

## An analysis of symbols regarding women's roles in Rupī Kaur's *Milk and Honey*, "the hurting" section

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### Abstract

The objective of this study was to analyze symbols regarding women's roles that appeared in Rupī Kaur's poem *Milk and Honey*, "the hurting" section. This study applied Timpane and Watt's theory (2001) for the analysis of symbols based on Abrams' (1999) concept of symbols consisting of both conventional symbols and private symbols. Moreover, the researcher employed a conceptual framework for the analysis of women's roles for eight roles. The data were analyzed, presented, and tabulated. The result found that there were 12 conventional symbols and 8 private symbols. It was presumed that Rupī Kaur frequently used conventional symbols to express ideas that were uncomplicated to understand to make readers comprehend a deep significance. Symbols regarding women's roles were shown in Rupī Kaur's poem *Milk and Honey*, "the hurting" section as follows: role of women as a mother (S1), role of women as a daughter (S2), role of women as a generous person (S3), role of women as an empowered person (S5), role of women as victims of discrimination (S6), role of women as a person of subservience to men (S7), and role of women as victims of sexual harassment (S8). Nevertheless, role of women as a provider of unconditional love (S4) was seldom seen in this section. These findings revealed women's significant roles in the contemporary period, including daughters, mothers, and victims of discrimination. Furthermore, Kaur's poetry also portrayed that the issues of unfairness and discrimination against women persisted in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Keywords:** Symbols, Women's roles, Poetry, Milk and Honey, Rupī Kaur

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 The Background of Study

Literature is the imaginative expression of writing creative pieces that employ the most symbolic language, in entire or in part. That can additionally refer to narratives of individuals who create beautiful literary pieces made from magnificent expressions that portray the author's sentiments through their works. More specifically, many poems that are regarded as the greatest works in literature still have a long-lasting impression on readers. Poetry is a valuable literary form that conveys thoughts more gracefully than other forms of expression. Its simplicity and complexity can attract, present stories, and evoke emotions (Strömner, 2013). Many poets communicate narratives and individual experiences with these literary devices: allusion, metaphor, imagery, rhythm, pattern, contradiction, irony, and more to enable readers to understand the poem's hidden meaning. However, the symbol is the most key component in poetry that many poets use to fully convey the deep meaning of their poems (Lakhadive, 2018). A symbol is a literary device used by authors to show an emotion and attitude. It can refer to a person, thing, situation, action, object, interpretation, or abstract conception used by authors as a symbol for interpretation that extends beyond the literal meaning. Symbols may also be any form of expression that employs another thing for conveying a thought through a symbol, instead of directly alluding to something. Several scholars define various types of symbols. For example, Alam's (2013) symbols consist of three types: colors, elements, and animals; Mahler's (2021) symbols consist of three types: objects, characters, and events; and Abrams' (1999) symbols consist of two types: conventional symbols and private symbols. Most poet's imaginative works inspired by certain symbols reveal a propensity for enigmatic. In addition, the symbols provide an emotional resonance of literary works, consisting of poetry which can ultimately have an eternal impression on the person who reads it. One of the most feminist poets of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is Rupi Kaur, who frequently employs symbols in her poetry, especially feminist symbols to convey women's issues. Rupi Kaur is a contemporary Canadian poet, artist, and performer who was born on 4 October 1992 in Punjab, India. She had obvious artistic and creative ability from an early age. Rupi Kaur also started writing poems for her affections and her companions. Rupi Kaur's creative work *Milk and Honey* on Instagram garnered her considerable recognition in 2015. The first poetry collection *Milk and Honey* was published online by herself before it was formally released. Andrews McMeel Publishing (2017) claims that *Milk and Honey* peaked at number one on the New York Times trade paperback bestseller list on January 15, 2017. From the beginning of May 1, 2016, for 41 weeks in consecutive weeks. Moreover, *Milk and Honey* is a collection of works encompassing poetry and prose. According to Kharbach (2023), there are four main sections of *Milk and Honey* including "the hurting" (30 poems), "the loving" (32 poems), "the breaking" (60 poems) and "the healing" (57 poems). Each of the sections

portrays different themes such as violence, suffering, love, loss, trauma, femininity, and the path of rehabilitation and learning about oneself. The researcher concentrates on the first section, “the hurting.” It focuses on Rupī Kaur’s personal experience of experiencing discomfort and observations on the trauma that many women encounter. The poems make it obvious that the poet was intent on shedding light on women’s experiences related to sexual assault, women’s bodies, and psychological pain caused by family. Additionally, several feminist symbols are noticeably seen in the poem (Aninda et al., 2019). Rupī Kaur is a contemporary poet who applies symbols to emphasize the interesting role of women in her writing by demonstrating that almost all women will exist in familial and societal roles. The portrayal of women’s role in literature extends to many different periods in both contemporary and classical works. Lucas and Ordeniza (2023) divide the role of women in literature from various historical periods, including women in Greek mythology, women in the Elizabethan period, women in Victorian literature, and women in Modern literature. The roles of women performed throughout history make it clear that women have always been seen as housewives who take care of their families with cooking and cleaning. Jawwad and Asghar (2017) mention that during the most of the history’s passing, women were confined to their domestic domain, while men were set up for public life. Even as recent as early 20<sup>th</sup> century, women were not allowed from participating in public life and from exercising their right to vote. Additionally, women were denied entry into a wide range of employment opportunities, and they had only limited access to education. Ironically, situations remain unchanged, and women are still subjected to these kinds of constraints in present-day society. Despite the fact that in the past, women’s roles were less often in the limelight, they were marginalized and discriminated against. Nowadays, women are respected for their perseverance and determination, enabling them to accomplish the greatest achievements. As the same Rupī Kaur’s poetry from the book *Milk and Honey* is one piece that demonstrates the way women’s roles are frequently depicted in the popular media given that it portrays women in the context of the modern period. Rupī Kaur’s poetry represents the centerpiece of feminist analysis in several studies and articles. A number of research investigate feminism, women’s identities, or employing figurative language in *Milk and Honey*. For example, Aninda et al. (2019) conducted research on the issue of “Female body and identity as represented in Rupī Kaur’s poetry *Milk and Honey*” Their study intends to find out how the representation of female body and identity in the poetry of Rupī Kaur and they employed qualitative descriptive method in analyzing the poems. The findings showed that Rupī Kaur’s poetry illustrated the female body as a sexual object with the use of cultural symbols. Moreover, Islam (2019) conducted a study on feminist writing of Rupī Kaur: “A Gynocritic Study of Rupī Kaur’s *Milk and Honey*”. According to the researcher, gynocriticism is a modern theoretical framework for analyzing the writings of women that live in the patriarchal society. This research demonstrates women are empowered and they may

express themselves intelligently in a world where males dominate. From the literature review, however, symbolic research is becoming more relatively rare. The researcher searched and discovered a few studies emphasizing Rupī Kaur's using symbols to represent women through her poetry (Jindal, 2017). Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing symbols on women's roles in Rupī Kaur's poetry from *Milk and Honey*, "the hurting" section.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Symbol**

Literary symbols contain something traditional, which may belong back to pre-literate periods, and every new context gives to these symbols a new meaning. Thus, literary symbols are a dynamic phenomenon that facilitates cultural diffusion (Mihkelev, 2018). Symbol is sign, object, and so on that looked upon as representing something (Hornby, 1987). In other words, symbols are indirect representations of concepts with analogies. According to Abrams (1999) state that "Symbolism is only used to describe words or phrases that denote things or events that themselves denote things or have a range of references, beyond themselves." While Elmahdi and Hezam (2020) pointed out that a symbol is an individual, place, object, or occurrence that is used to represent an abstract idea or condition. These are frequently employed in literary studies, symbols demonstrate the relationship between shared conceptions of reality and moral or spiritual order (Elmahdi and Hezam, 2020). A symbol may be viewed as a kind of metaphor in which the metaphor's subject is not made explicit. The relationship between the text segments includes contextual details from an older or ancient text and, if it is placed in an alternate context, the new context provides the symbol an entirely new meaning (Mihkelev, 2018). Furthermore, a symbol is a term, phrase or thing that expresses the essence of a certain phenomenon conditionally (Mussaly et al., 2022). There are individual symbols created by poets in literature besides the commonly understood symbols. To reveal their individual symbols essence, it is important to investigate the author's poetic world (Akhmetov and Shanbayev, 1998). Symbols are significant in literature. Many poets utilized symbols to enhance their poems deeper in meaning (Lakhadive, 2018).

According to the study of Lakhadive (2018), it was found that there were two types of symbols that poets used in their writings: conventional or public symbol, and private or personal symbols. For instance, poems of William Blake, John Donne and William Shakespeare used conventional symbols in their writings and W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot and W.H. Auden used private symbols in their writings. For example, the word 'rose' which in its literal meaning refers to a particular species of flower; on the other hand, in Robert Burns' poem "A Red, Red Rose," the poet employed the word 'rose' as a simile. Then, in William Blake's poem, "The Sick Rose," he used the rose as a personal symbol that may be his love (Lakhadive, 2018). Thus, each poet employs symbols conveying different meanings in their poems. In addition,

Abrams (1999) described that several poets used two types of symbols: conventional symbols and private symbols. Conventional symbol is a symbol that conveys the same implications when utilized repeatedly. It may refer to a meaning that can be comprehended by the social surroundings (Setiawan, 2015). Moreover, a conventional symbol is also referred to blank symbol. Blank symbol is a term that expresses a symbol with a universal meaning. Hence, the readers may not find it harder to interpret and comprehend the meaning (Fananie, 2000). While private symbols are products of individual poet's mind or imagination that are almost mysterious. Private symbol is a symbol that readers may find challenging to comprehend or interpret certain passages from the poets because private symbols are dependent on the poet's choices and their reasons (Setiawan, 2015). The poets determine the meaning of their symbols. According to Abrams (1999), private symbols exploit thought associations between an object, event, or action and a particular concept. Another meaning of private symbol is words that communicate about a symbol that was specifically created and employed by the poet to illustrate their distinctive style in writing poems (Fananie, 2000). As a result, the symbolic meaning of a private symbol is determined by the poets causing it hard for the reader to interpret the symbol.

The researcher selects Abrams' (1999) types of symbols to identify symbols in this study as conventional symbols and private symbols are widely recognized by many literary educators. Some poets frequently utilize private symbols to primarily create the meaning on their own, making interpreting and evaluating them more challenging (Abrams 1999). Furthermore, conventional symbols are also used in certain times. As a result, when applied in different times, their meanings change.

## **2.2 Women's Role**

The importance of women's roles in society is mostly considered in relation to their employment settings (Kapur, 2019). There is widespread knowledge of the main patterns in family structures and changes that have occurred in recent decades and women are largely responsible for raising their children (Oláh et al., 2014). Cultural feminism on women's "natural" compassion, nurturing inclinations, pacifism, relationship kindness, and care for others are among their intrinsic qualities that set them apart from males (Alief and Farijanti, 2015). In society, women perform a variety of roles including those of a wife, manager, mother, daughter, administrator, and head of the family etc. Women deserve to be respected and given equal treatment (Kalaivani, 2019). While Junaidi (2018) revealed that feminism is the struggle for women's equality with males. Feminism began with the assumption that gender differences lead to inequity for women. Man's roles become the authority and woman's role are always secondary and submissive. This reinforces the stereotype that women are connected to the body, matter, emotion, absence of logic, unreasonable, whereas males constantly associate with reasonable and objective reasoning. According to the research of Ghorfati and Medini

(2015) conducted significant study on this issue of “Feminism and its impact on women in modern society”. The research describes how women face several problems, challenges, limits, and barriers to become an integral part of culture. Women lacked rights before, and males discriminated against, invalidated, and abused them. This statement reflected that women were considered as the second and inferior creature and suffered from discrimination, deprivation, and other forms of hardship (Yadav and Kumar, 2021). Moreover, the earlier historical discourse presents injustice toward women. However, when feminists mobilized, reframed inequality as discrimination and oppression change. They produced a new feminist discourse. Thus, discourse analysis reflects social reality rather than determining the truth (Abu Al Rub, 2022). Lazar (2007) draws the distinction between critical feminist discourse analysis, which is inherently “feminist approaches that apply descriptive discourse analytic methods.” A feminist discourse approach recognizes that agency exists in the relationships between actors instead of in individuals and objects, allowing certain options while confining others. Feminist discourse analysis illuminates the relationships within individuals lived experiences and the broader institutional, economic, and political institutions that shape their lives.

### **3. Research Objective**

The objective of this research was to analyze the symbols regarding women’s roles that appear in Rupī Kaur’s poetry *Milk and Honey*, “the hurting” section.

## **4. Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Research Design**

This research was qualitative. The researcher employed a descriptive analysis strategy to find a symbol regarding women’s role in poetry, as well as provided comprehensive summaries and listing of symbols about women's role in tabulation.

### **4.2 Data Collection**

The data of this study was one of Rupī Kaur's four sections of poems in *Milk and Honey* titled “the hurting” containing 30 poems. The researcher chose this section because a small number of studies emphasize “the hurting” section of symbols regarding women’s roles. “The hurting” is the first section covered in the book, and the poet’s personal experiences are a source of details in this section. Moreover, *Honey and Milk* is Rupī Kaur’s first famous worldwide piece of artistic work. It is also intriguing to consider that Rupī Kaur’s poetry might portray numerous roles of women in her poetry. The researcher collected and analyzed data related to literary symbols that symbolize the role of women in literature leading to the conceptual framework to aid in the process of thorough examination and assessment.

### **4.3 Procedure**

Firstly, the researcher entirely read a single section of Rupī Kaur's poetry and then carefully reviewed each again. Secondly, the researcher focused on the word that served as a symbol regarding women's roles in each poem. Thirdly, the researcher explored the meaning of words from Cambridge dictionary (2020). Fourthly, the researcher analyzed the word's symbolic meaning concerning women's roles based on Timpane and Watt's theory (2001), and then classified types of symbols into conventional symbols and private symbols based on Abrams' (1999) concept of symbols. Finally, the researcher summarized and described the details of the symbols regarding women's roles that appear in Rupī Kaur's poem and presented the data in a table.

### **4.4 The Conceptual Framework**

The research applied Timpane and Watt's theory (2001) to analyze the symbolic meaning. Timpane and Watt (2001) defined symbols that they are central to the functioning of the mind and words which leads people to utilize symbols to symbolize distinct thoughts. A symbol stands for something else which in turn brings with it an intense world of meaning. The steps to identify symbols are provided as the following: A stands for B, which results in a C mean a greater symbolic meaning. Symbols unite a concrete thing with an idea or concept greater than that thing. In other words, Timpane and Watt's theory (2001) consists of three parts, A refers to the symbol itself. B is what the symbol represents, and C is its meaning (Rindarti, 2018). In addition, this study focuses on the concept of Abrams' (1999) symbols. A conventional symbol is commonly identified and utilized with phrases and words that have simple comprehended meanings for literary works. A conventional symbol is one that most readers are unlikely to have trouble understanding. It is widely recognized meaning and people in general already perceive it as representing itself. A private symbol demonstrates many different meanings according to the poet's intentions about the composition. This symbol might have numerous interpretations since the only source of the symbol's meaning is the poet's context. Moreover, the researcher studied the concept of women's roles in the contemporary period of Mojumder's (2020), Sandhya's (2021), Dodgson's (2018), Kalpana's (2023), Fawad's (2023), Sahni's (2020) and Guerrero's (n.d.) and then classified role of women for the analysis of this study into eight roles: role of women as a mother (S1), role of women as a daughter (S2), role of women as a generous person (S3), role of women as a provider of unconditional love (S4), role of women as an empowered person (S5), role of women as victims of discrimination (S6), role of women as a person of subservience to men (S7) and role of women as victims of sexual harassment (S8).

| Women's roles   | Meaning of role   |
|---|---|
| Role of women as mother (S1)                            | Mother's role is the center of a family and a house where everybody feels accepted, understood, and full of compassion. A woman as mother devotes her time, efforts, sentiments, and thoughts to guaranteeing her family members are well-being (Mojumder, 2020).                 |
| Role of women as a daughter (S2)                        | A daughter's role is an important base for the family through being graceful and attractive. This role becomes the cornerstone of a family's strength and captures the happiness of parenthood (Sandhya, 2021).   |
| Role of women as a generous person (S3)                 | Women as generous person's role is typically seen as generous, compassionate, and kind people who want to offer their support and show generosity to others without requiring anything in return (Dodgson, 2018).   |
| Role of women as a provider of unconditional love (S4). | Unconditional love provider's role often cultivates strong relationships of trust and desire to sacrifice far and wide for their loved ones without asking anything in return (Kalpana, 2023).  |
| Role of women as an empowered person (S5)               | Empowered person's role is a representation of strength, equality, and empowering women in obtaining positions of leadership in a multicultural society. It demonstrates the increasing and significant contribution that women make to achieving gender equality. (Fawad, 2023). |



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|---|--|
| Role of women as victims of discrimination (S6),      | Victims of discrimination's role are women who lack the respect who deserves and encounters discrimination at every opportunity because some people erroneously exploit bias and discrimination to make women in an unacceptable. For example, some people revere several goddesses, like Lakshmi, but they mistreat women in communities (Sahni, 2020). |
| Role of women as a person of subservience to men (S7) | A person of subservience to men's role is a woman who submit to male family members in all aspects of their life is a common consequence of rigid gender roles. Especially, a woman gets married, she should listen to her spouse, respect his choices, stop trying to make decision on an equal basis (Guerrero, n.d.).                                 |
| Role of women as victims of sexual harassment (S8)    | Victims of sexual harassment's role are women who endure and confront gender inequity from the attitude of men who consider women to be nothing more than commodities and objects for sexual fulfillment and all they want is a satisfactory response to their sexual demands that led to sexual assaults against women (Guerrero, n.d.).                |

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## 5. Data Analysis

The researcher studied and read all thirty poems in “the hurting” section, and Rupī Kaur’s poetry *Milk and Honey* to search for symbols regarding women’s roles. Using content analysis, the researcher applied Timpane and Watt’s theory (2001) to analyze the symbolic meaning and focused on the concept of Abrams’ (1999) symbols: conventional symbols and private symbols. After an analysis of symbols regarding women’s roles, the researcher provided comprehensive summaries and a listing of symbols regarding women’s roles on tabulation. The results were also verified by the experts in the field of literature and English language teaching.

## 6. Results

From the qualitative data, the findings revealed that Rupī Kaur employed 14 symbols regarding women's role from 30 poems in "the hurting" section, *Milk and Honey*, which are presented in the table below.

**Table 1** Symbols regarding women's role appear in her poem

| No.         | Symbols regarding women's role   | Analysis/ Interpretation  | Women's role in conceptual framework | Types of symbols of Abrams (1999)      |
|-------------|--|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Poem no. 1  | How is it so easy for you to be kind to people he asked<br><u>milk and honey</u> dripped from my lips as I answered  | an altruistic person      | S3                                   | conventional symbol                    |
| Poem no. 3  | You have been taught your legs are a pit stop for men that need a place to rest<br><u>a vacant body</u> empty enough | a sexual object           | S6                                   | private symbol                         |
| Poem no. 5  | The therapist places the doll in front of you it is the size of <u>girls</u> your uncles like touching               | victims of discrimination | S6                                   | conventional symbol and private symbol |
| Poem no. 7  | You were so afraid of my <u>voice</u><br>I decided to be afraid of it too  | women's voices            | S6                                   | conventional symbol                    |
| Poem no. 8  | She was a <u>rose</u> in the hands of those who had no intention of keeping her                                      | a beautiful object        | S6                                   | conventional symbol and private symbol |
| Poem no. 9  | Every time you tell your <u>daughter</u> you yell at her out of love   | a daughter                | S2 and S7                            | conventional symbol                    |
| Poem no. 12 | Yet the other is having sex with their body it's not love it is <u>rape</u>  | sexual victim             | S8                                   | conventional symbol                    |

|                    |   |   |    |  |
|--------------------|---|---|----|--|
| <b>Poem no. 15</b> | You pinned my legs to<br>the ground with your feet<br>and demanded<br><b>I <u>stand up</u></b>  | strength and<br>power of women                            | S5 | conventional<br>symbol and<br>private symbol |
| <b>Poem no. 20</b> | I was made heavy<br>half <b><u>blade</u></b> and half <b><u>silk</u></b><br>difficult to forget and not<br>easy<br>for the mind to follow | women's<br>strength and<br>danger/<br>women's<br>softness | S5 | conventional<br>symbol and<br>private symbol |
| <b>Poem no. 22</b> | You are a <b><u>war</u></b><br>the border between two<br>countries<br>the collateral damage<br>the paradox that joins the<br>two          | women encounter<br>conflict inside<br>their families      | S2 | conventional<br>symbol and<br>private symbol |
| <b>Poem no. 23</b> | The art of being <b><u>empty</u></b><br>is simple<br>believe them when they say<br>you are nothing<br>like a wish                         | worthless and<br>empty role                               | S6 | conventional<br>symbol and<br>private symbol |
| <b>Poem no. 24</b> | You look just like your<br><b><u>mother</u></b><br>I guess I do carry her<br>tenderness well  | a mother  | S1 | conventional<br>symbol                       |
| <b>Poem no. 25</b> | This is how the women in<br>my family<br>learned to live with their<br><b><u>mouths closed</u></b>  | a silent woman<br>who surrenders to<br>men                | S7 | private symbol                               |

From the above table, 13 symbols regarding women's roles in the hurting section of Rupī Kaur's poetry were found. It was evident that Rupī Kaur's used eight private symbols and eleven conventional symbols following Abrams' (1999) concepts. According to the study's conceptual framework, the researcher listed in order of the largest amount of symbols regarding women's roles found in 30 poems as follows: roles of women as victims of discrimination (S6) appear in five poems, role of women as a daughter (S2), role of women as an empowered person (S5), and role of women as a person of subservience to men (S7) appears in each of 2 poems, role of women as a mother (S1), role of women as a generous person (S3), and role of women as victims of sexual harassment (S8) appear in each poem. The last role of women as a provider of unconditional love (S4) seldom exists in this section.

**The details of the example data are demonstrated as follows:**

*Poem No.1*

how is it so easy for you  
to be kind to people he asked  
**milk and honey** dripped  
from my lips as I answered  
cause people have not  
been kind to me  
the hurting, Kaur (2015: p.11)

The overall meaning of this poem describes the importance of kindness. The poet employs a conversation between an intriguing man and woman in her first poem. Between two conversations, Rupri Kaur portrays a powerful depiction of milk and honey dripping from a woman's lips. The "**milk and honey**" is a symbol of women's role that the researcher discovered from this poem. According to Cambridge Dictionary (2020), **milk** means the white liquid produced by female mammals and used by humans as a drink or for making dairy products. **Honey** is a sweet, sticky, and yellow substance made by bees and used as food. "**Milk and honey**" are liquids that symbolize benevolence and healing. It is also meant to be a consolation, and calmness and are symbol that represents the kindness of women. Thus, the "**milk and honey**" represents women's role as an altruistic person. Rupri Kaur utilizes this word in poem number 1, and she intends to reflect on the role of women as a generous person (S3) following the conceptual framework in this study. The poet points out that women's roles still encounter difficulties when realizing their roles as altruistic people because others will always be cruel to them. It can be seen from the final two lines of the poem. Rupri Kaur explains that women are always kind because others have not always been "kind to" her. Women recognize what it is like to be on the receiving end of cruelty and suffering. They have no desire to continue that cycle (Baldwin, 2021). The type of symbol involving women's role in this poem is conventional symbol as Abrams (1999) noted, because the phrase "**milk and honey**" **conveys** a general meaning. Both substances are of gentle, soothing quality and offer consolation and healing (Baldwin, 2021). Thus, poets employed this symbol to make the readers clearly understand women's kindness.

*Poem no.7*

you were so afraid  
of my **voice**  
I decided to be  
afraid of it too  
"The hurting", Kaur (2015: p.17)

The overall meaning of this poem describes the voices of women and individuals who express their thoughts terrify most people, so it also causes them to be afraid of their voices and tend to be silent. The “**voice**” is a symbol of women’s role that the researcher discovered from this poem. According to Cambridge Dictionary (2020), **voice** means the sounds that are made when people speak or sing. In addition, “**voice**” is a symbol of women’s expression of ideas and women's standpoints. Thus, the “**voice**” represents women’s voice. Rupī Kaur intended to convey the role of women as victims of discrimination (S6) following the conceptual framework in this study. Rupī Kaur’s poem shows women experience discrimination because of their gender, and their voices are rarely heard or acknowledged (Adzkiya et al., 2022). The type of symbol regarding women’s role in this poem is conventional symbol as Abrams (1999) noted, because the poet expresses the voice of a woman straight via the term “**voice**” in this poem.

*Poem No. 8*

she was a **rose**  
in the hands of those  
who had no intention  
of keeping her  
“The hurting”, Kaur (2015: p.18)

The overall meaning of this poem is that women are beautiful objects as roses that belong in the hands of men or other admirers who will eventually neglect their beauty. The “**rose**” is a symbol of women’s role that the researcher discovered from this poem. According to Cambridge Dictionary (2020), a rose is a garden plant with thorns on its stems and pleasant-smelling flowers. **Rose** is a symbol of women's beauty and infatuation. Thus, the “**rose**” refers to women’s role as a beautiful object. Rupī Kaur also utilizes this word to portray the symbol regarding the role of women as victims of discrimination (S6). From this poem, it is evident that the poet decided to compare women to “**roses**” with the intent for the purpose to imply that women’s roles are limited to being beautiful objects. That unfairly discriminates against women, ignoring them and not intending to keep them. The type of symbol regarding women’s role in this poem is conventional symbol and private symbol as Abrams (1999) noted. The poet utilizes the word “**rose**” as a conventional symbol regarding women’s role because this expression is commonly used to describe a woman's beauty and is understandable to readers. Furthermore, the word “**rose**” gained a private symbol since Rupī Kaur tends to portray women’s roles as beautiful objects that should be utilized only for the benefit of men or other people.

*Poem No.20*

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  
I was not made with a lightness on my tongue  
so it could be easy to swallow  
I was made heavy  
half **blade** and half **silk**  
difficult to forget and not easy  
for the mind to follow  
“The hurting”, Kaur (2015: p.30)

The overall meaning of this poem describes the distinct identity of a woman with a powerful build. Although this poem demonstrates that women are compelled to be quiet as their opinions lessen their beauty, Rupi Kaur remains determined to insist that women are more powerful than men. The “**blade**” and “**silk**” are symbols of women’s role that the researcher discovered from this poem. According to Cambridge Dictionary (2020), a **blade** is the flat part of a knife or similar tool or weapon, with a very thin edge used for cutting. “**Silk**” is a delicate, soft kind of fabric created from silkworm-produced thread or the thread itself. **Blade** is a symbol of women’s strength, power, and danger. **Silk** is a symbol of women’s softness. Rupi Kaur conveys the role of women as an empowered person (S5) following the conceptual framework in this study. The poet emphasizes that women are not created to be quiet and beautiful as well as that they should not be quiet. Women have an enormous amount of power to impact ideas as they have powerful thoughts. The type of symbol regarding women’s role in this poem is conventional symbol and private symbol as Abrams (1999) noted. Rupi Kaur utilizes the “**blade**” as a conventional symbol regarding women’s role since the word’s definition is a sharp edge and danger. Similarly, “**silk**” represents women’s softness. Thus, the “**blade**” and “**silk**” are private symbol because Rupi Kaur uses the words to symbolize the strength of women who hide strength and danger under their softness.

*Poem No.25*

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**

“The hurting”, Kaur (2015: p.35)

The overall meaning of this poem describes women’s subordination to males in the family. The “**mouths closed**” is a symbol regarding women’s role that the researcher discovered from this poem. According to Cambridge Dictionary (2020), **mouths** mean the opening in the face of a person or animal, consisting of the lips and the space, and **closed** means anything that is not open. The “**mouths closed**” is a symbol of silent women who surrender to men. Moreover, Rupri Kaur utilizes this phrase to represent the symbol regarding women’s role as a person of subservience to men (S7) following the conceptual framework in this study. All this poem demonstrates that women are submitting to males in the family because the woman must painfully obey the man’s demands to keep silent. The type of symbol that involves the role of women is a private symbol as Abrams (1999) noted. Rupri Kaur applies the word “**mouths closed**” to convey a silent woman who surrenders to men in his orders and every aspect of life. Rupri Kaur also reflects the lowly status of women’s role in her own family and the norm of society.

It is obvious that the poet employs symbols regarding women’s role as victims of discrimination (S6) than any women’s role in the conceptual framework in this study. Therefore, Rupri Kaur’s poetry reveals the fact that discrimination against women still exists in many areas nowadays, such as social and family life, that continually limit women’s roles, and status and implement prejudice.

## **7. Discussion**

The data results in the conclusion that a total of 30 poems, the researcher found 13 symbols regarding women’s roles following the conceptual framework employed in the analysis. The researcher analyzed the symbolic meaning based on Timpone and Watt’s theory (2001) and classify types of symbols into two types based on Abrams’ (1999) concept of symbols. It observed that the poet utilized most of the symbols regarding women’s roles are conventional symbols. Rupri Kaur employed eleven conventional symbols, while she only used eight private symbols. It presumes that conventional symbols can convey a poet’s emotions

and ideas in an uncomplicated way. It demonstrates that Rupi Kaur usually uses symbols that are clear to understand and without quite providing an in-depth interpretation.

Based on the conceptual framework employed in this study, many roles of women as victims of discrimination (S6) could be found in 5 poems from 30 poems. From the findings above, the poet mostly portrays women as victims of discrimination. This is supported by the study of Pokharel (2008) revealed that societal discrimination exists in male dominated society. Women are aware of discrimination practices at home and in society in various aspects such as property, education, and mobility. Most women experience prejudice and discrimination when it pertains to mobility or equality in their lives due to a cultural norm that restricts women's freedom of movement in all aspects. Ghorfati and Medini (2015) describe how women face several problems, challenges, limits, and barriers. Men tend to discriminate against, devalue, and abuse women. They suffer discrimination and cruel behaviors throughout the world (Yadav and Kumar, 2021). That indicates women's roles are still unfairly discriminated against in some way in the contemporary period. Rupi Kaur frequently employed role of women as a mother (S1), and the role of women as a daughter (S2) in her poetry of "the hurting" section. This is supported by a study by Kalaivani (2019) that explained the role of women in the family and society as mothers. According to her study, a significant part of the childbearing task is conducted by the woman in the family. Women as mothers are responsible for the child's habit of self-control, orderliness, industriousness, theft, or honesty. Women as mothers are responsible for the maintenance of the discipline in the family. Similar to the study of Rittenour et al. (2014), it was supposed that mothers set boundaries for female-appropriate behavior that guide daughters' decisions across the lifespan. Thus, the poet expressed her family's and societal perspectives on women's roles, which points out that women are usually portrayed as being only housewives or daughters. Role of women as a person of subservience to men (S7) that appear in two poems. According to Junaidi (2018), it was revealed that women's roles are inherently subservient and subordinate. This might be pointed on the assumption that gender differences cause injustice and subjugation for women. Rupi Kaur's poetry conveys role of women in a society dominated by men since the poet presents role of women who still must submit to males and submit to their control in many of her poems. However, the poet additionally illustrates the ability, strength, and power that women must have the same status as men from role of women as an empowered person (S5) that appear in her poem. Likewise, a feminist discourse approach recognizes that agency exists in the relationships between actors instead of in individuals and objects (Lazar, 2007). Role of women as a generous person (S3) appear one poem. Alief and Farijanti (2015) state that cultural feminism on women's natural compassion, nurturing, kindness, and care for others are among their intrinsic qualities that set them apart from males. Role of women as victims of sexual harassment (S8) is the least women's role that appears in Rupi Kaur's poetry. This is



supported by a study by Mapuranga et al. (2015) that explained sexual harassment in the education sector is a burning issue, not only in Zimbabwe and other African countries but across the world. Their study shows that most victims of sexual harassment are women while men are the main perpetrators. It is anticipated that these two women's roles will assume fewer parts than other roles. The reason for this is many of Rupri Kaur's poetry in *Milk and Honey* derives from the poet's personal experiences with trauma and suffering on "the hurting" section. The last role of women as a provider of unconditional love (S4) seldom exists in this section. It can be assumed that the lack of women's role as a provider of unconditional love because of "the hurting" section is probably connected to the poet's frequent reflections on the pain she feels from her past experiences or her family's and society's often painful perspectives. Therefore, role of women as a provider of unconditional love (S4) is rare to be observed in Rupri Kaur's poetry on this section.

## **8. Conclusion**

Through the poem, Rupri Kaur reveals the use of symbols through her feminism in the contemporary period. She illustrates women's role using conventional symbols in hopes that the reader may comprehend them without having to interpret them for much deeper meaning. Based on the findings of this study, most roles of women are conveyed as discrimination victims in her poems. The poet reflects on the issues that women encounter throughout today's world when discrimination against them persists in family and society simply due to their gender. Therefore, the message embedded in Rupri Kaur's poem reflects the continuing of women portrayal as being in a lower social status than males and as experiencing severe discrimination. According to Adzkiya et al. (2022), women have never been accepted over the years, and Rupri Kaur's poetry reflects this reality even in the modern era. That led to presentations of symbols regarding women's roles in contrast to modern times. As Rupri Kaur's poetry emphasizes the power of women's roles, she provides an avenue for perspectives that express symbols regarding women's roles to receive enough attention in the contemporary period. The researcher assumes that this research will fill any gaps involving women's roles that may have been disregarded in earlier studies. It is hoped that this research will shed light on perceptions of hidden symbols and women's role in the contemporary period. Furthermore, this research will serve as a beneficial guide to studying or utilizing Timpane and Watt's theory (2001) in various poems.

### **8.1. Limitation of Research**

The limitation of the study lies in the scope of the study which focuses on only one section of the poem in Rupri Kaur's *Milk and Honey*, "the hurting" section.

## 8.2. Future Research

Based on the results of this research, a few suggestions are provided for further research. The further research should be conducted to analyze the symbols regarding women's roles in all four sections of *Milk and Honey*. The further research should investigate other figurative language that reflect women's roles or feminism that appears in Rupi Kaur's poetry. The next researchers could also utilize Timpane and Watt's theory (2001) to analyze symbols in different aspects of Rupi Kaur or other poet's poetry.

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