarked, “Anger can be a kind of genius if it is acted on” (ARP 111). Acting on anger establishes the necessary foundation for the identity that Rich was able to carve out for herself in her later life.

At this juncture Rich started using language, which becomes a powerful medium in the hands of a creative writer, for expressing resentment against institutions that relegated women to the ‘second sex’. She soon began to discover new frontiers and themes, particularly those concerned with writing as a woman and expressed them in experimental and novel ways. She fused to great effect, stylistic devices like assonance, consonance, slant rhyme and onomatopoeia with the political slogans of the anti-war and women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 70s, as also with literal quotes from women’s diaries, letters and essays, even conversations and internal monologue, to convey the anger of women
whose creative abilities had been trivialized or denied in a male-dominated culture. Rich, thus, succeeded in liberating the pen from its phallic iconography by using it instead, as a device for exploring not only women's biology, psychology and culture but also for exploring the possibility of evolving new linguistic structures that would not relegate the feminine to positions of inferiority and subordination.

The relationship of Rich's writing to the various modes of feminine literary criticism, then, leads to an interesting analysis. Biofeminism, which argues in favour of a somatic theory of writing explores connections between sexuality and textuality. Biofeminists consider the labia as the source of a distinctly feminine writing (ericture feminine), thus countering the phallocentric myth of writing as an erectile and ejaculatory activity. Rich too stresses that writing with their bodies helps women writers to articulate their psychological femininity so that the vast resources of their consciousness would open up. Feminine imagery also helps to signify a host of associations, specifically feminine. She argues that women's writing actually proceeds from the body and expresses her conviction that:

... female biology ... has far more radical implications than we have yet come to appreciate. Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology for these reasons; it will, I believe, come to view our physicality as a resource rather than a destiny. In order to live a fully
human life, we require not only control of our bodies... we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, the corporeal ground of our intelligence. (OWB 62)

Rich believes that such writing, which is often intimate, confessional and innovative in style and form is different from that of writers who write "from somewhere outside their female bodies". In her prose work Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution, Rich analyses the ways in which patriarchal institutions deny women control over their bodies and also probes current controversies on abortion, contraception and methods of delivery. In her treatise, Rich also touches on the issues of prostitution, marital rape, incest, pornography, genital mutilation—subjects which had hitherto been taboo. She sees rape as a paradigm for other forms of oppression by man – the rape of environment by industrialization and technology. She also believes that though women conceptualize their situation in society in relation to their ideas about their body, linguistic and social generalizations play an equally important role in determining their position.

Linguistic theorists of women’s writing analyse whether men and women use language differently and whether speaking, reading and writing are all gender marked activities. Rich calls the prevalent dominant discourse 'the oppressor's language' a language that is as sexist as it is abstract. What patriarchy euphemistically calls mother tongue should be more accurately called 'father tongue' according to these theorists. Since it is through the mode of this language that we categorize perceptions
and comprehend the world around us, male dominated categorizations are subtly at work in the shaping of our understanding and perception of reality.

Rich believes that there is an umbilical connection between the female body and the discourse of women, as such a language disintellectualizes writing and does not dry up by going back to dry academicism. What is needed then is a new discourse that works ceaselessly to deconstruct androcentric assumptions in writing and reinvents the way we write.

For Rich, the advocacy of women’s language is a gesture that carries tremendous emotional force and unifying appeal. The task of creating a new language is enormous but not impossible, for Rich means to shape this new language through her new perceptions and not through words. Rich has observed that “. . . Poetry is . . . a concentration of power of language, which is the power of our ultimate relationship to everything in the universe” (LSS 248). Because consciousness responds to language, Rich believes it is necessary to see that speech encompasses the full range of female perceptions. This relationship between language and consciousness becomes the basis for Rich’s activism and her poetry. Hence in order to free women’s literature from repressed association, the patriarchal linguistic structure must be ‘decentred, old words must be resounded and new meanings must be discovered’ (Cixous, AAT 230).
The theory of women's culture focuses on the interpretation of ideas about women's body, language and psyche in their social and cultural contexts. Such a theory is more comprehensive as it makes an effort to connect women's sexuality - their bodies and their reproductive function - their psyche and language with the social and cultural environment in which they are placed. However, transcending the differences of class, race, nationality and history, women's culture forms a collective experience that binds women from different nationalities into a cultural whole.

For a long time women have been excluded from the agenda of male-constructed formulations of history. It is therefore very important to examine and rewrite the history of women's experience on its own terms:

Women have been left out of history not because of the evil conspiracies of men in general or male historians in particular, but because we have considered history only in male centered terms... To rectify this, and to light up areas of historical darkness we must, for a time, focus on a woman centered inquiry, considering the possibility of the existence of a female culture within the general culture shared by male and female. History must include an account of the female experience over time and should include the development of feminist consciousness as an essential aspect of women's past... (Lerner, MFP ).
Rich talks about the roles, activities, tastes and behaviour considered appropriate for women in a male-dominated culture. The term 'women's sphere', in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, projected a vision of separate roles for men and women. Though woman’s sphere was defined by men, women frequently internalized its precepts in this cult of true womanhood:

Now we’re labouring under a structure that is evolved out of thinking about women and man as dividing up the realms separately with no crossing over. Woman is privacy, home, domesticity, emotional refuge, subjectivity. Man is achievement, aggression, outer world, economies etc. (Rich, _ARP_ 111).

Women's culture, however redefines women's activities from a woman centered point of view. Now women's culture refers to a community of women sharing values, relationships, institutions and methods of communication that cut across the boundaries of class and nation. Rich has thus broadened her experience to include the lives of all women regardless of their social states or history. Her community of women includes “the poet, the housewife, the lesbian, the mathematician, the mother, the dishwasher, the pregnant teenager, the teacher, the grandmother, the prostitute, the philosopher, the waitress”. (Rich, _ARP_ 204)

Rich also asserts that women are closer to nature, to the environment,
to a matriarchal principle at once biological and ecological. Rich thus sees women as agents of redemption in “A man’s world (which seems) finished”. / (for men) themselves have sold it to the machines” (DW 8)

Rich’s cultural and psychic exploration are an important part of the re-visioning process that she so forcefully advocates. Her watery submersion in ‘Diving into the Wreck’ leads to cultural explanations that unify the otherwise varied amorphous feminine experience. Ultimately she invokes the need for a female community to enable women to express their dormant power:

Outside the frame of his dream we are stumbling
up the hill
hand in hand, stumbling and guiding each other
over the scarred volcanic rock. (DW 12)

In these cultural explorations, Rich learns to use her anger as a source of energy and her rage even sustains her during her solitary sojourn towards personal and cultural origins. The dynamics of this rage become clear on ‘re-visions’ Rich’s life in retrospect.

Adrienne Cecile Rich was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on May 16, 1929. Her father, Arnold Rich, was a pathologist at John Hopkins university and her mother, Helen Jones, was a housewife. Rich's mother gave up her career as a concert pianist to submit to the conventional responsibilities of marriage and motherhood, and this greatly affected Rich's mind. Until the fourth grade, Rich and her sister, Cynthia, received
their education at home. Rich's father was a perfectionist, who encouraged her to write poetry according to certain set norms and prosodic laws. At a very early age, Rich learned to adhere to metric forms and patterns. She read mainly Victorian writers—Tennyson, Keats, Arnold, Rossetti, Swinburne, Carlyle and Pater. She strove hard to meet her father's standards of perfection and to please him. She attended the Roland Park Country school and then graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Radcliffe College. As an undergraduate she was influenced by the male poets prescribed for her course—Donne, Yeats, Auden, Frost, Dylan Thomas, Stevens and Mac Neice.

Adrienne Rich was educated at home till the fourth grade according to the precepts of her father who urged her to “work, work harder than anyone has worked before” (Sources 14). When Rich started writing poetry, the influence of the male canonical poets was very pervasive. She had read Donne, Yeats, Auden, Frost, Dylan Thomas, MacNeice from her father's library and imbibed them somewhere in her unconscious. Her first collection A Change of World (selected by W.H. Auden for the Yale Younger Poets series in 1951) was an affirmation of this unconsciously assimilated attitude. These early poems were elegant, terse, tightly crafted and so perfect in form that the meaning was lost somewhere.

However very few critics seem to have noticed the dormant underpinnings of a timid yet discernible anger in the early collections:

I have seen the mob of late
Standing sullen in the square  
Gazing with a sullen stare  

Some have talked in bitter tones,  
Some have held and fingered stones. (ARP 4)

Her second collection *The Diamond Cutters and Other Poems*, corresponds to an effort to understand the very nature of her own existence. However, one underlying concern unifying the whole anthology is the disconcerting feeling that humans are imperfect and tainted – a very anti-Rennaissance idea. Some 'kitchensink poetry' also came to the fore, charged by the drudgery of typically feminine chores and a smug, chauvinistic male stance implanted the seed of anger in her verse.

*Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law: Poems 1954-1962* came eight years after the first two collections. During this time Rich had married and had borne three sons. The daily domestic chores consumed most of her time leaving her with little time to write. She felt herself being pulled along the strong current of destiny which scared her because she felt she was losing contact with her own self. *Snapshots* was an epiphanic work which changed her whole mode of writing. Gone were the forced rhymes and the terse metre. In fact it was a very fragmentary work written in fierce snatches during the time available to her. Another basic variation in the volume was the theme. Till now, Rich had avoided writing as a woman, under the illusion that the best poetry is universal - which to her meant 'non-female'. But after putting the title poem on
paper, all the compounded rage of the questions of identity, sacrifice, ego, creation and ambition were expended. In her essay, "When We Dead Awaken : Writing as Re-Vision", she writes - "It was an extraordinary relief to write that poem" (*LSS* 44).

Rich had to make a painful, but a conscious choice between the conventional role of a woman and a rebel poet in her effort to destroy the double – bind. In ‘Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law’, the angels chiding the woman are the affirmers of the ‘feminine mystique’ which Betty Frieden conceptualised in her book of the same name (1963):

Banging the coffee-pot into the sink
she hears the angels chiding, and looks out
past the raked gardens to the sloppy sky.

(*ARP* 9).

Also, Rich’s references to Mary Wollstoncraft, Simone de Beauvoir and Emily Dickinson indicate that she was already adhering to a feminist framework, which prevented her from wallowing in emotion. The poem, as Wendy Martin suggests:

... explores the legacy of self-hate and wasted energy experienced by women in a society that values them to the extent that they are ornamental and able to subordinate their potential accomplishments to other. (*AAT* 180)

In *Necessities of Life : Poems* 1962-1965, published in 1966, Rich continues her exploration of a personal identity within a cultural...
and social framework — both being complementary to each other. As Elaine Showalter observes:

Indeed a theory of culture incorporates ideas about women's body, language and psyche but interprets them in relation to the social contexts in which they occur. (*FCW* 345)

The conflict that the poet experiences between her personal values and the larger social practices, in fact, represents the schisms between mind and body, nature and civilisation, victim and victimizer, which forms the basis of the patriarchal (dis) order. In her *Powers of Horror*, Julia Kristeva writes:

I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself with the same process through which I claim to establish myself (3).

Rich works on the same cathartic vision in this volume:

and each with his God-given secret spilled out through months of snow and silence, burning under the bleached scalp; behind dry lips a loaded gun (*NL* 49).

On reading her later volumes we further notice the building up of this emotion of anger.

*Leaflets*: Poems 1965-1968 came down with vengeance on traditional male aesthetics which tend to separate art and life. With the publication of this volume, Rich's rudimentary vision about politics as a part of
life began to take shape. 'My politics', Rich had written earlier, 'is in my body'. So that a poem like 'Nightbreak' \((L\ 36)\) becomes an allegory on the relation between sexual politics and political oppression.

*The Will to Change: Poems* 1968-1970, which received the Shelley memorial award, is a strong affirmation of Rich's vision of a woman with a new identity and in these poems her rage is compounded manifold. These poems, as Wendy Martin, observes:

... chronicle Rich's increasing rage at the waste of human energies, especially those of women in a patriarchal society, and continue to explore women's efforts to define their own identity \(AAT,\ 187\).

However, they also imply a new order wherein woman actively participates in the process of change.

This whole idea of women's contribution towards social reconstruction is reiterated in her conversation with the Gelpis in which Rich talks about the protagonist of a documentary film, *Janey's Janey*, who says:

... when you have got nothing you can't imagine that you could have anything. But once you get a little you begin to realise you can have a lot \(ARP\ 109\).

This viewpoint can very well be related not only to Rich's poetry but also to the entire process of the growing, changing and 're-visioning' of attitudes as she calls it, in her life. To begin with, she realised that
she needed to write as a woman to expend powerful feelings. Once she began to do it, she gradually felt the anger as well as the potential in women's writing for a lot more – evolving a new identity and the founding of a new social order based on mutual respect and understanding between the sexes.

_Diving into the Wreck: Poems 1971-1972_ is the anthology which best illustrates anger in control of itself. The need for a female identity on the basis of a community is very strong in these poems. The rage expressed in the poems of this volume gives the poet her vision of creating a new female order. With the publication of _Diving into the Wreck_, Rich identified herself as a radical feminist in 1974.

Adrienne Rich has emerged as a very prolific writer. Her later anthologies of poetry include _The Dream of a Common Language, A Wild Patience has Taken me This Far, Your Native Land, Your Life, Time's Power_ and _An Atlas of the Difficult World_. In these volumes she emerges as a lesbian feminist separatist. Her new volumes are _Dark Fields of the Republic: Poems 1991-1995_ and _Midnight Salvage: Poems 1995-1998_.

This thesis seeks, in particular, to analyse the poems of Adrienne Rich – from _A Change of World_ (1951) to the time she identified herself as a radical feminist in _Diving into the Wreck_ and also the later volumes in general, which form a part of her vision as a radical feminist. In doing so, it proposes to study the poems in terms of their relation to the concept of rage as well as in terms of various innovative linguistic
devices employed by Rich to express this emotion of rage. Rich has challenged traditional roles that subordinate women to men and comes across as a visionary seeking a woman-centered social order that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all forms of life. Her poems emphasise the necessity, of women, of disengaging themselves from a self-destructive male culture and creating social and artistic forms expressive of women’s actual experience. This study also seeks to place Rich in the tradition of cultural feminism.

Each chapter in this project has been given a title and a subtitle. While the titles have been taken from the titles of Rich’s poems and indicate the dominant concerns of the chapter, the subtitle are indicative of corresponding stages in the re-visioning process.

The first chapter entitled “ ‘When We Dead Awaken’ : Re–vision as a Concept” will deal with an important concept given by Rich herself and focuses on the concept of ‘Re–vision’. The title focuses on the act of reviewing which helps women writers to examine the cultural assumptions which prevent them from making a contact with their own selves. As Rich remarks:

... And this drive to self-knowledge, for women, is more than a search for identity : it is a part of our refusal of the self-destructiveness of male dominated society (ARP, 107).

There is an effort to analyse the first two volumes of her poems – A Change of World and The Diamond Cutters and other Poems
from the perspective of re-visioning.

The next chapter entitled "‘Implosions’: Pain and Betrayal" will analyse the pain, betrayal, violence and inward collapse experienced by women due to the discoveries they make in the course of the re-visioning process. These bitter truths reveal the role of the institution of patriarchy in suppressing women and their creativity. Rich’s next three volumes – *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law*, *Necessities of Life* and *Leaflets* – are studied in this chapter.

The third chapter entitled “‘The Phenomenology of Anger’: Rage” will deal with the expression of rage in Rich’s poems, leading to the cathartic experience and show how she has learned to use anger as a source of energy. Her next two volumes, *The Will to Change* and *Diving into the Wreck* become the subject of study in this chapter.

The last chapter entitled “‘From a Survivor’: Feminism – A New Vision” will be devoted to the new vision which Rich evolves as a radical feminist writer. It will attempt to place Rich's poetry in the context of cultural feminism by exploring possibilities of new human and communal relationships.

The thesis thus proposes to undertake a comprehensive study of Rich’s works and her philosophy as a woman writer in the above mentioned context.