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FEMINISTIC VIEWS IN SELECT POEMS OF RUPI KAUR

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Feminism is a range of political movements, ideologies and social movements that share a common goal which is to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal, and social equality of sexes. This includes seeking to establish educational and professional opportunities for women that are equal to those for men. Feminist psychologist, Jean Baker Miller states, "There was nothing wrong with women, but rather with the way modern culture viewed them". Gynocriticism put forward by Elaine Showalter is a form of feminist criticism which restricts itself to the study of women's writings and the writings related to female experience.

Rupi Kaur is a famous Indian Canadian poet known for her short poems on feminism and love. She is a poet, writer, illustrator, performer and an active feminist. She is well known for her first published book, *Milk and Honey* which is a collection of eloquently written poems and drawings. When Kaur was posted the question, "What is the greatest lesson a woman should learn?" by a reporter at the Zee Jaipur Literature Festival she remarked, "That since day one, she is already had everything she needs within herself. It is the world that convinced her she did not." Rupi Kaur was raised as an immigrant from India in Canada. She has experienced the cruelty of the male dominated society. Kaur effectively brings out these struggles in her poems where she advocates for the equality of women and projects the strong qualities of women.

The book *Milk and Honey* was published in 2014 and was one of the Bestselling books in America. It contains different images which are illustrated by the author. Each picture is associated with a poem. The title *Milk and Honey* shows the quality of women, where the author describes women to be "as smooth as milk and as thick as honey".

In the poem titled *You Are More Than Beautiful*, RupiKaur brings out the purest form of feminism where she highlights the strength of women and calls her to be resilient and extraordinary.

"I want to apologize to all the woman
I have called pretty
Before I have called them intelligent or brave" (1-3)

Rupi Kaur brings out the stigma surrounding women, ever since the dawn of time, where they are praised only for their physical appearances. Women are called to be pretty, elegant and beautiful but not as intelligent or brave. Women are not always appreciated for their mental power and the noble qualities they possess. Rupi Kaur brings out the innate nature of women where they should be proud of their spirit which can crush mountains. The lines reflect the very nature of the society where women are always contemplated for their physical appearances.

"From now on I will say things like, you are resilient
Or, you are extraordinary,
Not because I don't think you are pretty
But because you are so much more than that." (8-11)

Rupi Kaur offers a brilliant outlook into the purest form of feminism by carefully and consistently calling women to be resilient and extraordinary. By doing so Rupi Kaur beautifully portrays the fact that being pretty is good but being strong enough to do anything is much better than just being pretty. The

lines bring out the typical quality of women who is strong and extraordinary in nature but those qualities neither have any significance nor are they noted by the patriarchal society. In the poem titled *Freedom of Speech*,

"You tell me to quiet down cause
My opinions make me less beautiful
But I was not made with a fire in my belly
So I could be put out"(1-4)

The lines show the patriarchal nature of the society where women are often asked to be quiet in all occasions since her opinions are considered to be insignificant. Rupi Kaur portrays the belief of the society where women are advised to be quiet and to be always dependent on others. In a society where women are oppressed their opinions are considered to be insignificant and they are always silenced. Rupi Kaur brings out equality of women by saying that women are not made of fire which can be put out. Women are not fragile to remain insignificant. The importance of the physical beauty of a woman can be seen in these lines since a woman's opinion would make her look less beautiful and so her ideas are always unidentified.

"I was made heavy
Half blade and half silk
Difficult to forget but
Not easy for the mind to follow" (7-10)

Chaman Nahal, a popular feminist critic, interprets feminism "as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome." Rupi Kaur stresses on the same fact asking the women never to compromise themselves. Kaur states that women should be independent as they are sharp like a blade and soft like a silk. Women must not be submissive, they must learn to voice out their opinions. The lines compliment the mental prowess of the women who remain strong in spite of the society that continues to oppress them. Rupi Kaur encourages young women to be bold enough so that they can voice out their opinions, no matter how hard the society tries to suppress them. In the poem titled *Being Positive*,

"The world
Gives you
So much pain
And here you are
Making gold out of it
There is nothing purer than that" (1-6)

The lines portray the amount of pain a woman undergoes in the society where she always suffers for one thing or another. But the quality of women is so pure that she makes success from the pain she undergoes. The lines "making gold out of it" shows the humble nature of women who does not retreat in a harsh manner but who simply turns her pains into success in a silent manner. These lines break the negative associations regarding "feminism" because they portray the pure nature of women who do not inflict pain upon anyone. In the poem titled *Be Water*,

"I am water
Soft enough
To offer life
Tough enough
To drown it away" (1-5)

Rupi Kaur metaphorically compares women with water and emphasizes the fact that women can make a heaven out of hell or vice versa. Rupi Kaur makes the comparison of women with water to show the important role a woman plays in the lives of the people she knows in a similar manner like water, which is essential for all the living things. Rupi Kaur portrays the mental strength of women who can be full of patience to give life and at the same time furious enough to take the life away. Through these lines, Rupi Kaur succeeds in creating the importance of the mental strength of women separating the notion of a woman from any racial, cultural or ethnic differences within the world where she is meant to be physically beautiful.

"If you were born with

The weakness to fall
You were born with
The strength to rise" (1-4)

In the short poem, RupiKaur offers an insight to young women who are often suppressed by the patriarchal society. The poet projects the notion of perseverance where she advocates towards the young women to recognize their own strength. The lines portray the make belief attitude of women where they consider themselves to be weak. Rupi Kaur breaks the idea by stating that if a woman is born with the weakness to fall, she is born with the strength to rise. The poet stresses on the fact that no matter how many times a woman fails in her attempts to be successful and constantly keeps falling down, she has the will power to rise and fight back for her success in order to achieve it.

Rupi Kaur talks about equality of women in her poems where she says that nothing can suppress women. She brings out the strong characteristics of women and talks about the society which had oppressed them for so long. Her poems are mostly written in first point narrative where the author voices out her opinions directly to the readers. Rupi Kaur's poem strongly criticize the patriarchal society where women are let down in all instances. Reading Rupi Kaur's poems readers can understand the extraordinary nature of women who can make history. Hallie Sebastian has stated, "Rupi Kaur delivers a women positive message in a completely unapologetic and empowering manner. It showed me the power of art and quality feminist literature."

Rupi Kaur's works are mainly about feminism, equality of women and women empowerment. Rupi Kaur says that her inspiration for equality of women was from the words of her father who often said to her, "Women like you can drown oceans." Rupi Kaur employs various similes and metaphors to portray the extraordinary quality of women. An article in the affinity magazine stated "Rupi Kaur is setting an example and paving the road for young outspoken women, allowing them to feel confident and empowered by their life experiences and ultimately, being a woman." Her poems are the evidence of women who can rise out of the dust like air since she is phenomenal in nature.

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