

Dismantling The Body Image In The Sun And Her Flowers By Rupi Kaur

^{1,*} Faiza Aleem, ²Nayyer Hassan* ,³Khalid Mehmood
and ⁴Mareeha Bashir-ullah

^{1,2,3,4,*} The University of Lahore, Lahore.

*Corresponding Author : Faiza.aleem@ell.uol.edu.pk

Abstract

Rupi Kaur is an Indian Canadian poetess raising voice for the multiple tabooed female oriented themes and subjects. Her point of views in instapoetry has raised many thought-provoking instances yet controversial debates too; she began her instapoetry career with Milk and Honey; followed by two more books The Sun and Her Flowers and Homebody. The fascinating part is this that she gives drawing illustrations with her writing pieces too.

As far this study is concerned, it is an attempt to explore body image in terms of how the poetess portrays body image of contemporary females in her work. To start with, body image is aligned with power struggles and patriarchal dynamics in many cultures and eras. To Bartky, it sounds really controlled in many variant forms and manifestations. She points out how patriarchal domination is modernized which is visible in the works of Foucault.

Introduction:

Here "Styles of the female figures vary in different eras and cultures. "Like she gives an example of today's time when slim women are preferred over fat. Then she throws light on the pressures of handling diet disciplines in determining the force of discipline. Females have to go through the drill of rigorous exercise for fitting in the society as a particular model. She terms it as "spot reducing" which in all manners is cruel for a woman.

Disciplinary projects for bodily perfection are very cruel for the females of today. Another step for creating submission in women is controlling their posture, movement, manner of speech too. She refers to a photographer MarianneWex showing difference of posture in masculine and feminine bodies_ they look small, tense and harmless. Men on the contrary expand into the available space proffering position.

A woman's body is there for ornamentation; "a woman's skin must be soft, supple, hairless and smooth. Ideally, it should betray no sign of wear, experience, age, or deep thought (31)". Hair must be removed not only from face but from large surfaces of the body as well, from legs and thighs, an operation accomplished by shaving, buffing with fine sandpaper, or applying foul smelling depilatories.

Another tenet fit for the study's framework is "A woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other. We are often told that "Women dress for other women" (34).

Women are often perceived with the notions of beauty set by the men around. The beauty standards are determined by them so they have to look and behave in a certain fashion. The existence of these standards makes them conscious of their world views and dynamics of male gaze too are constructed through this.

Most of the females feel at loss when male patronage is denied_ it guarantees them to secure good positions too. "The refusal of a decent livelihood" "women punish themselves too far the failure to conform" (38).

Also that the theorist suggests "The art of makeup is the art of disguise, but this presupposes that a woman's face, unpainted, is defective" (Bartky,1988, 33); which implies that she has to get. Contrary to this, "Soap and water, a shave, and routine attention to hygiene may be enough for him; for her they are not". (Bartky, 1988, 33)

The work ends on resolute determination "We women cannot begin the re-vision of our bodies until we learn to read the cultural messages we inscribe upon them daily and until we come to see that even when the mastery of the disciplines of femininity produces a triumphant result, we are still only women"(Page 44).

Literature Review

The research material found on *The Sun and Her Flower* is comparatively less in scholarly horizons yet the researcher manages to find some research reviews discussed in this section. "A Structural Analysis of Rupi Kaur's selected poems in *The Sun and Her Flowers*" is using the intrinsic and extrinsic elements employed in the poetic collection. It narrows down to the aspect of genetic structuralism i-e the origin of the work. Here extrinsic elements focus on social background, social circumstances when it was written. It further aligns with the feminism and religious backgrounds too.

Another article titled, "The Reflection of Inferiority Complex in "The Sun and Her Flower" by Ulfi Syaefianti elaborates the suffering of the speaker who goes through inferiority complex using the theory of Alfred Adler. He discusses its causes and visible symptoms. According to the theorist, a person with inferiority complex may use a superiority complex as a way to escape from his obstacles. "The speaker has faced some trauma, loss, and has been blindsided by infidelity which causes anxiety" (n.p). Her symptoms drive her to perform not in a good mood__ she thinks most of her relations will abandon her. "The social anxiety makes the speaker feel ashamed, powerless and alone" (n.p) Too much social anxiety pressurizes her into negativity. "The speaker formed to always do girl things, go to the salon, do some beauty treatment, and if she is not she will be called ugly and not fit in beauty in her society". She needs more instances to feel love for herself and her body image. As a result, she suffers from self-hate. It is indeed a different experience for her. The book proceeds the way it is curing and the poetess is forgiving all. This feeling is only temporary as rest of the times she is surrounded by clouds of inferiority complex.

A book review "Asian Women", Dec 2018, by M. Imran addresses body, using the term dysmorphia. It praises her efforts to chronicle various topics being an Asian woman. She uses an analogy of a flower to document the journey of a female. The book teaches the readers to "evoke various emotions, mostly sympathy and empathy and teaches the readers to love themselves before they love the world"(123).

Another article, "A Feminist Stylistics Analysis in Rupi Kaur's The Sun and Her Flowers" by Eddy Setia aims at linguistic stylistics describing how women and men are presented in the text. The work is using the feminist approach. It is indeed using Mill's theoretical framework and separately dealing with characterization, fragmentation, focalization and schemata incorporating examples from the book. This article concludes that the gender specific words are only used for the females.

"Flash of Feminism" by C. Esthar Rani enlightens that the scholars are of the view that Rupi Kaur's writings are a reflection of traumatic life experiences. They applaud Kaur for raising issues for the working women as well as home makers. In doing so she is not male slamming; this paper categorically throws light on the five sections providing a unique sense of raising voice for the painful experiences of her life.

"She's Already had Everything She Needs within Herself: Representation of Women's Empowerment in Rupi Kaur's *The Sun and Her Flowers*" by Emmi Hagman in a thesis discusses the dilemma is this that female oppression is deeply rooted in various societies__ it has the movement itself got mixed reviews. It traces the origin of instapoetry throughout ages____ like started during 2010. Kaur being the most famous of the all sheds light on the need for conducting research in terms of feminist approaches. Since most of the work revolves around linguistic structures. This work uses Fairclough's framework of CDA.

The need for improvement in women's inferior social options is pretty visible and it clearly shows the disadvantages of status relative to that of men. It traces the history of feminism_ its three waves and agenda. So her first work__ creating hype in a Canadian school. She becomes a controversial poet.

Whereas the current research paper delves deep into how Kaur makes an endearing attempt to voice for the coercive beauty pressures exerted on a female. She shuns the obligations to appear and behave in a certain manner which is putting the entire burden away. Thus it empowers her the way how individual she is.

Material and Methods

Key terms from Bartky's work is employing how a woman is facing control on her body, movement and posture by the male counterparts. She is doing a reworking of Foucault's work on human sexuality with reference to societal pressures exerted on the females. She categorically segregates the medical procedures and beauty treatment taken by a female; in doing so she goes through changes not only in her physique but her psychological and emotional health suffers too. Rupi Kaur is trying to put an attempt in creating an awareness of how a female first goes through all this and then a gradual sense of enlightenment opens on her which makes her comfortable in her skin and colour.

Another critical concern, Bartky voices that face tapes and hair removal are all part of a female's life. She refers to a feeling of self-loathing and self-denial which gives her slow psychological impacts of identity crisis. She weaves together the narrative of life long struggle which the females have to face since as the theorist states, "state of conscious and permanent visibility' is a sign of tight, disciplinary control of the body has gotten a hold on the mind as well" (Bartky,1988, 27).

Another critical concern is that diet plans are followed too for maintaining a certain body figure. Likewise the female ratio for going to dieticians is much more than the males. Though certain exercises and jazzercises are common with both genders yet the females are prone to many poses for face yoga and cellulite reduction for additional beauty baggage to carry. Resultantly on scientific grounds, it is problem-causing for most of the females; the major factors for fat contributions are hereditary so they are termed as callous activities; going against the nature. The work is suggestive that even if women are expressive then get creased face with imperfections and a body with disproportions, fat and cellulite accumulation.

The third part of the work categorically mentions that a female has to bear the extra pressure in terms of composure, gestures, movement and posture too. Her body has to display closure and composure in public and private spheres. In order to make the argument authentic, she quotes the efforts of a German photographer, Marianne Wex who shows that how different males and females appear in their street photos. One noteworthy part was to see the difference of sitting posture; a male sits with wide legs and a female with composed posture. Akin to this, there comes the next part of being judged on the bases of stride; a man goes for longer strides and a female is taxing herself with uncomfortable heeled short strides. It goes without saying too that the female has to show economy in her style, gait and smile disciplines. Such a woman also is trained to lower her gaze for appearing to be modest and well groomed. Lastly with this the economy of touching with hands too is depended on the professional needs where women are recruited and overall in their being too.

Bartky intricately weaves these concepts together in her work, the exerted pressures on her being feminine makes her complete only once she meets the traits of constriction, grace and modest eroticism later describing the disturbing nature of a female who struggles in routine life consequently if such a female cannot keep up with this, she faces self-denial and self-loathing. Even so far has gone the culture of magazines trying to put an inbuilt decorum with reference to monitoring her gait and getting off a car too. Overall Bartky's approach is to disseminate awareness of being creating this difference that a male gait and movement is like that of a horse; not heavy but smart and gentle.

The fourth part of this reworking analysis highlights what is major concern of the day to day life of a modern female. Bartky employs that a female has to carry supple, youth and hairless skin; in doing so she has to put herself through a drill of shaving, waxing and delving into various machines too. Also that she has to adapt to certain beautifying procedures like electrolysis; which is indeed a painful process of killing the root of the hair. She has to go through many beauty enhancing creams and serums and this is just the beginning of things the list goes on like insanely laborious self-care ingredients. Then commences the hassle of putting layers of makeup and that too is for different occasions since she states, " The art of makeup is the art of disguise but this presupposes that a woman's face that is not painted, is defective"(Bartky, 1988, 33). This is how a female earns her badge of acceptance in a society which creates fake beauty standards for the females of the modern era. She has to take the narrative of patriarchal dynamics and a readiness to go through certain bodily transformations.

Fifth part disseminates the frustration where Bartky sums up the list of all the parts of building a narrative for creating a powerful feminine beauty. Then she raises another particular concern that of having to do with race, class or ethnicity of women; they are unable to keep up with the changing norms and keeping up with femininity. She further quotes from de Beauvoir that in cooperate world, a woman presents herself as an attraction to the male gaze and her dress-up and decorum is controlled indirectly by the patriarchal Other (qtd Beauvior 1968, 642).

Results and Discussion

The instapoetic collection *The Sun and Her Flowers* shows poetess' frustration on being a female and all the way dolled up as a lady of all delicacies. She needs to look meticulous and flawless with all the beauty regimes to follow and endorse. Likewise Bartky claims that the art of makeup gives them an extra urge to disguise the true bare and natural self so they do so to put a mask to the identity as well. The young adult girls are looking to the mature females of the locality and family whole exert an extra pressure to stay delicate, soft, hairless and wrinkle free. The notions of staying natural and glamour free are restored; the females after reading this poetic collection feel a boost in themselves that the way they look is beautiful and unique in its own way.

The young girl in this piece of poetry is compliment-deprived. She needs public validation to how her facial features look remarkably attractive and magnetically

alluring. She takes validation even from the people after going through various innovations in skin care and aesthetic procedures which put so many girls like her in a blind rat-race of looking pretty. The aesthetic and clinical treatments are a nuance since many girls may not afford it but they have to fit in so they indulge in activities like these. The readers can observe "I am willing to pay any price". The state of affairs for these young girls is that they have to look mesmerizing to make people awed by dint of acquired beauty. They remove themselves away from the natural beauty and delve into the synthetic approaches for flourishing their femininity.

There are wrong beauty canons expressed in the collection that carry a certain amount of filial and societal pressure leading to an almost perfect body image. Where female relatives push the girls into the aesthetic procedures on the other hand, the fathers or male counter parts discourage them for being looking ugly after a certain beauty treatment. So the young Asian girls are divided into a stretching exercise to look beautiful and remarkably pretty. The most harmful practice is the exercise of comparing one's beauty and appearance with the other girls/females. The poetic reference gives an ample detail of this stance:

"I am having a difficult time right now comparing
Myself to other people I am/ stretching myself
thin
Trying to be them making fun of my face
like my
father /calling it ugly"

The feminine images are mostly related to juicy fruits whereas the same feminine is portrayed in filthy colours if there is any mishandling such as rape, harassment or molestation. This is evident that there is natural and fresh imagery from the world of man and nature for a woman who is desired. God forbids if she is assaulted then the angle of seeing a woman transforms drastically. Hence the amount of shame is parallel to not the attacker but to the victim. On the contrary, flies, webs, bugs are associated with filth and rape. A woman has to keep the outer beauty as youthful as possible and inner beauty intact and away from the abuser's approaches. Then the readers go through lines where the shame is attached to body hair.

my girlhood was too much hair thin limbs coated in
velvet it was neighborhood
tradition for the other young girls and i to frequent
basement salons on a weekly
basis run by women in a house

who were my mother's age had my mother's skin
but looked nothing like my simple mother they had
brown skin with yellow hair
meant for white skin streaks like zebras

The poetess presents a critique on the need to visit parlors on regular bases to maintain a meticulous appearance which endorses the societal and cultural pressures on the females. All the females of the vicinity pay discreet visits to the beautician. The landscape is noteworthy too where the female clients are directed to take part in this whole beautification process like some sort of gorilla mission. The simile employed here is that of zebra where the black and white hair streaks are resembling the patterns of zebra. The female psychology is constructed in this way that weekly threading, facial and waxing procedures are quite normal for her. The mature aged women are giving the beauty treatments to the young girls since they know what it feels like to carry the burden of looking pretty. The skin color being comprised of brown is significant too since the readers know they are Asians whose complexion invites a sense of discrimination while living in Canadian society.

Moreover, the following poetic instance is observed closely;

i reduced my body to aesthetics
forgot the work it did to keep me alive
with every beat and breath
declared it a grand failure for not looking like theirs
searched everywhere for a miracle
foolish enough to not realize
i was already living in one .

This presents the notions of using aesthetic procedures and cosmetic treatments being the cause of diminishing the femininity of its innocence and natural beauty. The body is facing a public sense where it is only turned to petite pigmy of aesthetic projection and being plastic. The amount of awe is articulated through these lines where the poetess feels that due to worldly beauty concerns she ignored the natural call of her body. The body which resonates the miraculous existence in itself like it malfunctions, rejuvenates, replenishes, detoxifies and recovers as a result of the external and internal healings. Most importantly, it manifests that all individuals possess distinctly beautiful and highly attractive beauty attributes. The female clientele puts themselves through a laborious grill when they plunge into beautifying themselves through aesthetic procedures and artificial assistance.

Overall, the facial beauty is the highest of the concerns where the density and scarcity of eye brows matter too. With an age where the poetess herself is coming of age, she feels like a nerd when she looks at herself in the mirror. Special attention is given to the hairy eyebrows which become a cause of embarrassment for her. Overall, the female has to appear hairless facially and other public hair should be waxed properly yet the eyebrow hair should maintain the trend of the time otherwise the female will undermine herself for not keeping up with the beauty canons of the time. The readers can observe in the given poem too:

 slits for eyebrows
 i looked at my own caterpillars with shame and
dreamt mine would be that thin i
 sit timidly in the makeshift waiting area
 hoping a friend from school would not drop by a
bollywood music video is
 playing on a tiny television screen in the corner
someone is getting their legs
 waxed or hair dyed when the auntie calls me in
 i walk into the room and make small talk
 she leaves for a moment
 while i undress my lower half i slide my pants and
underwear off lie down on the
 spa bed and wait when she returns she positions my
legs like an open butterfly

As the critic, the researcher can observe that the simile the poetess is using is that of caterpillar. The readers is very much aware that a stage in the life of the butterfly. Metaphorically, it also stands for the teen female's growth into a seductive lady who undergoes the puberty crisis. When the female faces social pressure of keeping up with the beauty canons and feeling at times the sense of self-loathing then the female forgets that an acquired appearance which is going through metamorphosis is essential for us to embrace. This helps to construct the female identity on valid and much stronger grounds. The recipient of her well-maintained and trimmed body is the male counterpart. She is reached on the verge of seduction to allure the men and score a validation for her acquired beauty. This whole drill deprives her of her naturalness and innate beauty.

Hence here comes another poetic reference from the book:

 shivering with pain
 why do i do this

why do i punish my body for being exactly as it's
meant to be i stop myself
halfway through the regret when i think of him and
how i'm too embarrassed to
show him unless it's clean
i bite down on my lip
and ask if we're almost finished - basement
aesthetician

Noteworthy part here is the aesthetic parlors have got a
subterranean setting where all such beauty procedures
happen without the world being aware of their existence.

Then Kaur expresses:

my eyes
make mirrors out of every reflective surface they
pass searching for something
beautiful looking back my ears fish for compliments
and praise but no matter
how far they go looking nothing is enough for me
i go to clinics and department stores for pretty
potions and new techniques i've
tried the lasers
i've tried the facials
i've tried the blades and expensive creams for a
hopeful minute they fill me
make me glow from cheek to cheek but as soon as i
feel beautiful their magic
disappears suddenly where am i supposed to find it
i am willing to pay any price
for a beauty that makes heads turn every moment
day and night
- a never-ending search

The young girl in this piece of poetry is compliment-deprived. She needs public validation to how her facial features look remarkably attractive and magnetically alluring. She takes validation even from the people after going through various innovations in skin care and aesthetic procedures which put so many girls like her in a blind rat-race of looking pretty. The aesthetic and clinical treatments are a nuance since many girls may not afford it but they have to fit in so they indulge in activities like these. The readers can observe the confession "i am willing to pay any price". The state of affairs for these young girls is that they have to look mesmerizing to make people awed by dint of acquired beauty. They remove themselves away from the natural beauty and delve into the synthetic approaches for flourishing their femininity.

And then who cannot relate to heartfelt reflection of Kaur's pain in these verses:

i am having a difficult time right now comparing
myself to other people i am
stretching myself thin trying to be them making fun
of my face like my father
calling it ugly
starving out this premature double chin before it
melts into my shoulders like
candle wax fixing the bags under my eyes that carry
the rape bookmarking
surgical procedures for my nose there is so much
that needs tending to can you
point me in the right direction i want to take this
body off

Thus Kaur becomes a trailblazer in Instapoetry to raise an awareness of the anxieties the females go through for that whole exertion of looking pretty and keep up with latest aesthetic trends is an extra burden to handle.

Conclusion

The research sheds light on the need to push back all the established prevailing notions of looking meticulous for a female. Some poems end on a note of resistance and self-healing where the abuser is kicked out of the home; a parasite-like abuser is driven out. As Bartky points out that the true triumph is scored when women remain women since the application of makeup, beauty procedures and aesthetic treatments is set by the patriarchy. When a woman once feels a woman in her own skin and body she breaks away the shackles of body image imposed from the outside world onto her. The amount of pressure is akin to subsiding her subjectivity and gender specifications so she achieves all this and more by feeling confident in her own. She emerges as a young liberating woman who is gaining too much confidence. Any woman having wrinkles, body hair, and other female normality of physical attributes deserves same degree of love and affection and validation.

References

- Bartky. Sandra Lee(1988)"Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power". Ebook. (27,31-34,38,44)
- Hagman. Emmi(2020) "she's already had everything she needs within herself":
Representations of Women's Empowerment in Rupi Kaur's The Sun and Her Flowers". Bachelor's Thesis University of Jyväskylä

Department of Language and Communication Studies English,
February.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330287406> The Sun
and Her Flowers

Article in Asian Women · December 2018. (123)

Kaur. Rupi; The Sun and Her Flowers. www.andrewsmcmeel.com
www.rupikaur.com

ISBN: 978-1-4494-8890-1

Saddiah, Halimatus and Tarihoran, RezkyKhoirina(2021)"A

Structuralanalysis Of Rupi

Kaur's Selected Poems In The Sun And Her Flowers"Philology

Journal of English Language and Literature Volume 1, No. 2,

August 2021

SaskiaFebiolaSiregar, Eddy Setia, SiamirMarulafau(2020) A

Feminist Stylistics Analysis In

Rupi Kaur's The Sun And Her Flowers, University of Sumatera

Utara (USU), Medan, Indonesia Journal of Language Volume 2,

Number 2, pp: 170-186, November 2020 e-ISSN: 2685-8878 | p-

ISSN: 2655-9080

Syaefianti. Ulfi; The Reflection of Inferiority Complex in the Sun
and Her Flowers byRupi

Kaur .Reg. No. 17101060048

Rani. C.Esthar, Selvakumari. S.Aswini , K.Selvi , R.Udhayanila,
Assistant Professors ,

Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan college of arts and Science for

Women(Autonomous) Perambalur."Flash Of Feminism In The

Sun And Her Flowers By Rubi Kaur".