Chapter 5

The Dream of a Common Language

The close relationship that exists between language and the unconscious has been established by Jacques Lacan and other psychoanalysts. Lacan's pronouncements such as the unconscious is structured like a language and that it is when a child takes up a position in language that human subjectivity begins have received wide acceptance. In this chapter a comparative study of the poetry of Rich and Das is made on the psychoanalytic and linguistic models.

Under the psychoanalytical model of difference, a probe into the factors of psychoanalytical relevance as reflected in the poetry of Rich and Das, such as female sexuality, the anxieties to which the female psyche is subject, the different forms in which anxiety manifests itself in women, the theme of the quest for identity, the concept of androgyne, the ethnic consciousness, father-fixation and mother-daughter relationship is made.

The psychoanalytical study of difference brings out the fact that a number of mythical notions regarding female sexuality prevail in society. Patriarchal society seems to be wavering between two extreme notions in this regard—that either woman is the epitome of sex, or that she is the total lack of it. It is significant to note that modern psychoanalysts are of the view that sexuality is neither male nor female.

Sigmund Freud and Roland Barthes seem to contradict each other regarding the nature of the relationship of love. Freud suggests that the lover is always masculine. In "A Case of Female Homosexuality" he writes of his patient that she always assumed the masculine part. Humility, the sublime overvaluation of the object of love and the renunciation of the narcissistic tendencies and the preference for being the lover are considered typical of the
male. Barthes, on the other hand, assigns to the homosexual man the role of the woman who waits. Though the views of Freud and Barthes in defining the nature of the sexual relationship appear to be contradictory, if we accept those views it becomes clear that the concept of the mental sex of a person is mythical and that a position in Imaginary phantasy can be adopted by a person of either gender whether he/she is heterosexual or homosexual (Montefiore 108).

The way Das has depicted the experience of love in her poem "An Introduction" is noteworthy in this regard: "In him the hungry haste of rivers, in me the ocean's / tireless waiting" (13). The woman persona is the one said to be tirelessly waiting like the ocean. In this context it should be pointed out that contrary to Barthes' view, Irigaray and other feminist psychoanalysts insist that specifically female eros should be recognized and validated.

A significant factor about women's writing is that metaphors of fluidity and imagery of water, oceans and dissolution are seen to occur frequently. These are to be associated with female identity and sexuality according to feminist psychoanalysts like Irigaray (Montefiore 153–58, 176). Even though such a view is open to controversy, it is noteworthy that in the poetry of Das and Rich, such metaphors and images are used very often. In "The Suicide," for example, Das uses the metaphors of fluidity and water images profusely:

The only movement I know well
Is certainly the swim.
It comes naturally to me.

I swam about and floated,
And dived into the cold and green
I lay speckled green and gold ... (29)
In "Composition" she writes,

there was off and on a seascape
in my dreams,
and the water
sloshing up
and sliding down (77)

In "An Introduction" Das effectively employs the metaphors connected with rivers and ocean, as has been pointed out. In the seventh poem in the sequence "Twenty-One Love Poems" Rich writes:

And how have I used rivers, how have I used wars
to escape writing of the worst thing of all --

the failure to want our freedom passionately enough
so that blighted elms, sick rivers, massacres would seem
mere emblems of that desecration of ourselves? (80)

In An Atlas, tracing "a map of our country", Rich writes: "here is the sea of Indifference... / This is the haunted river flowing from brow to groin / we dare not taste its water" (144).

It is quite remarkable that the poetry of both the women poets under discussion bears evidence of the positive fact of women's sexuality. In fact female sexuality which is either denied or derided by patriarchal practice, is celebrated through the poetry of Rich and Das. There is no attempt on the part of these poets to restrain it or keep it under disguise. Rich's "Twenty One Love Poems," a sequence of poems in The Dream of a Common Language celebrates lesbian relationships. "The floating poem," which is unnumbered occurs between poems XIV and XV in the sequence and it is particularly noteworthy since it
delineates the physical details of intimacy between two lovers in an explicit manner:

Whatever happens with us, your body
will haunt mine--tender, delicate
your lovemaking. . . .
. . . Your travelled, generous thighs
between which my whole face has come and come --
the innocence and wisdom of the place
my tongue has found there . . . (83)

However the ecstasy does not seem to be an enduring experience. The suggestion of failure and inadequacy can be perceived in poem after poem in this sequence of love poems. In poem XV there occurs a question which seems to be self-searching: "Was the failure ours?" (84). In poem XVIII there is an admission of disillusionment: "I feel estrangement, yes. As I've felt dawn / pushing toward daybreak" (85). Rich's explanation which she provides in poem XVII, that a combination of forces within and without is responsible for the failure sounds logical:

this we were, this is how we tried to love,
and these are the forces they had ranged against us
and these are the forces we had ranged within us,
within us and against us, against us and within us (84)

The poem indicates that in addition to the forces of patriarchy, the strict codes of "moral" behaviour internalized by women in patriarchal society will effectively check any kind of inter-personal sexual relationship among women. Montefiore draws our attention to the new language of poetry used in "Twenty-One Love poems" to articulate woman-centred sexuality. According to her this
group of poems should be construed as "attempts at the forging of new forms" (165).

In Das's poetry one comes across the flaunting of "a grand flamboyant lust" ("Freaks") which may be interpreted as the articulation of her revolt against patriarchal norms and restraints. In "Composition," Das's longest poem, she describes how she whips up "a froth of desire" most deliberately with every "interesting" man she meets, be it "a curious editor, / or a poet with a skin yellowed / like antique paper . . . "(78-79). The poet can easily visualize the kind of reception her words would evoke:

Reader,
you may say,
now here is a girl with vast
sexual hungers,
a bitch after my own heart
But,
I am not yours for the asking... (79)

In "Summer in Calcutta" the poet makes a direct reference to desire in the following manner:

... What noble
venom flows through
my veins and fills my
mind with unhurried laughter? (49)

In spite of her conservative cultural background, Das writes with sexual candour about man-woman relationships in all its physicality. In "Glass" she portrays an extra-marital relationship:

I went to him for half an hour as pure woman.
He drew me to him rudely with a lover's haste.

an armful of splinters . . . (103)

Das seems to be quite aware of the patriarchal tendency to consider women as being subject to either frigidity or nymphomania. By celebrating sexuality through her poetry and writing about sexual life in an explicit manner in My Story, Das wanted to rid the society of its mythical notions and misconceptions particularly about the sexuality of women. (Interview "I Needed" 167).

Being aware of the precarious plight in which she has placed herself Das seems to be conscious of the necessity to free herself from the probability of being termed a nymphomaniac. The following lines from her poetry may be taken to be a vocal defence of her position: "... It is only to save my face / I flaunt at times, a grand, flamboyant lust" ("The Freaks" 42); and she also seems to absolve herself of any possible allegation of lesbianism through the lines:

The lesbians hiss their love at me

Love

I no longer need,

with tenderness I am most content ("Composition" 78)

Compared to Das, Rich who professes herself to be a lesbian holds the view that it is important to understand female sexuality on its own terms. She reminds us that the earliest bond that exists in the case of a girl-child is the one between her mother and herself. But patriarchal society does not let this bond to extend for any long period.

At most we're allowed a few months
of simply listening to the simple line
of a woman's voice singing a child
against her heart. Everything else is too soon,
too sudden, the wrenching-apart, that woman's heartbeat
heard ever after from a distance  ("Transcendental Etude" 88)

In a patriarchal society, female psyche is subjected to anxieties and tensions
in complex forms. Of these the lack of a literary tradition has been a cause of
anxiety for women writers in general. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, for example,
alludes to "that frightening sense of writing in isolation" (qtd. in Ruthven 124).
Rich observes that this is one of the ways in which women's work and thinking
has been made to seem "sporadic, errant, orphaned of any tradition of its own"
( OLSS 11). Patriarchy has in fact excluded women's writings from accepted
canons and totally buried or underestimated women writers of the past asserting
that literature is the domain of men alone, thus vindicating a literary tradition
that is predominantly male.

In the writings of women this anxiety factor resulting from lack of literary
tradition manifests itself in a number of ways; one of these is in the form of the
search for foremothers as in the writings of Elizabeth Barrett Browning
(Ruthven 124). In Rich, too, a tendency to probe the past is conspicuous. It is
her deep interest in the past and determination to retrieve a tradition that is at
work in her famous poem "Diving into the Wreck." Das's interest in her
grandmothers is made explicit through her references to her ancestresses in
her poems. In "Blood" she gives a detailed description of her great grandmother
and her intimate bond with her:

My great grandmother
Touched my cheeks and smiled.
She was really simple
Fed on God for years

A woman wearied by compromise (15).

In "My Grandmother's House" she refers to the house that is situated far away "where once / (she) received love. The woman died, / the house withdrew into silence" (21).

The way Rich refers to her Grandmother Hattie Rice Rich invites comparison with Das's depiction of her own ancestress. It is the picture of a woman who managed to compromise with the social norms in spite of her rebellious nature that is conveyed through Rich's lines: "Your sweetness of soul was a mystery to me, / . . . your sweetness of soul was a convenience for everyone" ("Hattie Rice Rich", A Wild Patience 38).

However, significantly enough, Rich's interest in the past is not confined to her grandmothers alone but it extends to illustrious women of the past whom she would like to present as the cultural foremothers of present day women.

In women's writing a theme that is usually dealt with is the search for home, which is in a way similar to the search for one's roots, another form of the manifestation of lack of tradition. In "Home Is a Concept" Das writes:

... If home is a concept
they shall not know it, if home is a group
prepared to love, the traveller has not known that
group and never shall . . . (117)

In another poem, Das has the opening lines: "The longest route home is perhaps
/ the most tortuous" ("Anamalai" VIII 156-57). She describes the inward path that takes one beyond the blood's arrogance, beyond the bone and the marrow to the "invisible abode of pain" ("Anamalai" VIII 157).

The sense of isolation or alienation women writers seem to suffer from can also be explained on the basis of the absence of literary roots, and the deprival of a sense of community with other women writers. In "The Anamalai Hills" Das writes,

From somewhere within my heart the mist ascends, the mountains awake...
. . . I hear the mountain speak: I was alone, I am alone, I will be alone...

In another poem too the theme of miserable loneliness figures in her poetry: "If I had not learned to write how would / I have written away my loneliness" ("Anamalai" III).

Rich's persona in "From an Old House in America" confesses:

I have lived in isolation from other women, so much in the mining camps ...........
Most of the time, in my sex, I was alone (67)

But it is a defensive stance that is taken by Rich's speaking subject in "Song"; it may be said that there is a celebration of loneliness in the following lines:

If I'm lonely
it must be the loneliness
of waking first,
of breathing
dawn's first cold breath on the city
of being the one awake
in a house wrapped in sleep (Diving 20)

Though the stance taken in this poem is one vindicating and even glorifying the experience of loneliness, it is clear enough that she too is subject to the experience of loneliness. Rich, however, succeeds in providing an explanation for this loneliness. A girl-child who is originally rooted to a firm old ground, the matrix of the mother when the two of them exist as a dyad, is subject to a "free-fall" in an abrupt manner which leads her to undergo an experience like fragmentation of the self and leaves her rootless and dismembered in "the pitch of utter loneliness" for good. She is transformed into "a cry / to which no echo comes or can ever come" ("Transcendental Etude" 89). Rich's suggestion for resolving the loneliness of women is to cherish woman-to-woman bonds, which have their beginnings in mother-daughter relationship.

The preoccupation with the past in Rich and Das which is manifested in these ways may be said to constitute the feminist springboard from which they begin their quest for identity, a theme which assumes great proportions in women's writing. The search for identity is a theme with which both Das and Rich are preoccupied. In her early poems Das is particularly concerned about her gender identity. In "An Introduction" which has been interpreted by critics in diverse ways as autobiographical and as the poet's aesthetic manifesto, an exhaustive treatment of the theme of the quest for identity is given by the poet. Assuming a name and a role seems to be part of establishing an identity and there is the suggestion that woman is weighed down by her name, and her role. Society admonishes her: "It is time to / Choose a name, a role. Don't play
pretending games." She is well aware of the political implications which are inherent in the concept of the identity of a woman in a male-dominated society where a woman's life is expected to be lived in conformity with a number of practices and regulations. As far as she is concerned freedom is just a myth and she has no choice but to lead a marginal existence. The poet seems to be at a loss since she is told that she cannot have even the luxury of being known under three different names -- Amy, Kamala or Madhavikutty; society is somewhat rude and harsh to her in asking her to limit her name to one. The three names by which she is known, in some way, indicate, a schizophrenic personality which has to be overcome. There is also some confusion resulting from the three languages she speaks, of which she is asked to choose one; it appears that the question of language too figures in her quest for identity. The poet tends to consider the essential difference in the languages and also in the cultures as of little significance. The claim she puts forward is that it is "human speech" capable of articulating her joys, her longings, her hopes; the speech of awareness, of a mind that is alert and well-informed.

Then Das goes on to describe the agony of growing up female in a patriarchal society. When she was told that she was no longer a child but was a grown-up woman and that she was expected to conform to certain norms, she found it difficult to comply with it. She was in a mood to rebel: "Then I wore a shirt and my / Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and ignored / My womanliness" (12). The categorizers insisted that she was not to sit on walls or peep in through lace-draped windows. She was told that she was not to cry embarrassingly loud when jilted in love. What was expected of her was this:

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. . . . Dress in sarees, be girl,
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook,
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Be a quarreller with servants. Fit in. Oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers (12-13)

There is a reference to the quest for love which is part of this search for identity. The woman persona speaks about having met a man in whom "all the erotic forces of love and lust are combined" (Nair 18). The woman persona transcends her individuality and becomes a symbol of the universal power in which everything good and evil merge: "It is I who drink a lonely drink near midnight at hotels / of strange towns, it is I who make love and then feel shame, / it is I who lie dying with a rattle in my throat" ("An Introduction" 13). The "weak ego boundary" to quote the words of Nancy Chodorow makes it possible for Das to reach out to other persons and to encompass "the sinner and the saint." "the lover and the beloved" within her consciousness. As Kaur points out, Das has been liberal enough to hide every woman in the burkha of "I." be it a lesbian, a woman indulging in extramarital sex, an adulteress, a woman running from door to door for love or a raped girl (Preface, Perspectives on Das's Poetry x). The consciousness of the poet is expansive enough to empathize with the millions of frustrated, discontented and suffering women of the world. Like Whitman she feels justified in identifying herself with the nameless multitudes:

I am a million, million people
waiting all at once, with voices
raised in clamour, like maids
at village wells.

I am a million, million silences
strung like crystal beads
onto someone else's

song . . . ("Someone Else's Song" 40)

If Das's persona can be equated with the poet herself it may be stated that her attempt to know herself through her man who, she had hoped, would complement her, turns out to be a failure. Each lesson he gave was about himself and she makes no attempt to conceal her disappointment; she speaks out how marriage with the wrong man has reduced her to an intellectual dwarf ("The Old Playhouse"), clipping her wings of freedom and confining her to the "shabby drawing room" ("The Stone Age"). When she realizes that marriage has been a failure, she ventures to seek fulfilment outside marriage. She becomes aware of the futility of physical love: "... for years I have run from one / gossamer lane to another, I am / now my own captive" ("Captive" Only the Soul 91). She turns her thoughts to the archetypal lover Lord Krishna. She realizes how Vrindavan lives in every woman and she is lured by the music of his flute. Her quest for love which is identical with her quest for identity merge together into a quest for truth. Her trust in Ghanashyam is such that she comes to look upon Death without fear. She even feels confident to meet death since she believes that it is the rightful "claimant of us all" whom "we call death by mistake." She wants us to turn our thoughts "to the raging continuity" which exists beyond the "chilling flesh" and the "funeral pyre's rapid repast" ("Anamalai" IV 154).

Thus the quest which had its beginning in the physical realm transcends the physical. The poet has come to believe that life is a mere dream and that death is the only reality. She believes that human beings are "mere participants in someone else's dream" (My Story 218). Mohanty is of the view that when Das is enraptured in Ghanashyam's love she "loses her egoistic attitude" and that there is "sublimation of her ego when she totally surrenders herself at the altar.
of Krishna's love" (33-34).

In Rich the quest for identity takes a complex course. There are different strands to this quest which should be taken together in order to get a clear perception of her quest for identity. Her lucid views about woman as an entity with the vast backdrop of a women's tradition made up of the lives of women of the past, her racial subconscious as a Jew, her concept about sexuality that cuts through Western bi-polarity, the alter-ego that complements her psyche, her concept of autogenesis and the new heroine should be taken into account while dealing with the theme of the exploration of her identity.

Rich is insistent that woman should be recognized as an individual in her own right. Instead of being looked down upon as a "womb" or a mere tool she should be taken seriously as an entity invested with a selfhood of her own. Rich has affirmed that in order to become a self-conscious, self-defining human being woman needs a knowledge of her own history, "of her much politicized female body, of the creative genius of women of the past--the skills and crafts, techniques and visions possessed by women in other times and cultures." She insists that women should have a clear idea about how fellow women who lived in other countries and other ages have been devalued and rendered anonymous by patriarchy. Women should realize that still the situation is the same and that still they are "denied equal rights as citizens, enslaved as sexual prey, unpaid or underpaid as workers, withheld from her own power." An analysis of the present condition of women is imperative according to Rich. Women should be made conscious of the women thinkers of the past who have reflected on it, about women's world-wide individual rebellions and organized movements against economic and social injustice, and how ultimately these have been fragmented and silenced (BBP 2).
From the beginning of her poetic career, woman in patriarchy has been the theme of Rich's poetry. As Gelpi puts it, her concern has been with "her own identity, the identity of woman on man's established terms and, more and more urgently, the possibility of identity on woman's terms." In articulating subjectivity through poetry Rich manages to undertake the reconstruction of her own self. Her perception of her own self is as a Jewish woman with a legacy of suffering which is registered in the ethnic consciousness. This awareness empowers her to move on in her quest "without faith" but "faithful" and convinced that there is something more to being a Jew than custom and so she wears "the star of David / on a thin chain at (her) breastbone" (Gelpi, "Two Ways" 283).

The ethnic consciousness that makes up an integral part of Rich's identity makes her identify herself with the oppressed and the downtrodden. Her sympathy and fellow-feeling for the suffering multitudes enable her to project the images of women who lived in the distant past, "fighting for their unmet needs and those of their children and their tribes and their peoples." They were women who refused to accept the prescriptions of the established society, who "took risks and resisted as women today are fighting their oppressors" (BBP 7-8). Rich exhorts contemporary women to identify with their foremothers. This is what she does in "From an Old House in America"; she reviews the lives of American women who were pioneers of the American frontier. They were "washed up on this continent / shipped here to be fruitful," to give birth to sons who would continue to dominate and exploit women and the land. She can easily imagine that the lives of those women were "mostly unarticulate," even though among them were women who stood shoulder to shoulder with men, fighting the cold, hard times. Their lives have gone unsung, without leaving any mark on history, but Rich wants those lives to be celebrated and made
memorable through her poetry.

In "Heroines" Rich speaks about middle class women of the nineteenth century who were spared the severest of adversities of life because of scientific progress and technological innovations. Rich remembers the times prior to all those developments when women, who have ever been more unlucky than their male counterparts, were exposed to the direst of living conditions—poverty, illiteracy, or ill-health resulting from exposure to unhygienic surroundings. Because of class privilege the nineteenth century heroines enjoyed many blessings. Yet it is quite significant that Rich fails to mention any blessing which is other than negative in quality: "You are spared . . . death by pneumonia / . . . the seamstress' clouded eyes / the mill-girl's shortening breath" (A Wild Patience 33). Still they were denied the chances to lead full lives which remained a distant dream for them; the law withheld from them the right to property in a world in which property was everything, the right to equal pay with men and the right to vote or to speak in public.

With feelings of nostalgia Rich looks back on her own past and recollects her childhood and her grandmothers who were alive then. She remembers her maternal grandmother, Mary Gravely Jones who was "restless, Southern-accented, reserved." She was brilliant and accomplished, but nobody listened to her ideas and her worth was left unrecognized. Speaking about her paternal grandmother Hattie Rice Rich, the poet says that her sweetness of soul was "a convenience" for everyone. In spite of having money of her own, she was homeless and used to shuttle between her son and daughter. She was just the "widow of Samuel, and no matriarch," "dispersed among the children and grandchildren" (A Wild Patience 37, 38). In her poem "Granddaughter" she projects her own self in the words: "Born a white woman, Jewish or of curious mind / -- twice an
outsider, still believing in inclusion" (A Wild Patience 39).

In her attempt to reach an identity of her own, her endeavour seems to be to bring about an extension of the definition of self. In her poem "Letters in the Family" Rich gives monologues of three different women, each in a crisis of her own-- one writes from the Spanish Civil War, another from behind the Nazi line in Yugoslavia and the third from present day South Africa. Thus breaking the barriers of nations and continents. Rich has proved that she is capable of transcending not only the temporal but also the spatial parameters in her endeavour to achieve a full-fledged definition of the self.

In order to transcend the fragmentation and isolation of their lives the collective unconscious of women should be explored along with their shared experience. This should be foregrounded in place of patriarchal myths which have been prevailing for long. Thus women should cope with the need for a new mythology, sustaining definitions of a self that are not male-identified or male-defined.

When there is perceptible difference in the viewpoint of men, male definitions of reality are also sure to undergo changes; a reversal of the significance of values is to follow in the wake of the new shift. Whatever has been held in great respect by patriarchy is sure to suffer decline in value with the altered state. The woman persona in Rich's poem "Diving into the Wreck" explores the depths of the past without the help of any male chaperon or patriarchal notion or myths and emerges after a confrontation with the waste and ruin of the wreck. Martin refers to it as "the wreck of civilization" of which the poet herself is a part. Rich's persona emerges from there with the realization that there is no justification in history for the essential division of humanity into polar opposites as man and woman: "I am she: I am he"(55). Realization
dawns on her that what had been perceived as immutable reality is nothing other than illusory:

I do not know
if sex is an illusion
I do not know
who I was when I did those things
or who I said I was
or whether I willed to feel
what I had read about
or who in fact was there with me
or whether I knew even then
that there was doubt about these things ("Dialogue " Diving 21)

Rich's women personae are willing to take risks in undertaking adventurous trips, exploring mysterious realms which have been totally shut off from common reach. One such persona who gets prepared to undertake an exploration has no preconceived notion as to where the quest would take her. In "Prospective Immigrants Pleases Note" (1962), she gets ready to travel to unchartered territory, opens the door to the future, signalling her "willingness to take risks, to experience conflict and acute anxiety, to tolerate ambiguity and to perceive her life as being open-ended" (Martin, "From Patriarchy" 179). Rich provides an underpinning of history to her quest for identity probably because she thinks that a clear perception of history is essential to provide a vivid idea about one's identity. In order to determine her personal identity she separates herself from a larger social and historical context. When Martin refers to this process of separation as "an essential phase of identity formation" (179), it reminds us of the separation of the ego from the "Dyad" according to the
psychoanalytical concept.

Rich is endowed with an insight into the truth of life and she perceives some basic connection between mind and matter and between all living things. She considers nature not just as a backdrop against which the personal identity is projected; to her, it is an essential source that contributes to our knowledge of the basic characteristics of life. Harmony with nature is essential for all human beings in the absence of which impoverishment of life is sure to result.

After distancing herself from the patriarchal landscapes, the poet retreats into her own private world of experience. She analyses her experience as a woman in patriarchal culture and articulates it in such a way that she succeeds in establishing "a coherent point of view, a feminist identity and poetic vision which become part of the composite reality of a community" (Martin, "From Patriarchy" 188-89). Rich is well aware of the fact that all the cherished notions should be subject to a fresh evaluation in the light of which a revision should follow. Such a step is likely to enhance the esteem of "the female principle."

In Rich's poetry one may discern the poet's dissatisfaction with heroines in patriarchal literature which leads her to conceive of the "New Woman," an ideal woman of the future who does not suffer from any limitations imposed by culture, but will be "in full command of her energy and power," as Martin puts it. The portrayal of the New Woman in "Snapshots" makes it clear that Rich is in favour of change. The need for a heroine is the undercurrent of the poem "The Stranger" too, which is a pure construct of the imaginary. The identity of "The Stranger" depicted in the poem is difficult to decipher since it is described in vaguely general terms:

If they ask me my identity
what can I say but
I am the androgyne
I am the living mind you fail to describe
in your dead language

the letters of my name are written under the lids
of the newborn child ("The Stranger" 52 - 53)

As Altieri remarks, it is not easy for someone with Rich's convictions to provide an idealized version of a heroine. It is in keeping with her beliefs that she has no models. However her concept of female anger is "precise" and "deep" according to Altieri; "anger cleanses the sight because it brings one to full self-consciousness." But to conceive of this anger as "visionary" is something unrealistic. Perhaps the androgyne unifies within itself the anger and mercy in which case the mythic reach tends to make the discursive clarity seem fantasized in the figure of the androgyne. Here Rich resorts to the use of myth as a way of projecting an identity beyond the dead language (176 - 77).

However Rich did not set store by the chimerical cultural construct of the androgyne for long. In "Natural Resources" she writes in deprecation of androgyne as a word that she "cannot choose again":

such words have no shame in them, no diffidence
before the raging stoic grandmothers:

their glint is too shallow, like a dye
that does not permeate

the fibers of actual life
as we live it, now (Dream 66)
Probably in introducing the androgyne, Rich was quite aware of the fact that this type of a union of myth and reality in the articulation of an identity would be open to controversy. Yet her interest in the concept may be attributed to her realization that it makes possible a new form of consciousness that contributes to the empowerment of women. In fact from the time she wrote The Dream of a Common Language the concern of the poet has been to enhance the condition of women and she knows how crucial it is for women around the world to attain empowerment. It is with this object that she introduces in her poetry women who have made meaningful contributions to the world and lived remarkable lives of their own.

In "Power" the title poem of the first section of poems in The Dream Rich writes about Marie Curie whose name has become synonymous with success and power. As far as Rich is concerned, Marie Curie is a living example from history, proving the worth of woman as an individual. It is not exactly a model that she provides; instead she provides "a kind of authority" (Altieri 179). She is capable of engaging in quests for power successfully and making a name for herself through her own persistent efforts. But the element that she succeeded in separating and purifying became the cause of her misery. Thus the source of her wounds and the source of her power were one and the same.

Rich's intention seems to be to construct a network of influence among women who belong to different communities of the world with varied interests and concerns in life. A sense of sisterhood with these women endows her quest with a dignity of its own. Instead of asserting her own self against an oppressive world, she bases her endeavour on acts of empathy. The fact that in Curie the source of suffering and the source of power are one and the same, is taken as a point of departure and Rich sets out to explore her own wounds as potential
siris of power. The poem "Transit" is a good example of re-defining self along with learning to recognize limits. This is one of "those brilliant first person poems which articulates an identity in relation to an alter ego" (Montefiore 161). The concept of the "alter ego" is expressed in poems such as "Orion." and "For Ethel Rosenberg" too. Das alludes to this concept of the alter ego in one of her poems:

... that deathless
creation tethered to your self,
and constantly struggling to wrest
itself free, tethered to your soul
as your shadow is to your form,
your Siamese twin no surgeon
can cut away from you ("Anamalai" VIII 157)

Rich's "Transit" projects the relation of the subject to an imaginary sister, the skier, an emblem of self-reliance and confidence as contrasted with the reflective self of the poet who is depicted as a cripple. The cripple, painfully aware of her own limitations, is full of admiration for the skier who walks towards the mountain, free-swinging in worn boots, an expert in her craft. The cripple attempts to establish bonds of sympathy and identification with the skier. Apparently it gives her some consolation to think that the two of them are kindred spirits. She remembers how they spent the Summer of 1945 together, climbing Chocorua. The skier symbolises for her her own shattered dreams in life -- "who I might have been." It gives her some kind of vicarious satisfaction to watch that "alter ego" of hers moving swiftly on the snow, her strong knees carrying her with ease. Rich has portrayed a realistic picture of the skier seen through the admiring eyes of the cripple:
How she appears again through lightly-blowing
crystals, how her strong knees carry her,
how unaware she is, how simple
this is for her... (93)

Altieri remarks that "the two basic roles that Rich must reconcile as the constituents of the freedom she pursues are staged in the poem in the two characters, the cripple and the skier (182). Freedom, according to him, is the "reconciliation of cripple and skier, each aware of the power and limitation of the other" (183). Rich becomes reconciled to the cripple in herself, makes it a means of access to other psyches, makes the access a source of self-knowledge and basis for community with other women.

Rich glorifies the multifarious nature of woman's potential through her poems. She exhorts women to shake themselves free from the clutches of patriarchy in order to grow to their full stature. In "Transcendental Etude" she warns women not to be enthralled by "rhythms we've moved to thoughtlessly." She points out that what may appear simply "the way things are" could actually be a social construct, advantageous to some and detrimental to others, and that these constructs could be criticized and changed (BBP 176). Women should train themselves not to conform to conventions or resign themselves to what they have made of their lives. A quest in search of identity involves bestowing ourselves to silence, or a deeper listening" ("Transcendental Etude"). In pursuing that endless process of self-revision it is necessary to cut the wires which hold the women fast to "the system" and let themselves be subject to a "free-fall" (89). They should be nurtured in such a way that they are not tainted by any influence. Stendhal's words are relevant in this context: "the forest must be planted all at once" (qtd. in de Beauvoir 807). Under such circumstances, the
Rich's belief in the concept of autogenesis should be considered in this light. Her optimism leads her to cherish the notion that it is possible to give birth to one's own self through which one can attain an identity of one's own, untainted by any outside influence. She has dealt with the theme of autogenesis even during the early phase of her career when she wrote *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (1958-60). In the title-poem of that volume she depicts the woman hero of the future as a new identity she would like to assume for herself:

she's long about her coming, who must be
more merciless to herself than history.
Her mind full to the wind, I see her plunge
breasted and glancing through the currents,
taking the light upon her
at least as beautiful as any boy
or helicopter, poised, still coming . . . (12--13)

Again, it is such a self that she portrays in "Necessities of Life": "piece by piece I seem / to re-enter the world" (18). As is her habitual practice, she looks back on the past, in the case of this poem, on her own past in order to get a clearer perception of the future. She takes a look at her own childhood when biographies of exceptional persons had their impact on her and she was enthusiastic to identify herself with geniuses like Wittgenstein, Wollstonecraft and Louis Jouvet. She also looks back on her adult life as a wife and mother when the innumerable demands made on her "wolfed her almost to shreds", when she felt as if all her resources were being dried up "... Scaly as a dry bulb / thrown into a cellar / I used myself . . ." She goes on to describe how the experience was "sometimes more like kneading bricks in Egypt." The image is
particularly significant as it provides us with an insight into Rich's Jewish consciousness. After passing through such excruciating experiences of life, she has gathered the confidence and competence to re-enter the world as a metamorphosed self that excites optimism. "Soon / practice may make me middling-perfect" (19). In this poem, as in a number of poems by Rich, her interest in the past is quite explicit. As Martin observes, Rich's deep interest in the past may have something to do with her determination "to understand the present better" and her attempts "to locate herself in the historical flux" ("From Patriarchy" 178).

Regarding the resurrected self that re-enters the world, the poet cherishes modest hopes only. The girl who dreamed of being Wittgenstein has, of necessity, to join the garrulous crones. And yet, considering the submission of the soul in all those years of Egyptian bondage and the confines of the root-cellar, it may appear normal enough to sit on the doorstep and knit. It is important to remember that this poem was composed by Rich way back in 1962. This makes it clear that even before she became a committed feminist, Rich had a clear idea about the lot of women in patriarchal society, who "in their daily kneading of the bricks, passion and ambition" are subjected to exploitation by others (Vendler, "Ghostlier Demarcations" 307).

In representations of suffering, she explores "the submerged connectedness of self to other selves" (Des Pres 366). In "Hunger" for example, she explores her relationship to suffering by famine. Even though it is not her lot in life to undergo this kind of suffering directly, by stretching her poetic imagination, she finds it possible to identify herself with those who experience it and therein lies her defence of poetry. She makes her stance clear when she exhorts her readers not to turn a deaf ear to the plights of those who pass through disaster.
dismissing it as an "act of god" but to feel responsible for life everywhere. The poetic mind, endowed with the faculty of "negative capability" would experience no difficulty in identifying with the oppressed. She considers it necessary to break "ego boundaries" which should result in the "opening outward of self" "engendering" acts of extended awareness" (Des Pres 365). Rich celebrates women's "intuitive identification and sympathy with other people as a "source of power." In her feminist ethos, this is what transcendence means -- reaching beyond oneself in sympathy with the plight of others"(Des Pres 365). "A sense of identity with other women stirs her more than any other experience" (Humm 184). She holds the view that it is vital to have not only an imaginative identification with all women but also with "the ghostly woman in all men" (qtd. in Jong 172).

Ever since her adolescence, Rich was conscious of her Jewish roots. In "Readings of History" she gives expression to her own dilemma in the following lines:

Split at the root, neither Gentile nor Jew
Yankee nor Rebel, born
in the face of two ancient cults,
I'm a good reader of histories. (Snapshots 39)

The phrase "split at the root" sounds like a knell throughout "Sources" according to Gelpi ("Two Ways" 283). Rich, in an essay entitled "Split at the Root" explored the theme of her Jewishness at the same time that she wrote the poem "Sources." In the poem she admits the influence exerted on her, first by her father and later, by her husband. She is annoyed at the remembrance that these two men played decisive roles in moulding the woman and poet in her. She views them both as deracinated nominal Jews whose sense of identity...
as men was defined and compromised by the anti-Semitism of their culture.

According to Jewish law, it is not possible to count Rich a Jew since her mother is a gentile. And if we are to abide by the words of Woolf, "we think back through our mothers if we are women." However, Rich is aware of the permeating influence of the Jewish blood on her which is her paternal legacy and in claiming her father in this manner she considers it necessary to break his silence and his taboos and thus expose him in a sense.

Though Rich makes it clear that her own identity stems from the Jewish roots of her father, she is positive about rejecting his anti-Semitic tendencies. It enables her to have a perception of her own self as a Jewish woman with a legacy of suffering which is registered in the ethnic consciousness of her race. She finds it easier to identify herself with the persecuted Jews, the ones "who were turned to smoke" ("Sources" 109). It was, in a way, a reaction to the enormous influence exerted by her father in moulding her personality and in guiding her to evolve as a poet. In fact both her parents had tried to persuade her to transcend her Jewish roots in her attitudes and to become "a citizen of the world" ("Sources" 109).

In her anxiety to emerge as a free human being she considered it important to liberate herself from masculine influences and her first effort was to shake herself free of her father's influence. She got estranged from her parents following her marriage. There was little contact between Rich and her parents for a long time. Nevertheless, she has recorded how the personality of her father haunted her life all the time ("Split"234). She has recorded how she soon realized that she was her father's daughter. His "mene takel" was made known to her one fine morning. The awareness of how much she owed to him dawned on her. His oft-repeated words, "I know you more than you know yourself" resounded in
her ears every now and then as if they were lines heard from a record player. Even though there was, ultimately, reconciliation between Rich and her parents the communication gap, especially between the father and daughter, could never be filled. In the prose passage which concludes the poem "Sources" she states: "...When I speak of an end to suffering I don't mean anesthesia. I mean knowing the world, and my place in it, not in order to stare with bitterness or detachment, but as a powerful and womanly series of choices: and here I write the words in their fullness: powerful; womanly" (114).

The words give an insight into her determination to carry out her mission which is to "change the laws of history" (qtd. in Gelpi, "Two Ways" 284). It is womanhood that empowers her to take responsibility not only for the land but for life as well. "This drive to self-knowledge, for woman," according to Rich, "is more than a search for identity" ("WWDA" 90). She advocates a change in the concept of sexual identity which is inevitable in order to make sure that the old political order would not reassert itself. Women writers have to gear themselves up to face "the challenge and promise of a whole new psychic geography" which is yet to be explored.

A somewhat similar case of father-fixation may be observed in the poetry of Das too. Das in her poetry is seen flaunting "a grand flamboyant lust" ("Freaks"), "seeking blind dates" ("A New City") and whipping up a froth of desire with "every interesting" man she meets ("Composition"). In "Glass" her persona is no better than a flirt who is totally indifferent and does not even care to shed a tear when she, fragile glass, is broken into an armful of splinters in the violent handling of her 'lover'. She is reduced to a shard of glass and no longer cares whom she hurts with love and often without it. "With a cheap toy's indifference" she enters the lives of other people and makes a temporary home.
of every trap of lust. However the explanation for such unseemly behaviour is provided by the persona herself, "I have misplaced a father / somewhere . . . / and I look for him now everywhere" (103). Such an explanation is sufficient to equate the persona with the poet since her relationship with her father, as has been admitted by the poet herself, was far from satisfactory.

Das has made it explicit through her literary works time and again, how she yearned for a word of affection from her father. But he seems to have been a busy man, always engrossed in his professional world; one seriously disposed, apparently a man of few words and hardly inclined to be demonstrative of his affection. He seemed to have little time for his daughter who was growing up fast. It was just for half a minute that she saw him each day: "Climbing down the stair / He stared past me" ("Next to Indira Gandhi," Only the Soul 118). She even wondered whether her father had ever wanted a daughter. Again she is not sure whether it was her dark complexion and her "brooding ways" that made her disagreeable to her father. However, it appears as if there was a wide communication gap between the father and the daughter. The following lines in "My Father's Death" are indicative of this: "There was a cloud of tension / Between him and me. I brought him / Shame, they say" (Only the Soul 116).

On his death she expresses her remorse at not having been petted by him at least once, "You should have hugged me, father, just / Once, held me to your breast, you should / Have asked me who I was, in truth." She was even ready to change places with her father and die if she could, instead of letting him die, as she states in "A Requiem for My Father." She wants him to know that she loved him all her life. In "Too Late for Making Up " the woman persona says that it was not easy to have loved him more than she did: "If I have loved others, father, I swear I have loved you the most" (Only the Soul 40). There is
ample suggestion in her poems that there is disappointment, discontent and agitation lurking in the mind of the poet. This may be interpreted as a reflection of her unsatisfactory relationship with her father.

The mother-daughter relationship is an important trope in feminist writing. Das's relationship with her mother does not seem to have been of a smooth nature too, particularly in her childhood. In *My Story* she has recorded her perception of her mother as "vague and indifferent" who spent her time lying on her belly on a large four-post bed, composing poems leaving Kamala and her brother to themselves as neglected children (2). However, later, following an attack of typhoid, when her mother went home to Malabar for rest along with the younger children (and her elder brother went to Madras for higher studies), leaving the young girl by herself in the company of her father and two servants, she felt immensely desolate. Moreover, later she has admitted that in her career as a poet her mother's influence was a positive factor. Her attachment to her mother is made clear in her poem "My Mother at Sixty Six." The fear of the loss of mother and separation from her which looms large in one's childhood, "that old familiar ache" is experienced by the poet's persona now that she realizes that her mother is old and that her face looks "ashen like that / of a corpse" (148).

Rich is a feminist who considers mother-daughter relationship as something vital; for one thing, it provides for her a strong base on which she projects the lesbian ethos. In her own words that "earliest enwrapment of one female body with another" can sooner or later be denied or rejected, "felt as choking possessiveness, as rejection, trap, or taboo," but it is, at the beginning "the whole world" for the infant (*Of Woman Born* 218). In "Transcendental Etude" Rich writes:
Birth stripped our birthright from us,
tore us from a woman, from women, from ourselves
so early on
and the whole chorus throbbing at our ears
like midges, told us nothing, nothing
of origins . . .

Only: that it is unnatural
the homesickness for a woman . . . (89)

In her personal life, her mother meant much to the poet. She has recorded that her mother's very name, Helen, had "a kind of magic" for her as a child. She somehow identified her mother with Helen of Troy, or perhaps even more with Poe's Helen (219). She considered her love of her own body as a profound "matrilineal bequest" (220).

With her marriage to Conrad, a Jew of the "wrong kind" according to her parents, Rich was alienated from her parents. During those years she had blamed her mother for having "chosen (her) father over (her): for having sacrificed (her) to his needs and theories" (222). But later when she became a mother herself, she began to understand the full weight and burden of "maternal guilt." She realized that the institution of motherhood finds all mothers more or less guilty of having failed their children. She understood how much her mother must have suffered when the "perfect" daughter she had been expected to help create according to her father's plan, resisted his Victorian paternalism and got married against his wishes (223). Rich considers the loss of the daughter to the mother and the mother to the daughter as the "essential female tragedy" though mother-daughter passion and rapture has not been recognized like other
bonds in conventional literature such as father-daughter bond in *Lear*, son and mother bond as in *Hamlet* or as in *Oedipus.* She alerts us to the fact that loneliness, unshared grief and guilt often lead to depression or mental breakdown (234).

Rich has portrayed women suffering from the sense of maternal guilt in "*From an Old House*":

Her hand unconscious on the cradle, her mind
with the wild geese
his mother hatred driving him
into exile from the earth

Her children dead of diphtheria, she
set herself on fire with kerosene

(O Lord I was unworthy
Thou didst find me out) (68)

Rich analyses the real nature of matrophobia in *Of Woman Born.* Her thesis is that it is the fear not of one's mother or of motherhood but of "becoming one's mother." Thousands of daughters view their mothers as having taught a compromise and self-hatred they are struggling to free themselves from and they dread they might identify with their mothers completely unless they are on their guard. It is because they fail to see beyond her to the forces acting upon her that they are led to hate and reject their mothers outright (235).

In "A Woman Mourned by Daughters" Rich portrays the daughters huddled together in her kitchen, "spent... already," recollecting her. They remember how they had succeeded in ignoring her very often. "You are puffed up in death..."
/ like a corpse pulled from the sea; / we groan beneath your weight" (Snapshots 35). She seems to breathe upon them even in the present through solid assertions of herself such as

... teaspoons, goblets,
seas of carpet, a forest
of old plants to be watered,
an old man in an adjoining
room to be touched and fed (35)

The entire universe seems to dare them "to lay a finger / anywhere, save exactly / as you would wish it done" (Snapshots 35). Rich projects herself as a woman who has tried in different ways to return to her mother, "to repossess her and be repossessed by her, to find the mutual confirmation that daughters and mothers alike hunger for, pull away from, make possible or impossible for each other" (Of Woman Born 218).

A study of the dreams which occur in the poetry of these two women poets is quite relevant in examining the psychoanalytical model of gender difference. Since women are fated to lead lives of subjugation as second-class citizens in real life situation, their dreams are invested with a special significance of their own. The unfulfilled wishes, desires and aspirations which constitute a large part of their universe and centuries of submission that make up the woman's unconscious will necessarily be repressed in their subconscious. Some of this is sure to get expression in their poetry since poetry is language articulated in its intensity. An examination of the dreamscape of Das and Rich is of relevance in the study of their poetry.

Das in "Anamalai Poems" speaks about hiding behind her dreams as the mountain does behind the winter mist. It is significant that this sequence of
Anamalai poems was written while the poet was recuperating at her sister's home in the Anamalai Hills after suffering severe depression following her defeat in the general election to the parliament. In "Anamalai Poem" (V), she speaks about having woven a wondrous raiment fit for Gods and climbed the stairways of her thoughts with nimble footsteps, finding even the heaven's portals ajar. She compares herself to Gods and Goddesses in her ability to gatecrash into the precincts of others' dreams in unsolicited magnanimity. It is the picture of a "winner" who has risen to the heights of glory that she projects through these lines. When we consider that the immediate context of writing these verses was one of rejection we are left to wonder whether this is a defensive mechanism that she uses to conceal her disappointment and feeling of failure. Or perhaps, she is solely focusing her attention on her poetic career in these lines and she has ample reason to feel proud of her achievement as a poet. She seems to have confidence in her capacity as a poet and the impact her poetry has on her readers: "My songs echoed in strangers dreams, in unease / they stirred in their sleep and sighed. . . (155).

This "gatecrashing into the precincts of others' dreams" seems to be the hallmark of Das's poetry. She evinces a tendency to probe into the texture and shape of the dreams seen by others. In "Gino" she refers to the "peerless dreams" of her lover: his dreams of "sunlit villas and of fat / half-caste children, lovelier than Gods and of / drinking wine in balconies . . ." (57). She refers to a "dream river" in which tributaries of the blood of her lover and herself merge and to the children as "dream-children": "Real ones never bear such splendent smiles" (57). Compared to these dreams of her lover, her own dreams are said to be of a different nature. As she confesses in "Gino," her dreams are either of a dreary nature or about the gratification of lust. She refers to her dreams about the
fear of death:

... of morgues where the night-lights
glow on faces shuttered by the souls' exit. And
of ward-boys, sepulchral, wheeling me through long corridors
to the X-ray room's dark interior

...........................

And, of aeroplanes bursting red in the sky (56-57)

It is with an analytical mind that Das seems to approach her dreams, and
the dreams of others. In "Sepia" the poet analyses the dreams of the "sad-
mouthed human race," finds them in no way exciting, but drab and flat. Their
dreams

... do not go up the trees
to reach with finger tips
a fringe of summer clouds
they do not go down the sea
to count the mermaid's eggs
that lie beneath the anemones (3)

No phase in the life of an imaginative woman writer is free of dreams. In
"To a Big Brother" she recollects "the hum of dreams / trampled into childhood
soil" (10). To her dreams are so real a part of life that she can conceive of the
ledge that frames and the bright silver threads that run lengthwise in her
afternoon dream ("Pigeons").

Das refers to dreams that glow "pearl-white" and seem to be "hardly mortal"
in "The Siesta." She alludes to a "seascape" that was "off and on" in her dreams
in "Composition." She laments that they cut down the ancient mango tree
because it was the tree on which she used to hang "damp nets of dreams to dry"
in "The Ancient Mango Tree." In "A Phantom Lotus" the poet says that the blue face of the Divine Lover is a phantom lotus on the waters of her dreams.

In Rich’s poetry, too, there is something similar to the gatecrashing into the precincts of others' dreams seen in Das's poetry. In "Nights and Days" there are the lines: "We are holding hands so I can see / everything as you see it / I follow you into your dreams." "Nights and Days" which is a poem "in the imaginary voice, in the infinity of the possible" is, in fact, in the pure language of a dream. According to Broumas this is one of those few poems by Rich where she does not inhabit, in Rich's own words, "any place but the mind / casting back to where her solitude, / shared could be chosen without loneliness" XXI (Broumas 328). The first and last stanzas which are identical are in the rhythm of the future and of a visionary nature.

The stars will come out over and over
the hyacinths, rise like flames
from the windswept turf down the middle of upper Broadway
where the desolate take the sun
the days will run together and stream into years
as the rivers freeze and burn
and I ask myself and you, which of our visions will claim us
which will we claim . . . ("Nights and Days." Dream 45)

Even her dreams seem to be political and invested with lesbian overtones as in the lines: "our faces dreaming hour on hour / in the salt smell of her lap . . ." ("Sibling Mysteries," Dream 48). In The Dream of a Common Language her visions are about the potentialities of women in the present day world. In "Eastern War Time" which has it source in the poet's memories of World War II and is included in her latest poetical work An Atlas of the Difficult World Rich
has enumerated a series of dreams.

I have dreamed of Zion I've dreamed of world revolution
I have dreamed my children could live at last like others
I have walked the children of others through ranks of hatred
I'm a corpse dredged from a canal in Berlin
a river in Mississippi I'm a woman standing
with other women dressed in black
on the streets of Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem... (159)

It is difficult to take these for her dreams, or for that matter, as the dreams of her persona. It may be interpreted as part of the endeavour of Rich to reach out to the consciousness of other people.

In "Origins and History of Consciousness" Rich writes that she has dreamed of going to bed "as walking into clear water ringed by a snowy wood / white as cold sheets thinking, I'll freeze in there" (Dream 7). In "Dreamwood" Rich portrays death as the merging of the real and the imagined. A woman who should be typing the last report of the day notices by chance a landscape veined, in the old, scratched cheap wood of the typing stand. It shows ridge upon ridge fading into hazed desert. She wonders whether this is a map laid down to be memorized because she might be walking it. And it turns out to be the map of the last age of her life. If the cheap wooden stand is her dream-map, she thinks the material and the dream can merge (136).

In "From an Old House in America" where the poet speaks about man-woman relationship, she seems to be addressing her husband who is no more:

If I dream of you these days
I know my dreams are mine and not of you
yet something hangs between us
older and stranger than ourselves (65)

In her attempt to analyze the nuances of man-woman relationship she
refers to the bond which is "like a translucent curtain, a sheet of water / a dusty
window / the irreducible, incomplete connection ..." In "The Blue Ghazals"
Rich writes about lovers communicating in their dreams when the barriers of
the ego are repressed: "Talk to me with your body through my dreams / Tell me
what we are going through" (Poems Selected 152). What Nancy Milford observes
about the potency of Rich's poetry is relevant here: It makes possible connections
between people in the face of what seems to be irrevocable separateness, it
forges an alliance between the poet and the reader" (202).

Though it is only "the dream of a dream" or "the shadow of a shadow" that
is made available through the dreams projected in poetry like the motif in the
mirror, it reflects some reality, the reality that the unconscious has to offer
which is quite significant.

Women writers in general have experienced the inadequacy of man-made
language as a medium of expression since language is male. It is this inadequacy
of man-made language which is problematic for women writers and the different
ways in which they exploit language with their resourcefulness that is discussed
under the linguistic model of gender difference. Feminists hold the view that
much of women's continued subordination is structured through language.
Spender, for example, points out that the existence of binary oppositions in
language in which the masculine is asserted while the feminine form is treated
as secondary presents premises based on the supremacy of one group over
another.

The awareness that language does more than record facts like male
superiority and that it even produces reality makes Rich explore the extent to which the existing language can be "re-vised." Her intention is to bring to the foreground the language of the muted who have been pushed to the background by the norms of patriarchy. This can validate their reality and give it some authenticity. In her endeavour to transcend gender, she insists that women should be keen enough to see through patriarchal manipulations in presenting women characters in literature. The images of woman projected in books written by male writers "negate everything the woman writer is about" ("WWDA" 94).

Rich has brought out this idea in the "snapshot" she has given of Corinna, the music performer. Rich says that "When to her lute Corinna sings / neither words nor music are her own" ("Snapshots" 11). What distinguishes her is her lovely appearance with her long hair dipping over her cheeks and "the song / of silk against her knees." Rich's choice of Corinna as the name of the persona becomes more intriguing since it reminds us of the ancient Greek woman poet Corinna whose works have gone into oblivion. As has been pointed out by Montefiore, Corinna stands for the "double exclusion" of women from poetry: "by omission and by misrepresentation" (28).

Rich gives us an insight into her project to uproot patriarchal ideologies including established language and create something new in "Essential Resources." She gives us an idea of her plan to create some sort of a film designed to rouse the amnesiacs out of their passivity and inertness and make them active. Though the nature of the script has not yet been decided upon by the poet, she has a clear idea regarding the final shot -- the whole screen going dark and the keepers of order screaming aloud in helplessness. The poem effectively brings out the poet's dissatisfaction with existing language and other patriarchal ideologies. It also suggests that nothing short of a radical revision...
can make it viable.

As Martin points out, Rich is quite particular that women poets should find the appropriate syntax, images and metaphors to create their realities which are dissimilar from male realities. For Rich language is of so much importance that she cannot divine an existence without it: "Only where there is language is there world" she observes in "The Demon Lover," a poem written in 1966 (32). There is a painful recognition about the inadequacy of the communicative power of language as expressed in "Our Whole Life" which occurs in her collection The Will to Change written during "her most politically assertive period" (Spiegelman 371). In this poem she refers to our whole life as "a translation of the permissible fibs" which have been reduced to "a knot of lies / eating at itself to get undone." It has come to such a sorry state that words have been bitten through words and "meanings burnt off like paint / under the blowtorch" and consequently it is "All those dead letters" that constitute "the oppressor's language":

Trying to tell the doctor where it hurts
like the Algerian
who walked from his village, burning
his whole body a cloud of pain
and there are no words for this
except himself. (44)

Rich observes that "In a world where language and naming are power, silence is oppression, is violence" (OLSS 204). In her "Twenty-One Love Poems" (IX), she admits: "I fear this silence, / this inarticulate life," (81). Shirley Ardener's remark that "the silence of woman has several dimensions" is quite significant (qtd. in Spender, Man Made Language 78). As Willard Spiegelman states Rich's
poetic credo is that "the powers of articulation must incorporate the truths and combat the delusions of muteness" (376), Rich declares at the end of the poem "Cartographies of Silence" that it is "these words, these whispers, conversations / from which time after time the truth breaks moist and green" that she keeps choosing (Dream 18). Joanne F. Diehl observes that these words complete the equation between the act of renaming the world and the power of speech. By her very presence the woman poet becomes the regenerative life force, as in the myth of Demeter and Kore and celebrates her choice of "these words, these whispers, conversations" that will bring, as did the goddess worshipped by the hierophants, a return of spring to the world (413). Even though the poet is not over-optimistic regarding the power of language, as is clear from the line "Language cannot do everything," for example, she feels confident that these words of hers are moving with "ferocious accuracy" in the right direction (Dream 19).

In "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children" it is a pastiche of a poem that Rich provides us with. She has included a prose passage written by one of her students in the Open Admissions Programme, another quotation from Antonin Artaud, the French surrealist poet in addition to one from Daniel Berrigan, Jesuit priest who was active in the protests against the Vietnam War. Remarkably, the passage incorporated in the poem is written disregarding rules of grammatic expression as the following sentence makes clear: "Some of the suffering are: a child did not had / dinner last night: a child steal because he did not have money to buy it . . ." (41).

The poem is particularly remarkable for the two lines which are oft-quoted: "This is the oppressor's language / yet I need it to talk to you" (41). Rich's affirmation about language has alerted feminists everywhere to become sensitive
to the falseness and distortions inherent in patriarchal language. Spender is of the view that "Rich's words, 'This is the oppressor's language' should be written between all the lines" in a conscious effort to bring out the deception of established language (183). Spender draws our attention to the fact that Rich makes this statement without hint of cajolery or flattery. She asserts that it is a mark of how far women have moved from the muted state. Spender feels hopeful that such actions will "break the silence of women" and mark the beginnings of "women developing their own scale of values, their own definitions of what is real, worthwhile or relevant" (Man Made Language 204).

Rich, who won the praises of critics for her mastery of craftsmanship with her very first book of poetry gave little regard for form later in her career. Time's Power, her book of poems published in 1988, for example, contains poems which can hardly be distinguished from prose passages in form. The following lines from "Living Memory" indicate how close they are to sentences in prose.

I knew a woman whose clavicle was smashed inside a white clapboard house with an apple tree and a row of tulips by the door. I had a friend with six children and a tumor like a seventh who drove me to my driver's test and in exchange wanted to see Goddard College, in Plainfield. She'd heard women without diplomas could study there... (138)

The inadequacy of the language as it has evolved nurtured in the patriarchal ethos is disgusting to her. Language as she finds it in the present set up fails to communicate intimacy in relationships; nor can it project the reality that surrounds a person and makes the individual what she/he is. It is
not competent enough to engender the powerful expression of reality in all its subtle shades of colour, bringing out all the nuances of life's contradictions:

a language like pigment released on the board

bursting under pressure from the tube
staining the old grain of the wood
like sperm or tears
but this is not what I mean
these images are not what I mean
(I am afraid). ("Tear Gas" *Poems Selected* 140-41)

The lines invite comparison with the words uttered by the baffling woman in Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": "That is not what I meant at all: / That is not it at all." The difficulty experienced by women who are alien to the language: their timidity, unease, diffidence, and the extent to which they are unsure of themselves on the one hand, and the effect their words are likely to produce on the hearers, on the other, are all made explicit by the above lines. Rich, however, is concerned not with the inadequacy of language to articulate experience alone but with the political horrors and falseness of language as well. As she suggests in "The Roofwalker" she is well aware of her limitations as a woman poet. Her predicament is similar to that of the construction worker who is balanced precariously on a rafter, "exposed, larger than life / and due to break his neck" (16). The poet feels compelled to remain passive and present her own self in the guise of a man instead of making a bold exposure of self. But soon she admits that even though it may be possible to identify herself with the builders in her capacity as a poet, perhaps she has...
made the wrong choice:

A life I didn't choose
chose me: even
my tools are the wrong ones
for what I have to do
I'm naked, ignorant . . . (16)

Judith McDaniel points out a probable connection these lines have with a passage in Of Woman Born where Rich describes a personal predicament she passed through in assuming a "new female identity." While she was at the threshold of motherhood she experienced this confusion about her identity: "I had no idea of what I wanted, what I could or could not choose" (Mc Daniel 314).

By the time Rich's first two volumes of poetry were published there was a growing awareness in her that she should write "poems that are experiences," tapping victimization and anger which women experience in their everyday life. She was conscious of the possibilities that would open and the immense psychic energy that would be released when women began to move out towards what the feminist philosopher Mary Daly described as the "new space" on the boundaries of patriarchy. In accordance with this, from the time she composed poems that make up Snapshots onwards, Rich concentrated on the ideas she intended to give vent to rather than on technical perfection.

Being aware of the political implications of language, Rich is eager to explore the limits of the 'city of language' with the same vein of enthusiasm which makes her dive into the wreck of civilization to know "where the split began." She visualizes language as an ancient city following Ludwig
Wittgenstein's idea, which she gives in a footnote to the poem "Images for Godard": "Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares of old and new houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses" (ARP 51).

The poet's intention is to discover a map for the city which will guide the entire community as well as herself through the perplexing maze. The complexity of man-made language which is experienced by women writers in general is something that baffles Rich too. In "Tear Gas" she makes an admission of this problem:

I am afraid
of the language in my head
I am alone, alone with language
and without meaning
coming back to something written years ago:
our words misunderstand us (Poems Selected 139)

She makes it clear that it was not completeness that she wanted but a way of saying that could deal with these "fragments" which constitute reality for her as a woman. In this poem she speaks about the necessity for a language to hear herself with and see herself in.

Rich who considers "words as maps" gives a vivid picture of pre-history in the following words: "... looks like a village lit with blood / where all the fathers are crying: "My son is mine!" ("August" Diving 51). What Rich attempts to communicate through such lines is something that amounts to the re-construction of a mythical past that ante-dates history and also an affirmation.
of the inauthenticity of the so-called patriarchal tradition. According to feminist critics the most coherent version of a woman's tradition is the re-construction of women's past through poetry; such a past would be either real or semi-mythical. In those poems which are evocations of the past in Rich's poetic works it is the semi-mythical past that can be perceived. On the contrary, in a poem like "Bashert" composed by the Jewish woman poet Irena Klepfisz we come face to face with personal experience in which the consciousness of the poet is directly involved.

Rich has proved her resourcefulness in exploiting language, breaking it free of all the existing rules of grammar and even semantics in order to give expression to her original ideas. For instance, the way she has presented the concept of the androgyne in her poem "The Stranger" is quite extraordinary. The poem is a first person narrative and the speaker is brought into focus, walking the rivers of the avenues, feeling the shudder of the caves beneath the asphalt, watching the lights turn on in the towers, looking straight down the heart of the street to the river, walking "like a man, like a woman." As is clear from this line, man and woman are not treated as polar opposites, nor is there the suggestion of a merging of the opposites using a conjunction but the same personality feels bold enough to assume an identity, "like a man, like a woman." Later in the poem an apparent explanation for the possibly bewildering nature of the line is provided: the fecklessness of articulation of the "dead language" may make it difficult to describe the identity of the androgyne, as Rich herself acknowledges (Diving 19). Conformity, even if it is only about the rules of language, is something this feminist poet detests beyond limits. Rich is one who sets her hopes on a "re-vision" of ideas in her vision to transcend gender.

Rich's intention is to bring out through her literary works the
resourcefulness of woman and the ineffectuality of man. In "Incipience" she projects images of men who do nothing but sleep. Even when he is awake he is shown as doing nothing constructive: all that he does is spending a whole day standing "throwing stones into the black pool / which keeps its blackness" (Diving 12).

She is quite conscious about the fact that the male perception of woman is just as though she were a commodity and with a total lack of respect for her as a person. The following lines explicate the poet's disgust with the way woman is perceived:

We are his dreams
We have the heads and breasts of women
the bodies of birds of prey
Sometimes we turn into silver serpents
While we sit up smoking and talking of how to live
he turns on the bed and murmurs ("Incipience" Diving 11)

Her intention is to reach "outside the frame of his dream" (12) even though she knows for certain that "Nothing can be done / but by inches" ("Incipience" 11).

It is her keen awareness of the lack of a literary tradition for women that prompts Rich to reconstruct communities of women who lived in the past. Hence we find in her poetry a deep interest in the past and in history which amounts to an obsession. Rich, the poet of innovations, makes use of the trope of obsession which manifests itself in the form of enumeration, as Spiegelman observes. Another technique that she exploits is that of mock catechism, "the oldest technique out of Greek drama to portray irresolvable conflict" (382). In "From an Old House in America" Rich uses this device quite effectively. In this poem...
she speaks about instances of patriarchal cruelty and lust which manifested in
the genital contests of the past. She also refers to their "terror of blinding / by
the look of her who bore them" (70). She reaches out to those old annals of fear
and hatred in the old dialect" using the method of mock catechism:

> But can't you see me as a human being
> he said
> What is a human being
> she said
> I try to understand
> he said
> What will you undertake
> she said
> will you punish me for history
> he said
> What will you undertake
> she said
> do you believe in collective guilt
> he said
> let me look in your eyes
> she said (70–71)

"Natural Resources" is another poem in which Rich uses this technique
with dramatic impact:

> Could you imagine a world of women only,
> the interviewer asked. Can you imagine
> a world where women are absent. (He believed
> he was joking) Yet I have to imagine
at one and the same moment, both. Because
I live in both. Can you imagine,
the interviewer asked, a world of men?
(He thought he was joking.) If so, then,
a world where men are absent?
Absent, wearily, I answered: Yes  

Another linguistic technique employed by Rich is that of "weaving, a way
of interlacing voices, echoes, or motifs in poetry, creat(ing) a whole from distinct
and separate elements" (Spiegelman 383). In "Culture and Anarchy," for
example, voices of women activists of the nineteenth century resonate from
within the matrix of Rich's poem. It is from Susan B. Anthony's Diaries that
the following lines which appear in the poem are extracted:

Commenced Mrs. Browning's Portuguese
Sonnets. Have just finished
"Casa Guidi Windows", a grand poem
and so fitting to our struggle . . .
To forever blot out slavery is the only
possible compensation for this
merciless war . . . (A Wild Patience 10)

In the poem there is part of a letter Anthony wrote to her sister too:

On Saturday Mrs. Ford took us to Haworth,
the home of the Bronte sisters . . .
A most sad day it was to me
as I looked into the little parlor . . .
How much the world of literature has lost
because of their short and ill-environed lives
we can only guess... (*A Wild Patience* 11-12)

There is an extract from a letter from Elizabeth Barrett Browning to Anna B. Jameson, written in 1852, besides a number of other historical records which are of value, particularly to feminists:

... and is it possible you think

a woman has no business with questions

like the question of slavery?

Then she had better use a pen no more.

She had better subside into slavery

and concubinage herself, I think...

and take no rank among thinkers and speakers. (*A Wild Patience* 13)

The literary artefact, the product that evolves, invites comparison with a mosaic pattern, as a result of this careful juxtaposition of voices from the past in the matrix of Rich's verse. This device of multiple voices employed by the poet seems to be part of her stipulation that global woman community should make a collective endeavour in attaining empowerment for woman.

Marilyn Hacker is of the view that it is from synthesis that Rich's work draws its greatest force. She juxtaposes her specifics and, at her strongest, leaves closure to the reader. Hacker considers that the most significant aspect of Rich's technique of synthesis is the "cinematic or collagist technique" through which it is achieved. Narrative threads, dialogue and quotations are interspersed within the poem and there are occasions when the speaker in the poem is identified with the writer herself. One such poem is "Living Memory" in *Time's Power*. In the poem Rich introduces the Vermont landscape with which she was familiar once and gives brief sketches of women who once lived there, who
were known to her, women who are no more. In the same vein, she alludes to "a man they said fought death / to keep fire for his wife for one more winter, leave / a woodpile to outlast him." Then she springs the surprise on the reader in the very next line in quite an unexpected and shocking manner: "I was left the legacy of a pile of stovewood" (138). This may be referred to as a case of "bridging of the identity gap" about which Heany writes in *Preoccupations* (41).

The sudden shift in focus from the poetic persona to the poet herself is effected in quite a dramatic manner that the reader is left to wonder whether it is fact or fiction. However, the poet wants to establish her point, for the next stanza of the poem opens with a line which bears analogy to the line in question: "I was left the legacy of three sons" which, in fact, brings home the truth regarding the merging of the identities of the persona and the poet herself (138).

Das writes the kind of language that articulates the identity of a forceful personality. The impression that one gathers of the subject in her poetry is not that of a shadow devoid of substance, a phantom figure or a charming picture of femininity; on the other hand, it is the vivid picture of a woman who knows what she wants, who is bold to proclaim her views, who deals at length with relationships with others and who is conscious of an identity of her own which sets her on its trail. She explores the metaphysical issues and indulges in pensive speculations regarding the salvation of her soul. In dealing with all these diverse subjects, her language comes to her aid. She knows how to forge a language that will suit her need to articulate experiences which are specifically feminine, and those which are of universal scope.

Like Rich, Das too is competent enough to exploit language to express her
feelings and emotions in their subtlety, caring in the least for taboos, and overriding all inhibitions. She is aware of the distortions and queernesses which the fault-finding society ruled over by the so-called categorizers are sure to detect in her language. However she defends her language on the ground that it is as human as herself:

.... The language I speak
Becomes mine, its distortions, its queernesses
All mine, mine alone. It is half English, half
Indian, funny perhaps, but it is honest,
It is as human as I am human, don't
You see? It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and it is useful to me as cawing
Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it
Is human speech.... (Only the Soul 96).

It may be observed that Das's poetic style is marked by an effortless ease which cannot escape the attention of even casual readers. It is probably because her genius was allowed to flower without the interference of outside influences. She has admitted time and again, in the course of interviews that the lack of formal education aided her in her poetic career ("Of Masks" 147, "No Finger Prints" 122). The pattern of her poems evolved as it were in a dream, unbridled by the rules of craftsmanship. The poet has stated unequivocally that her preference is for "clean, unadorned language," be it in prose or poetry. Her advice to writers is to use less rhetoric and bring in simplicity to the language; whittling the language down to its essentials will enable the kernel to come out ("Of Masks" 155).

Das, like a number of her contemporary compatriots who write poetry in
English, has succeeded in liberating her imagination from the overpowering influence of conventional British poetry as far as possible and in giving expression to women's lived experience as she perceives it around her in the immediate vicinity. Das is one of the few major poets who can use Indianized forms of English with a natural ease and a total lack of self-consciousness. Her use of the language illustrates the brilliant adaptation of a foreign language, liberating it from the linguistic standards set by the colonizers and investing it with an "Indianness" of form which is resourceful enough to reflect the nuances of the cultural meanings relevant to the Indian context. As has been pointed out by Bruce King, Das attains a naturalness of expression and rhythm with effortless ease in her use of the English language, as is clear from the following lines:

When I was growing up
Lost and lanky with braces on my teeth
And tortoise shell glasses covering my eyes
He was the one who attended the Rotary lunch

But when I saw him each day for half a minute
Climbing down the stair
He stared past me
His office problems kept his thoughts away from us
("Next to Indira Gandhi" Only the Soul 118)

Surely this is the type of "clear, unadorned language" that Das has advocated for poets ("Of Masks" 155). In her poetry, there are quite a number of words which have been juxtaposed in order to form compound words. "An adult peace" ("Punishment in Kindergarten"), "an anonymous peace," "girl-thin limbs"
("The Siesta") and "virgin white" ("The Fear of the Year") and "woman-form" ("An Apology to Goutama") are some such terms effectively coined by her.

This gifted poet does not have to undergo the painstaking drudgery of searching for the right words in articulating her ideas. She finds all around her words which grow on her like leaves on a tree as she reveals in "Words." All that she has to do is to choose the right word. Even though she finds words a "nuisance" at times, she admits that "they never seem to stop their coming / From a silence, somewhere deep within" (Only the Soul 36). In "Herons" her woman persona says that when she is on sedatives, words (of her speech) "rise from the still coves of dreams / In unhurried flight like herons" (52).

The sense of urgency in Das's poetry is a factor many a critic has drawn our attention to. Dwivedi, for example, remarks that Das does not seem to know "where to stop in the hurried mood of urgent expression" (128). Devindra Kohli is of the view that the impression of haste and apparently uncontrollable energy given by Das's poems is part of her poetic technique and conscious scrutiny, and not merely the result of her irrepressible and volatile personality as is generally believed to be the case" (57).

Like Rich, Das, too, has tried her hand at prose poems. 'The Blind Walk" is a typical example of such a poem;

The mango leaves are turning brown the wet cat crawls under the parked lorri i walk eastward but the cold poisonous breath of the sea follows me the feeble rain throbs on the citys brow like migraine today i have left my glasses behind this is to be a blind walk this is to symbolize my life i have always had a passion for symbols . . . (73)

It cannot be said that Das's craftsmanship is flawless since a discerning
reader is sure to find how control over language slips out of her hands at times. how single words constitute line after line in her poetry, how repetition of words fail to communicate any significant thing at all and how she sounds theatrical at times. Linda Hess, referring to the major weaknesses in Das's writing, characterizes them as a general carelessness in composition. She speaks about a looseness typified by the alarming number of ellipses, three lazy dots at the end or middle of a line which seems to suggest that "this matter could be elaborated much further, but I lack either the wit or the energy to do it." She refers to Das's frequent use of repetition of words and phrases as a "quick solution to the problem of filling up a line" often at the peril of "intensity and precision." Hess points out that there are "patches of triteness and lapses of balance." No less important is the abrupt manner in which a line comes to an end which is a mistake that occurs too often in Das's poetry according to Hess (Quest 38).

However, Hess is ready to acknowledge the fact that Das is endowed with genuine talent as a poet: "But all those difficulties cannot cloud the fact that a genuine poetic talent is at work here." Merrily Weisbord has referred to the "absolute poetic sense"of Das, and according to her, it is "the beauty of her language" that is most significant about Das's poetry. "Her language is capable of rendering an "exhilarating surprise and revelation" which can be expected only from" a true poet" (Nambiar 11). Weisbord has commented on Das's use of language in her much criticized work, My Story, a fictionalized autobiography, as "sexually discrete" since the device she has used here is to give "hints and suggestions" instead of being explicit. She is of the view that Das uses the English language in such an exquisite manner that it can thrill her readers in a way hardly any writer can; her perception of life is "so fresh and the language she uses is so unexpected and yet just, that often she comes with a kind of jump.
or a burst" (11). The words bear evidence to the fact that Das has been involved in an endeavour to forge the woman’s language which is capable of articulating female reality which the phallocentric language fails to illumine. It is not surprising that Satchidanandan refers to her as another "female Prometheus, one of the thieves of language with a manifesto of desire that seeks to escape the paradox of being a prisoner of the hegemonic patriarchal discourse she despises" (84). In their concern for forging a language of their own, feminists have considered whether a woman’s body can prove to be an effective source of her language. The notion of a female-centred language which would articulate women’s physical experience including somatic love, child birth, and memories of infantile sexuality has been the obsession of feminists who consider language not only as the articulating medium but also as the factor that determines and dispenses power in the social and domestic set ups.

Anais Nin in her endeavour to create a "feminine" literary aesthetic, evolved an approach to writing which she unabashedly related to female reproduction. According to her,

Woman’s creation far from being like man’s must be exactly like her creation of children, that is, it must come out of her blood, englobed by her womb, nourished with her own milk. It must be a human creation of flesh. . . . most women painted and wrote nothing but imitations of phallices . . . and no womb anywhere . . . (qtd. in Spencer, Feminist Criticism 165).

Mary Gentile has pointed out that Rich’s poetry is the prototype of a female-centred "new language":

Rich’s language would evoke women’s experience in all its multiplicity and undeniable immediacy in order to recognize it,
understand it emotionally as well as intellectually, and affirm it simply because it is true and existent for the individual who experiences it . . . This new language and the mode of perception it implies are the aims of her feminism. If I learn to express my experience as a woman in its entirety, in its physicality, in its complexity, without self-censorship, without employing externally imposed categories and evaluations, and with the conviction that my experience is valid, coherent and deserves attention, I will be speaking a new language. (137)

Gentile has even claimed that she experienced Rich's poetry "viscerally, with my body" (142). This declaration, in such forceful terms, clearly brings out the closeness of Rich's language to female physicality. Rich herself has made a similar avowal in referring to her reaction to her first reading of Judy Grahn's poem "A Woman Is Talking to Death." She says that she collapsed with the symptoms of influenza, letting "the knowledge that was accumulating in (her) life, the poem (she) had just read, go on circulating in (her) bloodstream" (OLSS 249).

The imagery used by both the women poets also deserves critical attention. It has been observed about Rich that she "thinks in images" (Ostriker, Writing 111). Vivid and energetic imagery is the hallmark of her poetry. The poet has stated that she is "an instrument in the shape of a woman" and that it is "for the relief of the body and the mind" that she translates "pulsations into images" ("Planetarium" 39). In "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" her woman persona states: "The language is a dialect called metaphor / . . . When I think of a landscape I am thinking of a time. / When I talk of taking a trip I mean forever" (44). Ostriker observes that the images in Rich's poetry are from a very wide
range of reality which includes "astronomy, modern technology, natural history records, movies, historical, contemporary urban scene and domestic setting" in addition to dream and fantasy (Writing 111).

In "Orion" Rich conjures up the image of the constellation which is named after the mythical hunter, as her "fierce half-brother." In "Planetarium" she refers to "galaxies of women" and identifies herself with the remnant of an exploding star, emitting pulses of radio waves: "Heartbeat of the pulsar / heart sweating through my body / . . . I am bombarded yet I stand" (39). In "I Dream I'm the Death of Orpheus" Rich adapts imagery from Jean Cocteau's movie about Orpheus to depict herself as a woman whose animus is the archetypal poet (Gelpi "Poetics" 296). The resurrection of Orpheus is worked out in the dream-poem. The mission of resurrecting the dead poet is accomplished by the young woman in the poem. She has determination, the nerves of a panther and contacts among "Hell's Angels" which help her to fight against all "depersonalizing forces -- psychological, political, sexual -- arrayed against the exercise of her powers" (Gelpi 296). Incidentally, Rich makes it clear that "Hell's Angels" is also the name of a motorcycle club in Oakland which was viewed as something of an outlaw gang. It is significant that Rich has reversed the roles of the Thracian poet and Euridyce in her poem.

In "The Demon Lover" she portrays desire as "the old wine that pours through (her) veins." The eighteenth century heroines with their minds smouldering long after their death are compared to a pyre of driftwood burning on the beach, in "Heroines."

The "midwife" is an image endowed with power and prestige in Rich's poetry. It is the awareness that patriarchal culture denies anything in the nature of dignity to the profession of midwifery that sets Rich on her path to work for
granting recognition to the midwife’s role. Besides, as a person who advocates autogenesis for the betterment of the species, Rich regards the work of the midwife as of supreme importance. In “The Afterwake” she depicts the image of an efficient midwife who has carried out her work and has everything in order by dawn: “bloodstains washed up, teapot on the stove” and she is on her way back to her home five miles away walking all the distance, “the birthyell still / exploding in her head” (ARP 17). In Of Woman Born Rich refers to Athenian midwives of the past who were more than birth-assistants. They gave advice on sexual problems, induced abortions and even prescribed certain drugs (132).

A unique image in Rich is that of the vixen, a symbol of wisdom and resourcefulness as she presents it. This image is seen to recur in her poetry, evolving with the changing phases of her poetic career: “She was an omen / to me, surviving, herding her cubs / . . . in nineteen sixty five” (“Sources” 101). In “5.30 A.M.,” a poem written in 1967, she identifies herself with the vixen, depicting it as something like an alter ego of hers: “the fox, panting, fire-eyed, / gone to earth in my chest” (33). She seems to endow the fox with clarity of vision -- that she can see from her scuffled burrow the truth of her pathetic predicament and “the onrushing killer” who is inanely single-minded to have (their) skins. Probably it is her sense of victimization combined with the survival instinct in the midst of exploitation that makes her explore her kinship with the vixen. “The vixen is wise-looking in a sexy way” (“Abnegation” Poems Selected 109). It is easier for the poet to identify herself with the vixen rather than with the so-called chosen people since the former has “no archives / no heirlooms, no future / except death.” But sixteen years later, Rich looks at the rejuvenated self that she has become and declares that the vixen is now “long dead” since the relevance to a comparison in the patterns of life has ceased to
exist. She is leading a life of her own choices not letting "the inanely single-minded" to have her skin ("5.30 A.M." Poems Selected 107). She finds it more to the point to find some analogy between the vixen's life and the lives of the Jews of Vicksburg or Birmingham who were made to suffer at the hands of the Nazis. The lives of those Jews "must have been strategies, no less / than the vixen's" with her instinct for self-preservation ("Sources" 103).

The "spider" is an image that recurs in the poetry of Rich. Its extraordinary capability to convert its disability into its resource seems to have fascinated the poet. She even finds it easy to establish kinship with the spider:

\[
\text{This is what I am: watching the spider} \\
\text{rebuild} -- "patiently", they say, but I recognize in her} \\
\text{impatience} -- my own -- \\
\text{the passion to make and make again} \\
\text{where such unmaking reigns} \\
\text{the refusal to be a victim} \\
\text{we have lived with violence so long} \quad ("Natural Resources" Dream 64)
\]

The message that women ought to emulate the spider can be read between the lines in "Integrity":

\[
\text{Anger and tenderness: the spider's genius} \\
\text{to spin and weave in the same action} \\
\text{from her own body, anywhere--} \\
\text{even from a broken web} \quad (A \text{ Wild Patience} \ 9).
\]

The realization that anger and tenderness are integral to a woman makes her exhort women to exploit them and route them through proper channels, instead of feeling agitated.
When the spider makes an appearance again in An Atlas of the Difficult World, the message becomes much more clear:

The spider's decision is made, her path cast
... she comes swimming toward me
... she will use everything,
nothing comes without labour, she is working so hard...

But how do I know what she needs? Maybe simply
to spin herself a house within a house, on her own terms
in cold, in silence  (147)

The marvellous ability of the spider to spin and weave in the same action from its own body is what makes it noteworthy for Rich. It is in fact the same idea of weaving that underlies images of women creating beautiful quilts out of fragments of fabric and experience. In "From an Old House," there is an image from quilt-making where she depicts women who are resourceful enough to survive and who manifest their potential to be creative even under strenuous conditions of life: "she with her down quilt sewn through iron nights." In "Sibling Mysteries" there is a reference to "piecing our lore in quilted galaxies." In "Natural Resources" there is a detailed process of synthesizing all those humble things of the past saved and cherished by women -- "these ribboned letters, snapshots ... these scraps turned into patchwork." The image of the kente-cloth, plaid-like African cloth with interwoven bands of colour, usually red, black, green and gold which is compared to knowledge arranged in patterns occurs in "Sources". There is awareness of the despised and the endangered as of being a connective link in a long, continuous way of ordering hunger, weather,
death, desire and the proximity of chaos. In "North American Time" it is the image of braiding the hair, yet another type of weaving that is delineated: "a woman braiding another woman's hair"--"straight down, or with beads and shells / in three-strand plaits or corn-rows" (116).

Being a feminist poet, the female body, instead of being taboo, is a source of imagery to her. In "Culture and Anarchy" she introduces the domestic details of the gathering and slicing of beetroots, thus depicting the realm of women's experience in their everyday life using body imagery:

While you go down the garden to pick chard
while the strength is in the leaves
crimson stems veining upward into green

I slice the beetroots to the core,
each one contains a different landscape
of bloodlight filaments, distinct rose-purple
striations like the oldest
strata of a southwest canyon
an undiscovered planet laid open in the lens (A Wild Patience 15).

According to critics, the lens suggests more than life of the traditional woman's world of chores; there are clear connotations of sex in the perception of beauty of "the crimson stems veining upwards into green" and in associating their colour with the rock of the Arizona canyons inhabited by the lost pre-Columbian civilizations. The rose-purple striations become metonyms of an essential female bedrock, their crimson vulval circles being miniature representations of the planet's core laid open to the lens of the poet's vision (Montefiore 88-89).

The geological metaphor of the "red rock" is an essentialist metaphor of
identity of women from which all the lived differences of women's experiences and choices have disappeared. It is a symbol of femaleness representing "the many lived, unending forms in which she finds herself" as it makes its appearance again in "Transcendental Etude": "the stone foundation, rockshelf further / forming underneath everything that grows" (90).

It is quite remarkable that "the new woman" projected by Rich in "Snapshots" is shown to be "at least as beautiful as any boy / or helicopter" (12). Through suggestions, she makes it clear that this new heroine is poised and has intellectual capabilities. Undoubtedly such an image is designed to subvert the traditional images of women describing their physical attributes in detail.

In spite of the wide range of her images, the primary subject of Rich is herself battling "the beak that grips" her. According to Ostriker it signifies, her fighting with the male culture against their denial of her identity. Rich's language functions at a plane where her life coincides with the lives of others (Writing 111). Even though she presents one of her characters as "the thinking woman" who "battles the beak that grips her" and "sleeps with monsters," on reading those lines we are touched to the quick and realize with clarity that it is her own predicament in the contemporary set up that is communicated through the lines. She carries out her long drawn out struggle with patriarchy against subjugation wielding her powerful weapon, words.

In this respect Rich bears striking similarity to Das. It has been asserted that the subject matter of Das is her "personality: beautiful, sensitive, bold and tormented" (Kohli 21-22). Her poetry is marked by vivid and picturesque imagery which is original in nature. In "The Lunatic Asylum" the unshaded bulb is said to be "shaped like a teardrop"; in "The Blood" the blood that flows through the veins of the poor and the new rich is said to be "thick as gruel and muddy as a
ditch"; in the same poem the woman persona refers to the plucking of her great grandmother's soul "like a pip from a fruit"; in "After the Party" the woman persona who is a celibate by choice enters the party and finds "all men dark and sleek like drones, and women parakeets"; in the same poem she describes a smile blazing rudely "like alphabets on the kindergarten's blackboard tucked neatly away in memory"; in "Woman Without Her Shadow" each waiter who serves in the South Indian cafes is said to look "like another Jiddoo Krishnamurthy"; in "A Requiem for My Father" the doctors who did the lumbar puncture on the poet's dying father are said to have folded him "Like a canvas chair"; in "Composition" the woman persona speaks about freedom "as (her) dancing shoe"; and in "Smoke in Colombo" there is reference to the smoke which lingers on "as milk lingers on in udders after the calves are buried" and also "as grief lingers on within women rocking emptied cradles."

In "The Millionaires at Marine Drive" there is reference to "yellow"ing and "sicken"ing "like the leaves on trees" "in autumn years." The correspondence between words and leaves is emphasized in "Words." Words are said to grow on the speaking subject like leaves on a tree. Though this is the prime image there are other images used in this poem to show what words can be. They are "a chasm where running feet must pause, to look," "a sea with paralysing waves," "a blast of burning air." They can even be "a knife most willing to cut your best friend's throat." In "Ferns" Das uses a striking image of "words falling thudding down like dismembered heads."

In "Composition" she refers to "a skin yellowed like antique paper." In "The Freaks" the male lover's mouth is said to be "a dark cavern where stalactites of uneven teeth gleam." In "Summer in Calcutta" Das depicts desire as "the noble venom that flows through her veins" an image that comes close to Rich's
"old wine that pours through her veins." In "Convicts" Das refers to it as "a burning in her veins." In "A Journey with No Return," "Desire swims as a dolphin does in the rivers of my blood tonight." In "Ethics" she uses the image of "the hungers of blood unfolding like petals." In "White Man with Whiter Legs" there is the picturesque image of "folding up lust neatly like a wedding gown" and putting it away in old age. In "Composition" she refers to gathering morals in life in the following words: "picking them like wild flowers on my way." In "The Millionaires at Marine Drive" she wonders whether her grandmother was buried "bones and all, in the loose red soil of her heart." In "Jaisurya" she refers to the spreading of the lush moss on every weeping tree during the rains as eczema. In this poem "the first tinge of blood" in labour is compared to "another dawn breaking." The appearance of the baby in child birth is said to be as "a streak of light thrust / into the fading light." In "Glass" she refers to the rudeness of a lover's haste breaking her into "an armful of splinters." In the same poem the woman persona is a stringed musical instrument on whom the strumming fingers (of others) may revive fond melodies of a past. In "Gino" the male lover in an extra-marital relationship is "fair conqueror of another's country." She refers to riding "the great white steed" of happiness in this poem. In "My Grandmother's House" the illicit love affairs of the persona are described as begging "at strangers' doors / to receive love, at least in small change." The abandoning of the body to death is depicted as giving ourselves "as child to mother's arms" in "The Descendants." In "Radha-Krishna" the souls of the archetypal lovers are said to hang like bats from the pure physicality of an old kadamba tree. K. Radha points out that several of the images used by Das are surrealistic in nature (27). Images such as "the house . . . crouching on its elbows" ("Blood"), "the windows whine and groan" ("Blood"), some hell-fire had
clasped / you to its bosom for a while" ("Woman without her Shadow") and "the pond / lays on me its cold unbleached shroud" ("No Noon at My Village Home") are strikingly original.

The poem "The Knight" written by Rich, in a way, reflects the attitude of feminists in general to patriarchy. The archetypal image of the knight is a patriarchal construct. The medieval knight errant was supposed to be the epitome of chivalry and gallantry. However Rich projects a harsh realistic view of the knight, shorn of all the illusions which the moonlight would have invested him with. "A thousand splintered suns / are the gaiety of his mail" and it is "under his crackling banner" that he rides like a ship in sail. Beneath the metallic armour, rags and tatters are betrayed and under the radiant helmet his nerves are worn to ribbons. It is not likely that anyone can have any admiration for this knight who symbolizes patriarchy. It is feelings of contempt that this pathetic figure is likely to evoke in the minds of readers. The poet suggests that the knight is dated and has no relevance in contemporary life situation. He is a half-dead figure already: "only his eye is living / a lump of bitter jelly / set in a metal mask." Rich predicts that defeat awaits him; but if he is unhorsed, it will mean a kind of release for him too, from between the walls of iron which are crushing his chest with their heaviness. The poem even expresses concern for the knight-in-distress: "Will they defeat him gently?" The impending collapse of the patriarchy is envisaged by the poet through the depiction of the knight. It is clear that what strikes the keynote of the central images of Rich and Das is the overpowering of patriarchal traditions.