

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A.1 Background of the Research

Poetry is one of the oldest literary works from a long time ago (Suaidah et al., 2022). Poetry emphasizes the beauty of language and rhythm, such as sound and symbolism to make a deeper meaning from literal text (Baldick, 2015). Poetry reflects the complexity of human experiences and emotions, including themes such as nature, love, religion, identity, social injustice, trauma, emotional healing, and personal growth. Among these, the theme of womanhood is often explored to reflect the lived experiences of women and how they face and overcome personal and social challenges.

Despite living as diasporic in Canada, women continue to face various forms of violence and oppression, particularly within patriarchal societies, where gender inequality, sexual objectification, and silencing of women's voices remain persistent (Hundal, 2024). According to Sajeev (2014), literature is used as the most honest medium for women to express themselves. Women consider literature as the art form that relates to women's experiences. Literature which created by feminine spirits helps to create gender equality within culture, to build a new social order based on humanistic value. This theme is frequently expressed through figurative language such as symbolic imagery, metaphors, and personifications reflecting women's voices, their inner strength, emotional resilience, and their resistance to oppression.

Poetry as a form of personal expression has evolved into a tool for social resistance and a medium through which women express about themselves as they are (Taringan, 2021). In this context, it is important to note that a work of literature is not created in a vacuum. A literary work is produced within the author's imagination that reflects their society and representation of their life (Zimmerman & Goldman, 2013). Societal norms and values, historical events, and cultural perspectives serve as influential components that both the author and readers contribute to the interpretations (Xiaofei, 2023).

One of the prominent figures of this was Rupi Kaur, whose poetry illustrates how suffering can be transformed into strength, which was influenced by her socio-cultural experiences. Rupi Kaur is Indian-Canadian contemporary female poet and illustrator. She was born in Punjab, India in 1992 and four years later moved to Canada. Her family relocation was part of a larger migration of Sikhs due to historical tension in Punjab, including Sikh persecution by the Indian government in the 1980s.

The Sikh community in Canada is one of the largest diaspora groups in the country (Nahak, 2022), with a history of migration dating back to the early 20th century. However, this migration brought with it strong cultural values and traditions, including caste and patriarchal social structures (Jacobsh 2021, Singh 2024). Although Sikh teachings, as introduced by Guru Nanak Dev Ji, emphasize the principle of egalitarianism which asserts that all human beings hold equal status, the social reality within Sikh communities, including the diaspora, still

reflects persistent gender inequalities in practice. This condition has given rise to initiatives, which seeks to reclaim the meaning of “Kaur” as a symbol of women's autonomy and liberation.

In this context, with the background of Singh-Punjabi and diasporic women, Kaur expresses her thoughts on conflicting patriarchal culture, feminism, identity, love, and self-acceptance through poetry. Through her first book, *Milk and Honey*, Rupi Kaur describes how her verses become a conduit for the expression of pain, women's resistance, resilience, and a longing for healing.

Milk and Honey is a poetry and prose collection that addresses themes about trauma, healing, love, loss, and femininity (Kaur, 2015). This poem is about a person's journey from the hurting to the healing phase after much oppression from society. The poetry has four parts: *The Hurting*, *The Loving*, *The Breaking*, and *The Healing*. Kaur minimalist style, combined with deeply personal and empowering content, resonates with a wide audience, particularly women navigating issues of violence, love, identity, and recovery.

In conducting the research, researcher utilize various types of researches that can provide fundamental inspiration. One of the previous studies is by Siva et al. (2023) which conducted research entitled “*Unravelling Milk and Honey: Women Voice, Patriarchy, and Sexuality*”. This article analyses *Milk and Honey* through the lens of feminist literary criticism, focusing on themes of patriarchy, women's sexuality, and resistance. *Milk and Honey* serves as a critique of patriarchal oppression, illustrating how women navigate and resist inequality. Through this

poetry, Kaur empowers women to reclaim their voices, bodies, and sexuality by challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for gender inequality.

The second research is done by Almas et al. (2021) entitled "*Milk and Honey: Kaur's Poetic Cure*". This article examines Rupi Kaur's poetry collection using Judith Herman's trauma theory, as outlined in trauma and recovery. This study examines how the confessional language that Kaur used in her poetry can reflect the stage of trauma recovery of Judith Herman. This research emphasizes how trauma survivors are often silenced, especially in Indian culture, leading them to a feeling of worthlessness. Kaur challenges this by expressing suffering, and validating survivor's experiences by confronting repressed emotions. "The Healing" part of the poem also highlights resilience and restoring trust in the community and offering other survivors hope and solidarity.

The third article is entitled *The Body of Woman and Woman's Right as Portrayed in Rupi Kaur's Milk and Honey Based on Elaine Showalter's Gynocriticism* by Priska Tarigan et al. (2020). Gynocriticism is a form of feminist literary criticism that focuses on women as writers. Women writers are increasingly free to choose the themes of their writing (Tarigan et al., 2020). The writing is no more about the tool to fight against men anymore, but to explain or talk about women as they are. This study finds that the body of a woman in *Milk and Honey* is portrayed in three ways: as an object, as the owner of the body, and as a strong body. Priska also concludes that the poet suggests self-acceptance, self-love, and supposed women to embrace and accept themselves as they are. This research indicates that the

poetry of *Milk and Honey* not only represents the female body in various ways; as the object, the owner, and strength of the body, but also contains elements of healing.

The other one is a dissertation done by Valerio Guido Masini (2019) about *Rupi Kaur's Poetry: Trauma and Healing*. This research examines how Kaur's poetry *Milk and Honey* and *The Sun and Her Flowers* turns personal life experiences such as traumatic memories, into a healing journey, which the readers can relate to and follow. This poetry has inspirational power to people who struggling to be heard, and an encouragement to fight discrimination and build resilience.

While the previous studies on *Milk and Honey* focus on feminist theory and trauma studies, few have explored the deeper social structure embedded within the text. The previous studies inspired researcher to fill the gap by using Lucien Goldman's genetic structuralism. Genetic structuralism is a method of literary analysis that explores literary work's historical context by looking at its internal structure and its external elements. According to Goldman (1980), a literary work cannot be separated from its socio-historical, this is where the sociality and communicability of the text are found. To ignore this is to ignore the text as a praxis. This theory expresses the *worldview* of a particular social group and how its structure reflects the socio-historical reality of that group.

In the context of *Milk and Honey*, the poetic structure not only reveals an individual's experiences of wounds and trauma, but also as part of a transindividual

narrative that reflects and strengthens the broader collective struggle for resistance, gender justice, and empowerment within the Sikh diaspora.

Thus, *Milk and Honey* becomes more than a personal confession, but a literary space for healing as individual and collective, textual and social. While many critics consider contemporary poetry, especially Instagram poetry, which is Rupi Kaur's early form of poetry, as artless and merely an expression of personal emotions, this study argues otherwise.

Through the lens of genetic structuralism, this study analyzed the structure of the text in the form of figurative language, as well as found the author's worldview embedded in the poetic expression of *Milk and Honey*, linking them to the socio-historical context in which the work was created.

A.2 Problem of the Research

Based on the background research mentioned above, the problem is as follows:

1. How does *Milk and Honey*, through the figurative language, reflect the worldview of Rupi Kaur?
2. How does the figurative language in *Milk and Honey* reflect women's resistance and empowerment in the context of Sikh diasporic patriarchal culture?

A.3 Objectives of the Research

Based on the research problems mentioned, the objectives of the research are as follows:

1. To analyze how *Milk and Honey*, through the figurative language, reflects the worldview of Rupi Kaur.
2. To analyze how the figurative language in *Milk and Honey* women's resistance and empowerment in the context of Sikh diasporic patriarchal culture.

A.4 Significance of the Research

This study holds significant theoretical and practical importance. Theoretically, this research contributes to literary criticism by applying Lucien Goldman's genetic structuralism to contemporary poetry. This study demonstrated the relevance of a structuralist approach in analyzing literature in the modern era, especially poetry, which is usually written in simple language. Even though it uses simple and straightforward language, modern poetry can still describe the social, cultural, and historical background of a community through the author.

Practically, the findings of this study are not only relevant to literary scholars, but also for educators, and readers who seek to understand how literary work can serve as an empowering tool. The expressive and free-form poems in *Milk and Honey* exemplify how poetic language and structure can facilitate healing, resistance, and empowerment processes.

A.5 Limitations of Research

This study is limited to discussing the internal elements or the poetic structure of *Milk and Honey*, especially the figurative language and how Rupi Kaur used this element to reflect the author's worldview. The poetic structure, in this

case the figure of speech used by Rupi Kaur, is considered an important part to reveal Rupi Kaur's worldview regarding her background and Sikh diasporic women's resistance and empowerment in patriarchal culture.

In addition, the analysis is limited to the use of genetic structuralism as a theoretical framework, which means focusing on the intrinsic poetic structures, specifically the figure of speech, and in the concepts of human fact, worldview, and homology.

A.6 Definition of Key Terms

To avoid ambiguity, this research study uses key terms: Poetic Structure, Figurative Language, *Milk and Honey*, Trauma, Healing, Resistance, Diaspora, and Patriarchal Culture.

A.6.1 Poetic Structure

According to Simonovis (2024) in *The Poetry Lab*, poetic structure is defined as the foundation of any poem because this structure reflects the way in which ideas, thoughts, and speech patterns are organized in the poems. Poetic structure is defined as the organization of the formal elements of poetry to create meaning, rhythm, and emotional impact. The structure of a poem consists of several elements, such as the number of lines, the number of syllables in each line, the rhyme of certain words, and many more (Chris, 2021). Contemporary poetry uses a various of structural approaches, it often breaking away from traditional forms such as rhyme. It often uses free verses, experimenting with line breaks, stanza

arrangement, and visual elements to convey meanings and emotions (Fiveable, n.d.).

A.6.2 Figurative Language

Figurative language or figure of speech is the creative use of words in beyond their literal meaning, to express complex ideas so that they easy to imagine (Azmi et al., 2023). According to Perrine (1992) figurative language is classifies into: metaphors, simile, personifications, synecdoche, metonymy, hyperbole, irony, allusion, paradox, allegory, apostrophe, and symbol (Azmi et al., 2022). In this research, figurative languages are examined to understand Kaur's poetic expression of trauma, healing, and resistance, as well as socio-cultural background behind the poetry.

A.6.3 Milk and Honey

Milk and Honey is a poetry collection written by Rupi Kaur. It was her first self-publishing book on 2014. This book is divided into four chapters, *The Hurting*, *The Loving*, *The Breaking*, and *The Healing*. Each chapter serves different purpose. The poetry is about survival journey, the experience of love, loss, violence, trauma, healing, and resistance, as well as femininity. In this study, *Milk and Honey* is used as the object of analysis to examine the poetic reflection of diasporic feminist women's socio-cultural experiences.

A.6.4 Trauma

According to American Psychological Association, trauma is an emotional reaction to a distressing event, such as accident, criminal acts, natural disaster,

physical or emotional abuse, abandonment, exposure to violence, the loss of a love one, war, and similar experiences. Trauma affect individual see themselves and the world around them (Almas et al., 2021). From psychological perspective, a traumatic experience is shown through severe stress that negatively affects victims and has an unpleasant impact on their well-being. Therefore, trauma may lead to powerlessness (Herman, 1992). In this research, trauma is explored as personal and collective experience expressed through Kaur's poetic narratives.

A.6.5 Healing

The American Psychological Association defines healing as the process of reducing mental or physical suffering. Emotional healing involves recognizing, embracing, accepting, and processing difficult experiences and strong emotions.

A.6.6 Resistance

Resistance refers to actions, either individual or collective, by hidden or public that respond to unequal power relations, either by confronting, avoiding, or creating alternative ways of being. These actions can be intentional or unintentional (Lilja, 2022). Women resistance can be defined as specific actions of women, both individual or collective, to fight against patriarchal culture, gender-based violence, marginalization, and social pressures that suppress their position and voice in society.

A.6.7 Diaspora

Sheffer (2022) explained diaspora as groups of people with the same ethnic origin and national identity who or whose ancestors have migrated, voluntarily or

under compulsion to another places, and often maintaining their identity and various types of contact with their origin place.

A.6.8 Patriarchal Culture

Patriarchal culture is a social condition when men have a higher position than women (Budipratiwi et al., 2023). Patriarchal culture is a societal system where men hold dominant roles to women in positions of authority, leadership, access to privilege, and property ownership. Male dominance and male centered viewpoint are characteristic of the society that frequently result in the subordination of women. This system can be manifested in many aspects of life, including family, structure, interactions, and societal institutions.

A.7 Organization of Research

The thesis is organized into five chapters. Chapter one is introduction of the research that consists of background of the research, problems of research, objectives of the research, significance of the research, limitation of the research, definition of key terms, and organization of research. Chapter two is review of literature, contain theoretical framework and review of related research. Chapter three outlines the research method, including type of research, data and source of the data, method of collecting data, technique of collecting data, and method of analyzing data. Chapter four presents analysis, which covers data descriptions, data analysis, and discussion. The last chapter provides conclusion and suggestions.