



## **WOMEN'S STRUGGLE IN POETRY COLLECTION *MILK AND HONEY* BY RUPI KAUR (2011)**

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### **Abstract**

This research is an analysis of the poetry collection *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur (2011). This research examine several forms of gender inequality and forms of women struggle's struggles to get out of this gender inequality. The form of gender inequality contained is in the form of harassment experienced by women. This research also discusses the form of women's struggle in obtaining freedom and happiness. Researchers' uses qualitative descriptive techniques using feminist theory from Simon De Beauvoir that can make women free to get happiness. The result of this study indicate that women are able to change the situation by fighting the injustice they experience.

**Key words:** Gender Inequality, Harassment, Feminism, Struggles of Women

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Everyone's life experience is very different; this is also evidenced by the existence of gender, social status, education, occupation, and others. In the view of society, gender is a guide in the provision of human life, especially for women. Not only from social groups, women experience more oppression and gender inequality in the family environment because the patriarchal system is emphasized more in the family environment than in the social environment. According to Tong in Wahyuningtyas (2010) "patriarchal ideology is the culture assumes that man is the dominant, where a man in household and family is the superior figure that has more power". It means that men have a higher role than women because of gender differences in the social life.

Gender is a key dimension of personal life, social relations and culture (Connel, 2009). From the book on Theorizing Patriarchy (Walby, 1990, p. 20), "It is a system of structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women". From Johnson, Paula A. Widnall, Sheila E. and Beny, 2001, (p. 2) "there

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are three categories of sexual harassing behavior: (1) gender harassment (verbal and nonverbal behaviors that convey hostility, objectification, exclusion, or second-class status about members of one gender), (2) unwanted sexual attention (verbal or physical unwelcome sexual advances, which can include assault), and (3) sexual coercion (when favorable professional or educational treatment is conditioned on sexual activity).

After looking at the various problems that occur between men and women, According to Ilaa (2021, p. 214) in Beauvoir's book *Le Deuxieme Sexe* or *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir emphasizes that "women and men are different beings, but the whole Views of the world always seem to be told from the point of view of the men". however Beauvoir adamantly rejects this and encourages women to find him identity through freedom, without coercion or standards imposed on it. This encourages women to rise from adversity and struggle to solve the problem of the patriarchal system in social life based on the feminist system.

Feminism may be defined as a move to reduce and eliminate gender inequality, or alternatively limited to the goal of improving the position of women while still embracing gender difference, or more ambitiously as having the aim of transforming gender relations and existing gender standards (Walby, 2011). Beside that "feminism is the awareness of gender injustice that befalls women, both in the family and society" (Kurnia et al., 2013). In existential feminism, "freedom is subjectivity, where "man is freedom itself" (Ilaa, 2021). According to Beauvoir (Bere, 2020, p. 49) the theory of women's existence is divided into three points: women's intellectual (seeing from a standpoint of some kind and making articulate representation), women's physical (having self-confidence and loving yourself), and women's freedom to actualize themselves (being brave and firm to rebel).

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

Analysis of poetry collection *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur (2011) in this study used a qualitative descriptive method. In this research, descriptive phenomena such as words, sentences, and language were examined because, in this poem, it revealed the meaning of poetry and described the meaning of feminism that merged in the social circle and gender equality between men and women. In addition, this research is used to show the struggle of women to achieve gender equality, which is usually ignored by men.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

In analyzing the collection of poetry *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur there is a gender issue that is still being discussed a lot, especially by feminist activists who demand gender equality and justice. Gender is social gender that is reconstructed by society for both men and women. In Simone De Beauvoir's view, women who are considered weak, used as objects and considered powerless cannot be removed or ignored. Even so, Beauvoir also invites women to be aware and aware of the forms of women's resistance in order to realize their existence in fighting the gender gap they experience. This she uses the form of gender

inequality (harassment against women) and the struggle of women to change their lives because of the existence of gender inequality.

### a. Gender Inequality

#### 1. Gender Harassment

The first data point that the researcher analyzed found in the collection of poetry *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur is the injustice experienced by women in the form of gender harassment. Gender harassment against women is a social problem that often occurs in the social and family environment. From Beauvoir, this happened because of the gender inequality that led to harassment of women. Gender harassment is sexual harassment in the form of verbal or non-verbal expressions that show contempt for women of a sexual nature, as can be seen in the quote:

he was the first boy  
to teach me my body was  
for giving to those that wanted  
that i should feel anything  
less than whole

In the stanza above there is harassment and humiliation of women in the form of negative comments about women's bodies. A man says that women's bodies are only to be given to men. This is considered as something that can benefit women because it is owned by the most powerful man, but on the other hand women actually feel tormented by the thoughts of men. Women are often harassed by men from various backgrounds including from their own families. This can be seen from the word "first boy" which shows the meaning of a man who comes from his own family.

#### 2. Unwanted Sexual Attention

Inequality experienced by women is in the form of harassment in the form of matters of a sexual nature directed at women. From Beauvoir women always get sexual harassment because of gender inequality. Men often perceive women as sexual pleasure, men often say sweet and beautiful words to provoke women's thoughts that this is a form of harassment that makes women worry and makes women not have freedom in their lives, as the meaning contained in quote:

she was a rose  
in the hands of those  
who had no intention  
of keeping her

The quote above shows men's seduction of women, which is gender inequality. A man likens a woman to a rose that is very beautiful, has a bright, sparkly color, and is liked by many people. This seduction is used by men

as a way to establish a romantic relationship with women, or it can be said to captivate a woman's heart, but men don't really have feelings for the women they seduce; they only seduce women to vent their lust. Women are like roses, only to be used as decoration in a man's life, namely as a complementary form that aims to help men in household chores and sexual relations that require women to obey men's wishes. This becomes a very painful thing for women because men want to own women only to abuse them.

### **3. Sexual Coercion**

Women often get harassment in the form of violence and threats that make women forced to obey men. Sexual violence often occurs even in the family environment where every woman is required to fulfill the wishes of the man even though the woman is injured and tormented. That can be seen in the quote:

the first boy that kissed me  
held my shoulders down  
like the handlebars of  
the first bicycle  
he ever rode  
i was five

The quote above shows that the woman's character experiences sexual coercion from those closest to her. This can be seen in the sentence, which shows that the female character is kissed by the first man, who is the closest person in his family. This shows that the woman in this poem has experienced harassment from men because he has kissed someone else, and this is included in the form of harassment. Besides that, there is a sentence indicating that the female character is roughly grabbed by the shoulder by the closest man; this can be seen in the quote "held my shoulders down like the handlebars of the first bicycle," which means a man holds a female character's shoulder in a hard and rough way because usually the first time he rides a bicycle handlebars hard and roughly so he can be controlled by men, so that the women in this poem experience sexual coercion in the form of acts of violence and harassment by men.

## **b. Struggle of Women**

### **1. Women Intellectual**

Beauvoir in his book *The Second Sex* invites women to rise up against existing gender inequality. To combat the gender gap, women must have smart minds and be able to give a better influence in gaining freedom in living life. Women can get freedom by being intellectual to get happiness. Beauvoir in his book *The Second Sex* invites women to rise up against existing gender inequality. Intellectual women, in the form of women who have critical thinking and must also have intelligence and logic, can think that women are not weak creatures and are only used as objects by men. With intellectual thinking, women will be able to get what they want without depending on other people, especially men, to realize



their freedom. Therefore, women must think smart to get freedom and happiness in order to live a good life. This can be seen in the poetry collection *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur, especially chapter 4, which shows that:

the thing about writing is  
i can't tell if it's healing  
or destroying me

From the quote above, the author tries to persuade readers to be open-minded that everything including sadness must be expressed, so that the readers does not become something more painful. To express or release a sadness that is experiencing without thinking about the responses of others. This is evidenced by the sentence “healing or destroying” it means when someone sees and reads a story that has been shared, some people will provide support and motivation to the writer but can also get bullying and humiliation from readers who have never experienced sad and grief as experienced by the writer.

## 2. “To Be Herself”

The downturn experienced by women can be changed with a positive mindset. In feminism, Beauvoir fights gender inequality by demanding self-confidence and being yourself to find freedom from existing gaps. Women must have high self-confidence that they are very valuable and special. That way women have to become individuals who love themselves more to have high self-confidence with the aim that women are not easily tempted by men who only want their body, besides having self-confidence can also change a woman's must become a person who life in happier direction. Loving yourself in getting happiness can be seen in the quote:

you must enter a relationship  
with yourself  
before anyone else

In order to realize women's struggle for gender equality, women must have high self-confidence and dare to show their identity. To get that, women must love themselves. Women also have to know what they want, what makes them hurt, and what makes them happy; therefore, women have to establish a relationship with themselves so that they are not easily tempted by the sweet words of men and to know what their purpose in life.

## 3. Freedom Actualized Themselves

Women have the right to freedom, which must be properly developed. to fight against gender inequality Beauvoir supports women to be firm and brave in getting justice. The right to freedom that women have is often invisible because of the patriarchal system, but women can get their right to freedom by having the courage, not physically but with courage and determination, to obtain happiness. In addition, women also have the right to rebel to develop their potential so that

they have the courage to make decisions so that they are no longer subjected to violence and coercion from men and that women can finally live freely and have the courage to face their difficult times, as stated in the quote:

it is a part of the  
human experience to feel pain  
do not be afraid  
open yourself to it

Firm and courageous to start a new life without fear of getting hurt to gain self-freedom towards better development. The quote above explains that in order to get freedom and happiness, women must have the courage to open up, namely to try to start new things to strengthen themselves to become strong and resilient women. Even though a woman's physique looks weak but her mind and courage must be bigger than other people's responses. In addition, the bad life experienced by women must be used as things that can increase women's enthusiasm so that in the end the pain experienced by women is no longer a big problem, but only as a form of failure that is intentional and unintentional will not give a bad influence on women.

#### **D. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

In this part, it will present the results of the analysis in the previous chapter. Based on analysis in the collection of poetry *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur, especially in the hurting and healing chapters, the hurting chapter explains that the women in the poem experience cruel injustice. The injustice contained in the hurting chapter is divided into three forms: gender harassment, unwanted sexual attention, and sexual coercion.

The healing chapter shows how women rise up and fight against the injustices experienced in the poetry collection *Milk and Honey*. The form of women's struggle in the healing chapter is carried out in three ways: intellectually, to be herself, and to actualize their freedom. The final results of the study indicate that women have risen from the adversity and injustice that they have received so far. So the women in the poetry collection *Milk and Honey* by Rupi Kaur prove that women have the courage to change circumstances, rise to become more sovereign individuals, think critically, and are able to have a happier life than before.

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