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HEALING TRAUMA AND ASSERTING IDENTITY IN RUPI KAUR'S SELECTED
INSTAPOEMS

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Abstract:

This article explores the search for identity alluded in the poems of women who want to assert their existence. Such poets often vote for a sense of collective identity that gives their fellow beings, especially women, a token of power to fight against the atrocities they face in their lives. The shared sense of belonging produced because of their commitment to stand by with the people who need support, often work out as a savior role in the lives of the depressed. Digital literature is a new form of literature that uses digital platforms as its medium for publishing its works of art. Instapoems is a subgenre of digital literature that is easily accessible for the techno savvy and its reachability helps in strengthening and healing the oppressed souls. Rupri Kaur is a notable instapoet. Her instapoems aim to create a collective identity for women to fight against gender inequality. This article tries to study the peculiar way in which Kaur uses her medium of poetry to assert an identity to women and how she equips her poems by providing it an ability to change the world in spite of its brevity.

Keywords: *Digital Literature, Instapoems, Trauma, Gender Inequality, Collective Identity, etc.*

Introduction:

Living in an era of Artificial Intelligence, it is not an astonishing fact that people are writing and publishing their literary works on social networking media like Instagram. Digital platforms enable its users to create, distribute, and aesthetically experience literary works. The incorporation of multimedia elements like audio, video, and other interactive features add a beauty in addition to its textual representation. The trans-modality and the interactivity assured by the digital literature enhance its receptivity among its readers. The possibility of archiving also enables digital literature as a best suitable medium for writing literature.

Instapoems is a part of digital literature that is marked by its peculiar characteristics like its brevity, impactful presentation, mixing up of multimedia in interacting with the reader, easy access, and use of direct language. These qualities as well as the popularity of Instagram often make it a familiar sub-genre of digital literature. The existence of many instapoets with a huge number of fans following shows the popularity of instapoems. Rupri Kaur, the Canadian- Indian instapoet, who has given the title the Queen of Instapoets by Rolling Stone Magazine in 2017. It itself proves the admiration to the poet and her medium. According to the description given by Wikipedia on her, she is considered to be "at the forefront" of instapoetry. As Roje and Vojnovic opined, Kaur has "rocketed to literary stardom with her shortform, feminist-themed poems accompanied by simple line drawings,

Literary Cognizance
ISSN- 2395-7522 (Online) Imp. Fact.6.21 (IIJF)
An International Refereed / Peer Reviewed
e-Journal of English Language, Literature & Criticism
Vol.- V, Issue- 4, March 2025



and has collected more than 4.5 million followers on Instagram” (64). The free verses of Kaur has accelerated the readership as well as its strong themes like collective identity and healing trauma by incorporating sisterhood has given it an image of feminist poems.

According to Rupp and Taylor, Feminism is a “collective identity” (364). As they postulate, “A collective identity approach shifts attention to the complex and ever-changing process of drawing the circles that separate ‘us’ (i.e. feminists) and ‘them’”. In Rupri Kaur’s instapoems we can find the spirit of collective identity that strongly advocates a sense of belonging among the oppressed souls. This paper aims to find the ways in which Kaur develops a sense of sisterhood in order to derive the power to fight the injustices and incapacities existing in this world, which make women to suffer.

Trauma and Other Incapacities:

Kaur’s poems are constructed in such a way that it do not directly specify the kinds of traumatized experiences one faced or experienced. She does not give importance to explain the trauma. Instead, she insists on the methods to recover from such bad experiences. In one of her instapoems posted on International Women’s Day in 2024, Kaur says: “what is the greatest lesson a woman should learn/ that since day one/ she’s already had everything she needs within herself/ it’s the world that convinced her she did not”. A poem with the length of four lines has the capacity to throw light on the innumerable sacrifices and traumas faced by numberless women all over the world. This brief and powerful portrayal of the dark past or present of women justifies the unjustifiable lives they have to persist in this world. The denial of freedom, voice, and identity is strongly criticized at the end of the poem by stating that women have the potential to fight against all the odds they face. In another instapoem posted on June 28, 2023, she says: “i stand/ on the sacrifices/ of a million women before me/ thinking/ what can i do/ to make this mountain taller/ so the women after me/ can see farther”. This poem also does not mention the sacrifices or the events that led to such sacrifices. The dark past or the present is evaded now and what remains is a clear and fine future. The women who had experienced unlawful experiences cleared the paths they travelled in order to offer a peaceful and just life to the next generation.

Kaur has adopted a strategy of not mentioning the unmentioned trauma experiences, that is, it is a method used by the poet to not to give importance to the traumatic experiences in order to shun their existence. Ignoring the importance of trauma by not suggesting it, Kaur is resisting the incidence of traumatic and such unjust practices that target women. In a poem posted on September 11, 2024, she writes: “and here you are living/ despite it all”. The “it” mentioned here are the universal traumatic experiences that were faced or experienced by women. Despite the fact that the poem throws light on injustices, it has a positive note as well.

In another poem posted on Instagram on July 7, 2023 goes like this. “i am not a victim of my life/ what i went through/ pulled a warrior out of me/ and it is my greatest honor to be her”. This poem shows how much she values the fight one fights rather than the hurdles one faces during that battle. The speaker of the poem wants her to be renowned as a warrior, not a victim. The oppressions and injustices one faces make one the strongest. Hence, the trauma one met in one’s lifetime is not at all a thing to be remembered. The reason for not mentioning the traumatic experiences is thus cleared by Kaur.

Collective Identity:

Feminism inherently advocates justice and equality for all irrespective of their gender groups. For this, it seeks to dismantle systems of oppression. Kaur presents women as the source of inspiration and source of strength for all those women who suffer. Collective identity or a sense of belonging to others, especially women, brings a supportive system to those who experience atrocities or injustices

Literary Cognizance
ISSN- 2395-7522 (Online) Imp. Fact.6.21 (IIJF)
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e-Journal of English Language, Literature & Criticism
Vol.- V, Issue- 4, March 2025



in their lives. In her instapoem, “it isn’t blood that makes you my sister/ it’s how you understand my heart/ as though you carry it/ in your body”, she says that a sisterly feeling develops between the two becomes a source of strength to the person who is weaker by will.

In an instapoem posted on March 7, 2024, Kaur says that she wants to apologize to those women whom she called pretty. In spite of that, she should have called them intelligent or brave as they are more apt terms to represent the spirit of a fighter. Here, she indicates the terms that define women as pretty and beautiful contain patriarchal ideology. Men use it as a bait to renounce the true spirit of women. She says: “...you have to be proud of when your/ spirit has crushed mountains/ from now on i will say things like/ you are resilient or you are extraordinary/ not because i don’t think you’re pretty/ but because you are so much more than that”. Here, the poet is praising a fellow being for her resilience. She understands the fact that women are “so much more than” the attributes given to them by the society. We have to identify the inborn power and aspirations of women. Kaur praises women and supports them by standing by their side and also acknowledging their achievements. This act is itself a source of inspiration.

Kaur, in another instapoem posted on July 15, 2023, examines the importance of collective identity that instills a sense of belonging and support. In it, she says:

i can live without romantic love
but i can’t survive without
the women i call friends
they know exactly what i need
before i even know i need it
the way we hold space
for each other is just different.

Here, Kaur says her women friends know and understand her needs, her inner thoughts, and her sense of self. She cannot survive without their support. “the way we hold space for each other” explains their intimacy and assistance to each other. In another one posted on March 26, 2023, Kaur asserts: “the way we rise/ from every sorrow in life/ is the most gorgeous thing i’ve ever seen”. This shows how the collective spirit of women influences them collectively. Kaur finds that the bonding that helps women to rise, to flourish, and to win should be passing on to the next generations as well. In a poem posted on June 28, 2023, she inspires the succeeding generations: “i stand/ on the sacrifices/ of a million women before me/ thinking/ what can i do/ to make this mountain taller/ so the women after me/ can see farther”. These lines ultimately become an anthem to spread the collective responsibility of womenfolk to be the pillar of support to those who are in need of their compassion, their advice, and their guidance.

“sisters” is an instapoem posted on September 22, 2024, in which she tells us about the support she gets from the women who are attached to her. She says: “on days i could not move/ it was women/who came to water my feet/ until I was strong enough/ to stand/ it was women/ who nourished me/ back to life”. Such support systems must be there for everyone. Undoubtedly, we can say that the presence of a helping hand, a shoulder to cry on, and soothing words must be there for everyone in order to rise again from our ashes.

Strength and Power:

Asserting a collective identity is a source of strength and power. In an instapoem posted on October 26, 2023, Kaur proclaims: “your voice/ is your sovereignty”. Here, Kaur asserts the importance of self-expression which is itself the door to self-empowerment. In a poem titled “women of color”, she says: “our backs/tell stories/no books have/the spine to carry”. Here, “back” means an aversion, a



reflex action to all those injustices women face throughout their lives. Such actions speak louder than words. However, we need stubbornness and empowerment to turn our backs to tell the stories we want to say. Kaur's poems tell the same stories that she wants to say. As a poet, she is treading the path that is less travelled by other poets of her time. The independent poet who never rely on publishers to publish her poems, the poet who has the power to self-publish her poems, the poet who never follows capitalization rules in her poems and the like are some of the attributes we can give to the queen of instapoetry. The platform she chose to write her poem is itself a revolutionary idea. Her poems empowered her to be the leader of that revolution.

Conclusion:

Rupi Kaur addresses issues related to women through her poems. Her poems do have the quality to relate with the lives of women, particularly young women. Readers can connect and relate with their own emotions and experiences and this quality has made her poems appealing. Kaur is an ardent believer of self-love. This has also increased the charm of her poetry. Themes like resilience, perseverance, asserting identity, proclaiming togetherness, source of inspiration and strength have made her poems a better choice to empower the souls that need healing. Through collective identity, she implants the idea that women can acquire the power to withstand all the odds of lives. The social media platform, the brevity, simple diction has also played a major role in the reception of her poems.

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Literary Cognizance
ISSN- 2395-7522 (Online) Imp. Fact.6.21 (IIJF)
**An International Refereed / Peer Reviewed
e-Journal of English Language, Literature & Criticism**
Vol.- V, Issue- 4, March 2025



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To Cite the Article: S, *Smithalekshmi*. "Healing Trauma and Asserting Identity in Rupi Kaur's Selected Instapoems." *Literary Cognizance*, V-4 (March, 2025): 234-238. Web.

