

Power for Women Poems of Adrienne Cecile Rich

Selvalakshmi. S. and Dr. Girija Rajaram

=====
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 13:6 June 2013**
=====

Adrienne Cecile Rich and Her Works



Adrienne Cecile Rich
Courtesy: www.poetryfoundation.org

Adrienne Cecile Rich (May 16, 1929 – March 27, 2012) was an American poet, essayist and feminist. Prominently, Adrienne Rich is the one out of hundreds of woman straining for justice. She was called "one of the most widely read and influential poets of the second half of the 20th century", and was credited with bringing "the oppression of women and lesbians to the forefront of poetic discourse."

Adrienne's first collection of poetry, *A Change of World*, was selected by the senior poet W. H. Auden for the Yale Series of Younger Poets Award; she went on to write the introduction to the published volume. Rich famously declined the National

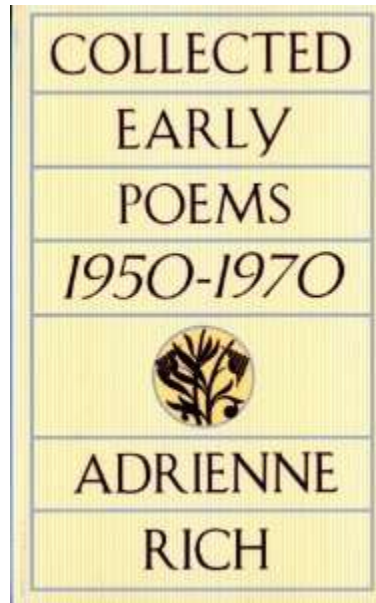
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 13:6 June 2013**

Selvalakshmi. S. and Dr. Girija Rajaram

Power for Women - Poems of Adrienne Cecile Rich

Medal of Arts, protesting the United States House of Representatives and Speaker Gingrich's vote to end funding for the National Endowment for the Arts.

A New Definition for Woman



Rich gradually forges a new definition for woman's power in her poetry. In Patriarchal systems, public forms of power are taboo for women. Therefore, only the most extraordinary woman breaks through the "male monopoly of formal overt power".

Adrienne Rich is a major figure in the recent history of American poetry and a frequent contributor to the magazine *The Nation*. In addition to twenty-two poems she had contributed fifty years for writing. She had written essays and reviewed for magazine; a remark in her review is on John Berryman's *77 Dream songs* could serve as self-analysis "One is conscious, as in few other poets, of a steely thread of strength running through the dislocation and the ruin".

***Translations and Song* – Speaker of the Poem**

In the poems "Translations" and "Song", Rich pictures the real condition of women in the patriarchal society. She is the speaker in the poems. In "Translations" she

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:6 June 2013

Selvalakshmi. S. and Dr. Girija Rajaram

Power for Women - Poems of Adrienne Cecile Rich

talks about the pitiable condition of woman who suffers mentally because of her husband. In “Song” she discusses about the loneliness of a woman. When both the women are compared there is lot of difference. The first one suffers till the end but the second comes out of the suffering and becomes the role model to all the women of the world.

In the poem “Translations” the author asks to the world to show a woman of her age or a younger person. She will be able to identify the woman easily with words like “enemy, oven, sorrow” which is enough for her to confirm that she is woman of her time. All the human beings will eagerly look from someone to show love on them. Woman may face lot of disturbance because of the extent love showed on her. The love makes her a slave to the society.

Woman in the Male-Dominated Society

Rich explains the wretched condition of a woman in the male dominated society as,

“We’ve trained it like ivy to our walls
baked it like bread in our ovens
worn it like lead on our ankles
watched it through binoculars as if
it were a helicopter
bringing food to our famine
or the satellite
of a hostile power.(Translations)

Rich says woman of her sort used to do all the household duties like stirring rice, ironing a skirt and typing a manuscript till dawn. All these works are considered as the works of a woman which is meant only for her. Woman’s good heart doesn’t think that she has been cheated with full of love and care for her family she practices to do all the heavy works.

Life as Making a Phone Call

The author describes the life of working woman by her realistic words, “trying to make a call from a phone booth”, she is making the call to her husband but her pathetic condition under the male dominated society is pictured very well by Rich,

The phone rings endlessly
in a man’s bedroom
She hears him telling someone else
Never mind. She’ll get tired. (Translations)

A lovable woman who thinks about her husband is broken into pieces by these words. Woman won’t consider another woman as her enemy but she thinks another woman as an enemy because of a man. The poet says the woman’s life is put into sorrow only because of her innocence she must have fought for her rights like a strong pillar. Rich brings a different view in the poem “Song” in overcoming loneliness and with that she informs how strong a woman wants to be in patriarchal society.

Song – Loneliness on a Daily Basis

The poem “Song” reflects out suffering of woman out of loneliness and the poem is about the personal experience of Rich. She experiences the loneliness on a daily basis, but she does not see their loneliness as a negative in her. She accepts the loneliness which she is undergoing and compares it with airplane, flying across the rocks. The image of a plane is used because it will ride lonely in an empty airspace with nothing in sight for miles except for a rocky mountains.

Loneliness of an Inanimate Object

Adrienne compares her loneliness with an object rather than another person or even with an animal that actually has feelings. The image of an inanimate object to explain loneliness works well in the readers’ mind. The author declares so many people

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:6 June 2013

Selvalakshmi. S. and Dr. Girija Rajaram

Power for Women - Poems of Adrienne Cecile Rich

in the world become like a rocky mountain. She uses the situation to bring out the positive attitude within her. She says the plane might feel isolated and alone in the sky, but its mission combined with the magical atmosphere marks its incredible journey. The poet wants all the women must be firm in reaching their destination. They should not give up at any cost.

Psychic Horizon

The most powerful words of the poet are scattered right through the poem which establishes a psychic horizon in which the tone manages to be both conversational and oracular; in which the reader can feel solitary and communal by these lines,

You want to ask, am I lonely?
Well, of course, lonely
as a woman driving across country
day after day, leaving behind
mile after mile
little towns she might have stopped
and lived and died in, lonely(Song)

An Exclusive Feminine Point of View – A Universal Womanhood

In speaking of an exclusive feminine point of view, the author promotes the idea of a universal womanhood cutting across all barriers of age, income, class, race and other divisive factors. The poet being the feminist tries to picture the woman strongly. She uses the image of a woman; she is across the country as a measure of her loneliness to a human who is driven out of the country. The woman is stopping in town on the way but she is not staying long enough to get to know people or meet friends. Instead, she sees different things every day and meets new people. This presents a powerful image of the author's loneliness. The woman is still continuing her journey to reach the target. These places represent decisions she could have made, but have forgone in order to search for better things, perhaps see the world.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:6 June 2013

Selvalakshmi. S. and Dr. Girija Rajaram

Power for Women - Poems of Adrienne Cecile Rich

Lonely – All Alone in the City

The writer explores a person being the only one in a house or in an entire city that is awake. The 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 (Song)

There is obvious loneliness shown these lines. The author is completely alone while all are sleeping in the house. Most humans generally need to interact with other humans in order to exist here the poet feels very lonely because there is no one to communicate with her. The poet provides images that explored and pointed out her loneliness in the first three stanzas. She brings an empowered woman in her last stanza.

Change of Tone

In the fourth and final stanza, the poet changes her tone. The theme is the same; it is about her loneliness, having lost her husband. In the fourth stanza the poet uses images like rowboat and burning wood which shows more of a sense of power rather than loneliness, by the lines,

If I'm lonely
its with the rowboat ice-fast on the shore
in the last red light of the year
that knows what it is, that knows it's neither
ice nor mud nor winter light
but wood, with a gift for burning (Song)

Viewing Loneliness in a Positive Way

The author proves herself by seeing her loneliness in positive way. She is beginning to be empowered. The images of a rowboat rowing quickly along the shore, and wood burning are the images of power finally show she is ready to face the loneliness. The poet's loneliness was still there but isn't lost and she begins to start her life and feel better after her loss. The poet makes the poem to have a positive end.

To Conclude – Two Kinds of Woman in the Same Person

In these two poems “Translations” and “Song”, the poet brings both kinds of woman. The first poem pictures how a woman can be exploited in many ways at home and also in the public. The second poem pictures the same woman can be powerful to overcome the hurdles and to be an empowered. It is appreciable to notice the same writer, Adrienne Rich, picturing a woman who is not only exploited at home but also in the society. At the same time she is skillful in picturing a woman who is more powerful to face the world. When a woman realizes her power she will do tremendous things.

Adrienne Rich wants the entire woman in the world to be an empowered woman by her own will power. When an empowered woman is broken down into pieces due to critical situations she can rebuild her from the same pieces and she could face the world stronger than ever. Thus, Adrienne makes herself as an example to all women calling upon them to self-empower themselves.

References

1. <http://group4en190.blogspot.in/2005/10/readers-journal-5-song-by-adrienne.html>
2. <http://www.thenation.com/article/167113/five-poems-adrienne-rich>
3. <http://www.emhschargers.org/uploads/writing%20Process%20key.pdf>
4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adrienne_Rich

Selvalakshmi. S.
Research Scholar

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 13:6 June 2013

Selvalakshmi. S. and Dr. Girija Rajaram

Power for Women - Poems of Adrienne Cecile Rich

Department of English
Karpagam University
Coimbatore-641021
Tamilnadu
India
Selva.lakshmi85@gmail.com

Dr. Girija Rajaram
Principal
K.G. Arts and Science College
Coimbatore-641021
Tamilnadu
India
principal@kgcas.com