

# An Exploration of feminine traumatic mind in Rupi Kaur's *milk and honey*

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**Abstract :** Words have the power to hurt as well as heal people. It is very apt to record that the poetic words of Rupi Kaur have been serving as a perfect healer for perfectly broken hearts. Rupi Kaur is an Indian – Canadian poet who is known for dealing with the controversial and emotional subject. Her poetry collection *milk and honey* (2014) is intended for a specific group of audience – women who were abused physically, mentally and emotionally. This poetry collection is innovative in its form too, as one can witness poetry, prose and even hand-drawn illustrations. This research paper delves deeper into the often unexpressed and concealed feminine feelings and emotions with special reference to Rupi Kaur's *milk and honey*.

**IndexTerms –** poetry, abused, feminine feelings and emotions.

"Insta- poet Rupi Kaur is at the forefront of a movement embodying short, raw verse, with arbitrary line- breaks and quick, often gut- punch-packing compositions" (Bakshi 1).

Rupi Kaur is a South Asian writer who was born in Punjab and brought up in Canada. She is well known for her poetry which is often used to challenge societal taboos. She is known for her photo-essay work on menstruation, which was designed as visual poetry. She inspires readers with her evocative and insightful words. Her themes as well as her way of presentation have paved way for her poetic work's success.

The most common feature of all the South Asian writers is that they often deal with a controversial or emotional subject- matters. True to that Rupi Kaur also has a unique ability to calmly discuss the issues that hit like a storm in a traditional society. With much courage and strong heart, she pens down the often silenced problems faced by young girls and teenagers. The works of Rupi Kaur were primarily influenced by her own experience. She is an expert in translating her suppressed emotions in the form of poetic words and pictures. Through this process, she transports those unexpressed emotions into a universal medium that can influence a wider audience.

Kaur is least bothered about the criticism about her works. As she firmly believes that writing is an art that is often undervalued. Kaur is so lucky to receive an array of praise as well as criticism for her literary works, still, her dedication to continuing writing is applaudable. Her works create a huge impact on the minds of young girls and also encourages those with broken hearts to speak up boldly about their problems. This small change in individuals can create a new society.

She has created a unique place in the literary arena solely because of her unconventional way of expressing her thoughts about taboo subjects. She grew up in a very traditional Punjabi family which do not gift her the freedom to explore the world according to her wish. As she says in one of the interviews, "At home, my parents would tell me not to go out in the sun because I'd become dark" (Bakshi 2). This situation is quite common for every Indian girl; every parent would have their fear of sending a girl out in the society alone. They firmly believe that their girls would be safe at home or with their relatives than with unknown people. Kaur has broken down that notion through her poems in *milk and honey*. Danger waits for women everywhere unless she speaks up for herself it never ceases.

*milk and honey* (2014) is the first book of Rupri Kaur. It sold over 1.4 million copies and was number 3 in the New York's Times bestseller's list. The book is filled with poetry, prose and even hand-drawn illustrations. The book is divided into four chapters as follows – *the hurting*, *the loving*, *the breaking* and *the healing*. Each poem occupies a single page, some of the poems accompany with illustrations, and some poems have a title that too at the end of the poem while other poems do not even have a title. Each chapter serves a different purpose and with different pain and heals a different heartache.

The first section of the poetry collection is named as "the hurting" and this part presents various mental and physical traumatic incidents experienced by women. Kaur makes it very clear that women are not safe anywhere in this world except one's mother's womb. Once the child comes out of its mother's womb, there is danger everywhere. The following poetic words prove it.

our knees  
 pried open  
 by cousins  
 and uncles  
 and men  
 our bodies touched  
 by all the wrong people  
 that even in a bed full of safety  
 we are afraid (33)

Women are always silenced by men in the family and then it continues in the workplace and in public places too. Kaur mentions about her mother being silenced by her father constantly. Men always play a major role in dominating women. All these conditioned beliefs by society have conquered the minds of men.

when my mother opens her mouth  
 to have a conversation at dinner  
 my father shoves the word hush  
 between her lips and tells her to

never speak with her mouth full  
 this is how the women in my family  
 learned to live with their mouths closed (32)

The second section is given the title "the loving" which includes the love experience of the speaker with her boyfriend. This section deals with love, lust, sex and the other joys of a relationship. The cute, little and silent moments spent with each other are expressed through words. She expresses that he either brightens up her life or darkens it – "it either lights me up or leaves me aching for days" (62). The intensity of the speaker's love for the other person is well expressed with supporting pictures too. The poet has expressed that even the voice and smell of the person lingers in the speaker's mind constantly. It even acts as a kind of drug. This idea is similar to Edward Cullen's words in Stephenie Meyer's novel *Twilight*, "Your scent is like a drug to me, Like my own personal brand of heroin" (Meyer 79). The concept of self-love is also introduced in this section.

i am learning  
 how to love him  
 by loving myself (50)

The third section is titled as "the breaking" – over pleasure leads to over sadness. The poems in this section are filled with grief, pain, loss and deprivation. The speaker elaborates on her heartache because of his sudden disappearance from her life. The speaker explicitly pens down the state of being empty:

you give and give till  
 they pull everything out of you  
 and leave you empty (100)

She clearly states that she had lost him forever, but there is some kind of blind hope within her that he would return someday, but ultimately everything ends up in fiasco- "I'm hopelessly a lover and a dreamer and that will be the death of me" (75). She brings out the pangs of being alone without her loved one :

that's the  
 thing about love  
 it marinates your lips  
 till the only word your  
 mouth remembers  
 is his name (87)

Again the concept of self – love is introduced here which states that you are deserved to be loved by yourself than by strangers.

i stopped loving you  
 i left because of the longer

i stayed the less  
i loved myself (89)

All the poems under this section make one understand the loss of loved one and how the individual suffers in her ailing for a long period with the memories and, finally concludes that self-love is the best gift one can give to oneself to cure completely. The section ends with 16 tips to overcome a broken heart.

"The healing" is the final chapter of this poetry collection. Healing is an inevitable process which allows one to reclaim one's power back. It allows us to fit the broken pieces back together in such a way one can be stronger than ever before. Rup Kaur is here focused on mental and emotional healing. She begins with a strong affirmation that she does not want the pain to hold her longer and destroy her into pieces again. As she begins the section with these poetic lines: "do not bother holding on to that thing that does not want you" (142).

The idea of self-love reverberates in the final session of the poetry collection too. The speaker makes a strong impact on the minds of the readers that individual must stop craving for love from others, instead, they must provide themselves with the required love to themselves.

you must enter a relationship  
with yourself  
before anyone else (143)

She concludes with the idea that feeling the pain is the part of human experience and to take necessary steps to heal it is very much needed for human survival. The word "loneliness" is given a new definition here, "loneliness is a sign you are in desperate need of yourself" (146). She gives courage to the readers to rise above the problems.

if you were born with  
the weakness to fall  
you were born with  
the strength to rise. (149)

This poetry collection explores the bitterest experiences in a girl's life. Kaur's poems are autobiographical to a certain extend. She has brought out the painful emotional trauma of other girls whom she knows very personally. Therefore, Rup Kaur is bringing out the collective traumatic experience of women and thereby being a representative for them. Human emotions are not to be played with if it is done so the consequences are very dangerous because it takes time to be healed completely from a broken heart. Kaur's poetic lines trace the evolution of heartache in this poetry collection and make the readers understand that at the end of every single pleasure, pain awaits.

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