FINDING A VOICE IN 21ST CENTURY POPULAR CULTURE: RUPI KAUR AND HER INSTA-POETRY

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DENİZLİ

I hereby declare that this thesis has been formed and written in accordance with academic rules and ethical standard. I also declare that all ideas and quotations that are not original to this work are fully listed and cited in the bibliography of this work.

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ABSTRACT

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Throughout history, women who have been oppressed by male hegemony and had to face inequality in many areas of life because of their gender, have fought for their freedom and gender equality by rebelling with the feminist movement that started in England in 1792. Mainly serving a common purpose, the feminist movement was separated by four waves. Women, who won political rights with the first wave, criticized the patriarchal structures and cultural norms at all levels of the society in the second wave, and fought for the destruction of gender roles and the elimination of any gender superiority. Aware of the racist, sexist and classist barriers created by the patriarchal order, the third wave feminists refused to be a part of this system and defended the rights of women of different races, colours, classes, religions, cultures and ethnic origins by focusing on their problems. Their ideas on different femininity issues reached wider audiences thanks to the technological opportunities brought by the 20th century such as electronic magazines and blogs. The fourth wave of feminism, which started in 2012 and is taking shape today, draws attention to the problems of sexual harassment, rape, domestic violence, sexism and misogyny via social media which has a significant impact on the formation and spread of popular culture. Thus, all over the world, women from different ethnicities who have been subjected to violence or sexual harassment have made their voices heard by sharing their horrible experiences on social platforms. These traumas experienced by women in addition to the aesthetic concerns brought by the 21st century have alienated them from their own bodies and made them lose their sense of belonging. The Indian-Canadian poet Rupi Kaur, finding a voice within popular culture, draws attention to different experiences and problems of womanhood with her instapoems which she first shared on Instagram and Tumblr and later published in her books <u>Milk and Honey</u> (2014) and <u>The Sun and Her Flowers</u> (2017). Kaur has succeeded in being the voice of all women by boldly expressing the issues that are covered up in society such as sexual harassment, rape, cultural structures regarding female bodies, taboos and the problems faced by non-white women through her digital feminist activism. While doing this, Kaur, who deals with the problems expressed by women in the third wave through the identities of her own mother and the other women in her community, combines her own experiences with the premises put forward by the digital feminism as part of the fourth wave. Thus, she not only creates a bridge between 20th and 21st century feminisms, but also reveals the path taken in terms of feminism.

Key words: Rupi Kaur, feminism, instapoetry, popular culture, social media.

ÖZET
21. YÜZYIL POPÜLER KÜLTÜRÜNDE SES BULMAK: RUPI KAUR VE INSTA-ŞİİRLERİ

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Tarih boyunca cinsiyetleri nedeniyle erkek hegemonyası tarafından ezilen ve hayatın birçok alanında eşitsizlikle yüzleşmek zorunda kalan kadınlar, 1792 yılında İngiltere'de başlayan feminizm hareketi ile başkaldırıda bulunarak özgürlükleri ve toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliği için mücadele etmişlerdir. Temelde ortak bir amaca hizmet eden feminist hareket dört dalga ile birbirinden ayrılmıştır. Birinci dalga ile siyasal haklar kazanan kadınlar, ikinci dalgada toplumun tüm kademelerindeki ataerkil yapılanmaları ve kültürel normları eleştirerek, toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin yıkılması ve herhangi bir cinsiyet üstünlüğünün olmaması için mücadelede bulunmuşlardır. Ataerkil düzenin oluşturduğu ırkçı, cinsiyetçi ve sınıfçı engellerin farkında olan üçüncü dalga feministler ise bu sistemin bir parçası olmayı reddetmiş ve farklı ırk, renk, sınıf, din, kültür ve etnik kökene sahip olan kadınların da sorunları üzerine eğilerek haklarını savunmuşlardır. Farklı kadınlık sorunlarına dair fikirleri elektronik magazin ve bloglar gibi 20.yy'ın getirdiği teknolojik imkanlar sayesinde daha geniş kitlelere ulaşmıştır. 2012 yılında başlayan ve günümüzde şekillenmekte olan feminizmin dördüncü dalgası ise cinsel taciz, tecavüz, aile içi şiddet, cinsiyetçilik ve kadın düşmanlığı sorunlarına popüler kültürün oluşmasında ve yayılmasında önemli bir etkiye sahip olan sosyal medya yoluyla dikkat çekmektedir. Böylece, tüm dünyada farklı etnisitelerden şiddete ya da cinsel tacize uğrayan kadınlar yaşadıkları korkunç deneyimleri sosyal platformlarda paylaşarak seslerini duyurmuşlardır. 21.yy'ın getirdiği estetik kaygıların yanı sıra, kadınların yaşadığı bu travmalar onları kendi bedenlerine yabancılaştırmış ve aidiyet duygularını kaybetmelerine neden olmuştur. Popüler kültürde ses bulan Hint kökenli Kanadalı şair Rupi Kaur öncelikle Instagram ve Tumblr üzerinden paylaştığı daha sonra Süt ve Bal (2014) ve Güneş ve Onun Çiçekleri (2017) adlı kitaplarında yayınladığı instaşiirleriyle farklı kadınlık deneyimlerine ve sorunlarına dikkat çekmektedir. Kaur, kadınların maruz kaldıkları cinsel taciz, tecavüz, bedenlerine ilişkin oluşturulan kültürel yapılar, tabular ve beyaz ırktan olmayan kadınların yaşadıkları sorunlar gibi toplumda üstü kapatılan konuları dijital feminist aktivizmi ile cesurca dile getirerek tüm kadınların sesi olmayı başarmıştır. Bunu yaparken kadınların üçüncü dalgada ifade ettiği sorunları kendi annesinin ve yaşadığı toplumdaki diğer kadınların kimlikleri üzerinden işleyen Kaur, kendi tecrübelerini dördüncü dalganın bir parçası olan dijital feminizmin öne sürdüğü tezler ile birleştirmektedir. Böylelikle, 20.yy ve 21.yy feminizmleri arasında da bir köprü oluşturmakla kalmayıp feminizm anlamında alınan yolu gözler önüne sermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Rupi Kaur, feminizm, instaşiir, popüler kültür, sosyal medya.

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INTRODUCTION

Women have consistently been subjected to discrimination because of their gender since early ages. They have been silenced and reduced to the secondary status in society by the male-hegemony. Their lives and bodies have been dominated, oppressed and exploited due to the societal norms constructed through patriarchal ideology. As a reaction to this patriarchal treatment, they have raised their voices in diverse ways in order to change the conditions on behalf of them and the attitude towards them by benefiting from the possibilities of the age throughout history.

Being deprived of social, economic and political rights, women in Early Modern England were totally dependent on male power and authority. The appropriate characteristics of women attributed by patriarchal mentality were to be passive, silent and obedient. While men were active in all areas of life, women were trapped with domestic duties within the boundaries of home. Women's inferior status and isolation from the social life triggered some female writers at least to challenge the attitude in society towards women in the 16th and 17th centuries. With this purpose in their mind, important literary figures such as Jane Anger and Rachel Speght deconstructed the common belief about the creation of women and Eve's first sin by reinterpreting some parts of Genesis that emphasize women's inferiority and lack of intellect by nature. Furthermore, in the 17th century, many women writers and feminist entrepreneurs led women to raise their voice about their unequal status in society. During the period from the end of the 16th century to the beginning of the 18th century - considered to be the early stages of feminism - women accomplished to break their silence in cultural and social areas, but they could not get any economic, political or legal rights.

In the 18th century, Mary Wollstonecraft, challenging the notion that women's major role in society is to please men, raised her voice with her feminist work <u>Vindication of the Rights of Women</u> (1792) which started First Wave Feminism. In her influential book, Wollstonecraft advocated equal opportunities for women and men in education, business and politics. During this period, women mainly focused on legal issues to gain equal rights with men. By investigating their legal status in society and fighting for it, they accomplished to acquire many new rights in this area. To start with, they gained the right to have the custody of their children with the Infant Custody Act in 1839. They also gained the right to have the same standards with men in the case of divorce with the 1857 Act and to keep and use their own earnings with the 1870 Act (Property Ownership Law).

In addition to these rights, they acquired many more legal rights that made them visible before the law. Thanks to the educational reform which took place during the period between 1860s and 1870s, women gained the right to get education almost at the same standard with men and to be employed in government departments. The most significant right gained by women in this period was the right to vote which enabled them to express their opinion about the administration of the country and made them also visible in the political sphere.

In the early 1960s, Betty Friedan argued that women withdrew from the world again and restricted themselves with the domestic duties at home after winning the right to vote. Considering that women's withdrawal from the social life would undermine the women's rights movement and their rising voices, Friedan initiated Second Wave Feminism with her book The Feminine Mystique (1963) in the United States from which it spread throughout Western world. In her work, she warns women against the culturally constructed feminine roles which prevent them to fulfil their own unique potentials by limiting them with the roles of a mother and housewife. In same way, Kate Millett points out these constructed roles of femininity and masculinity as the root cause of gender inequality in society in her book Sexual Politics (1977). Despite being criticized by women of colour and lesbian feminists, these books and the related debates produced a range of sites of resistance for women. In order to take the gains of first wave feminism one step further, feminist activists in this period dealt with a wide range of issues such as the injustices suffered by women in the family, at workplace and in their sexual lives as well as reproductive rights and legal inequalities. Second wave feminism including various feminist viewpoints like liberal, radical and socialist feminisms - which will be discussed in the First Chapter in detail - especially focused on criticizing patriarchal structures and cultural norms at all levels of the society. During this wave, women proceeded to a great extent in their fight for sexual equality and they accomplished to be visible and have their voices heard by gaining many legal rights.

As second wave feminist movement only dealt with the concerns of white, middle class and college educated women, it failed to address the issues of black, lesbian, transgender, immigrant or working class women. Therefore, third wave feminism and postcolonial feminism as part of it emerged towards the end of the 20th century in order to make the world aware of the existence and concerns of these groups of women who were oppressed not only because of their sex or gender but also because of their race, class or other factors. Rather than focusing on legal and political processes, these new

versions of feminism focused on individual identities, embracing women with various ethnic and racial backgrounds. Third wavers, especially postcolonial feminists, resisted the concept of universal female identity and the discourses that overemphasized the experience of white middle and upper class women. Thus, personal stories of the women who were exploited, devalued and silenced on account of their skin colour, religion, nation or ethnic background came into prominence. Third wavers including postcolonial feminists generally dealt with issues such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality and nationalism and tried to theorize these issues from a feminist perspective. By rejecting a generalist point of view on all these issues, they tried to explore individual identities and stated that the problems of women throughout the world were not common, and that women living in different places and cultures had different problems. Besides, they benefited from the advancements of 20th century in the information technologies which provided them a significant amount of opportunities to disseminate their ideas and reach a great number of women. In order to raise their voice against sexism, patriarchal oppression and violation, they drew on various media outlets such as television, magazines, internet blogs, e-zines, etc. In their fight for social, economic and political equality, they also used products of pop culture like music, art and fashion to express themselves without any restrictions. Furthermore, they started a kind of linguistic war against patriarchal discourse by rejecting the degrading labels used for women; hence, they invented their own unique words and types of communication by inverting sexist, classist and racist phrases. Judith Butler, as an important third wave feminist icon, emphasized the unnatural construction of gender, sexuality and gender roles through the cultural norms of society, drawing attention to the fact that it is these cultural constructions on the lives and bodies of women which trapped them in the patriarchal order. In this respect, depending on Butler's notion, one of the aims of this thesis is to depict how Rupi Kaur accomplishes to challenge cultural construction of women's identities and the womanhood in general through her subversive poetry by adopting the ideas of Butler.

Starting in 2012, fourth wave feminism refers to a resurgence of interest in feminism after the "dawning realization of the social, political, and cultural inequalities still faced by many women" (Rivers, 2017: 135). This new version of feminism is strongly linked to the usage of internet and social media which led to the emergence of digital feminism. Thanks to digital feminist activism emerging as part of the fourth wave, women who are silenced in other areas of life have managed to find their voices on social

platforms in the 21st century. Thus, they started to organize and raise their voices against sexism and misogyny without any restrictions. The main issues they have been dealing with involve the objectification of women in media, especially on television, sexual abuse, rape, domestic violence, workplace discrimination, racism, classism, trans-phobia and homophobia. For digital feminist activists, internet and the social networking sites have functioned as consciousness raising tools; hence, they have used these tools effectively for both discussion and activism. Moreover, they have accomplished to build a global community of women thanks to these digital possibilities of the era. Instead of online magazines or songs, digital feminists have set up blogs, websites and initiated campaigns on social media platforms. The #MeToo movement has become one of the most influential campaigns on Twitter which protested sexual assault and harassment on social media in 2017 and demonstrated that it is possible to end misogyny and oppose all forms of discrimination today. It can be said that digital feminism is the most inclusive form of women's liberation movement. It is closely linked to social justice activism taking into account the premise that all forms of systemic oppression are interconnected. Thus, the fight against gender discrimination goes hand in hand with the struggle to end racism, classism, discrimination against the disabled, shame on one's body or heterosexism.

After having a look at the historical progress in terms of the struggle of women for finding a voice in the First Chapter, Second Chapter of this study discusses in detail various definitions of pop culture and shows how the way popular culture spreads has changed through new media tools such as Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram or Facebook. This part also portrays how cultural products of popular culture and media marginalize, stereotype or devalue women by supporting and perpetuating cultural construction of femininity, sexual division of labour and unequal power relations between both genders. In addition, women's reaction to their deceptive manifestation in mass media and popular culture through new media formats by undermining the patriarchal ideology is analysed in depth. This chapter also discusses the current status of women's poetry in pop culture and shows how poetry and popular culture have become much closer thanks to the online platforms through which a new type of poetry called "instapoetry" has emerged. Instapoetry, as a popular cultural product, has made modern poetry more popular and accessible to individuals all around the world. Indian born Canadian poet Rupi Kaur, one of the most well-known representatives of this genre, has become an international celebrity with her short and simple poetry - namely instapoetry - shared by herself on Tumblr and Instagram. By building a powerful connection between poetry and online

platforms, Kaur has accomplished to find her voice within popular culture through her digital feminist activism. Thus, she has become the bold feminist voice of both 20th and 21st feminisms by challenging the patriarchal and hegemonic ideologies and making the voice of all women heard globally.

In the Third Chapter of this study, a selection of poems from Kaur's best-selling poetry-prose collections <u>Milk and Honey</u> and <u>The Sun and Her Flowers</u> are analysed from the perspective of feminist theory by evaluating the Instagram poetry as a popular cultural product in the 21st century literature. As for the purpose of this thesis, it aims to portray how women, who raised their voices against patriarchal authority by making use of the possibilities of the era in different ways, have struggled throughout history in order to have equal rights in social, political and economic fields on the same terms with men. It also aims to show how Rupi Kaur - as an immigrant and woman of colour - develops an understanding of the problems experienced by the women of her community especially by her mother during their survival in the male-dominant society and how she has built a bridge between 20th and 21st feminisms by finding her voice within popular culture. Finally, this study aims to portray how Kaur managed to raise her voice against the cultural constructions on the bodies of women, sexual abuse, violence and the taboos surrounding female sexuality and biology by increasing the popularity of poetry through her digital feminist activism.

CHAPTER I

WOMEN'S STRUGGLE TO FIND A VOICE

1.1. First Attempts

The struggle of women against patriarchal oppression in Early Modern England differs significantly from the feminist movements of the 20th or 21st centuries. During those early years (1550-1700), social conditions were quite restrictive for women since it was traditionally believed that men were sexually superior to women; thus, they had the power to dominate innately while women were born to be dominated. Throughout these periods, women did not have any political rights both in the local or national scale. Their access to education largely improved depending on their socio-economic power but they were prevented from getting a university education. They did not have any right to ask for equal pay or conditions and married women were legally dependent on their husbands. Since it was really hard for women to gain economic power, they regarded marriage as a safe way to secure their future. All properties, money and valuable things brought by the wife as a dowry automatically belonged to her husband. In return for this, he was supposed to maintain his wife for the rest of her life. Women's major role was childbearing, so they were expected to produce male heirs for the lands and titles of their husbands. Although women were the initial instructors of their children, they had no rights to express any opinion about the raising and education of them as the kids legally belonged to their fathers. During this period, the prevalent belief was that women were inferior creatures because of Eve's committing sin in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3). Besides, they were seen as incapable for rational thought and every kind of initiative. Therefore, their education had to be confined to personal and domestic sphere as advised by Renaissance philosophers. With regard to the education of a woman, Renaissance humanist Juan Luis Vives states that:

"It neither becometh a woman to rule a school, nor to live among men, or speak abroad, and shake off her demureness and honesty, either altogether or else a great part: which if she be good, it were better to be at home within and unknown to other folks. And in company to hold her tongue demurely. Let few see her and none at all hear her" (Loughlin et al., 2011: 106).

In his recommendation, Vives clearly demonstrates the inferior position of women in the eye of men and also states what behaviours were appropriate for them by portraying the oppressions and prejudices women were subjected to throughout Western history. In a period when women were expected to be virtuous, silent and obedient, their any attempt to pronounce and publish their ideas or problems was regarded as a threat and challenge to patriarchal authority.

Under such circumstances, feminism initially had to change the attitude towards women rather than changing the conditions on behalf of them. As a powerful and successful woman, during the 16th century, British author Jane Anger attempted to deconstruct the common belief about the creation of women in Genesis:

"The creation of man and woman at the first, he being formed...of dross and filthy clay, did so remain until God saw that in him his workmanship was good, and therefore by the transformation of the dust which was loathsome unto flesh it became purified. Then lacking a help for him, God, making woman of man's flesh that she might be purer than he, doth evidently show how far we women are more excellent than men" (Loughlin et al., 2011: 612).

With her radically different interpretation, Anger refutes the prevalent belief that emphasizes the post and inferior creation of Eve. Pointing out the improvement in the phases of God's creation, she proves the excellence in the creation of women. In addition, Rachel Speght, 17th century poet and polemicist of gender ideology, contributes to underpin the negative image of women in her polemic by arguing that if Eve had been deceived by Satan, why wouldn't Adam have prevented her:

"Yet we shall find the offence of Adam and Eve almost to parallel: for as an ambitious desire of being made like unto God was the motive which caused her to eat, so likewise was it his....And if Adam has not approved of that deed which Eve had done, and been willing to thread the steps which she had gone, he being her head would have reproved her......." (Marc, 1998).

With the efforts of women writers who wrote about women in the Bible and European history, the attitude towards women started to change to some extent; even the sermons preached at churches emphasized the necessity of gentle treatment of women by their husbands and the mutual respect between them. Many other women writers and feminist pioneers of the 17th century like Margaret (Fell) Fox, Esther Sowernam and Sarah (Fyge) Egerton not only offered for the reinterpretation of some parts of Genesis but they

also stressed on the fact that Eve was created from Adam's side which signifies her equal status to him (Gamble, 2004: 6). She was created as a "helper fit for him" (Genesis 2:18b). The term helper should not be interpreted as a lower status, instead it must be regarded as a function since Eve was to be a companion and a complement to Adam. Besides, the term "helper" is also used for God in Genesis "Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and our shield" (Psalm 33: 20).

Being fully aware of their lower status in society, women started to raise their voice by asking for a better agreement on the institutions as marriage, motherhood and correspondingly time-consuming domestic duties since for many of them, these duties prevented their intellectual improvement. To support these women's assertion, Scottish poet Mary Oxlie wrote a poem in 1656 to point out the fact that women are not intellectually inferior to men, they simply do not have the same opportunities with them. She argues that the inferiority of women is not innate rather it is culturally constructed. The successful women figures of the century like "Queen Elizabeth I", "Margaret More Roper", "Jane Fitzalan Lumley" and "Elizabeth Tanfield Cary" proved the fact that women could accomplish more intellectually provided that they were given the same opportunities as men (Gamble, 2004: 10). In the second half of the 17th century, women poets like "Katherine Philips", "Aphra Behn" and "Anne Finch" highlighted the importance of sisterhood among women to provide a solidarity against male supremacy and patriarchal oppression. The formation of a female literary tradition enabled women to express themselves without any restraints. Some women writers even benefited from the model of the convent to express their feminist ideas. By retreating to a convent, they nourished not only their soul but also their mind as recommended by English protofeminist author Mary Astell in A Serious Proposal to the Ladies:

 "You are therefore Ladies, invited into a place where you shall suffer no other confinement, but to be kept out of the road of sin: you shall not be depriv'd of your Grandeur but only exchange the vain Pomps and Pageantry of the world, empty Titles and Forms of State, for the true and solid Greatness of being able to despise them" (Astell, 1697: 42).

Having reached a professional level in the literary world towards the end of the 17th century, women writers began to compete with men increasingly. What they needed most at this point was to express their mutual support and admiration for each other publicly since this would facilitate the formation of a female literary tradition through

which they could be able to make feminist statements. Constant citation of Katherina Philips Orinda and Aphra Behn Astrea who accomplished both intellectually and commercially impressive achievements was a good example of mutual support among women during this period (Gamble, 2004: 12).

Although women made their presence felt in cultural and social spheres with their multiple literary voices during the years 1550-1700, they could not achieve anything about their economic and legal positions in society, however all their efforts in the name of feminism laid the foundations for greater changes in the near future.

1.2. Claiming More Rights

Emerging from a socially and politically chaotic atmosphere generated by the French Revolution (1789), Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) inaugurated First Wave Feminism which would be influential until the middle of the 20th century. As an advocate of women's rights, Wollstonecraft was the first woman to state outspokenly the issue of making women rational. In her book, she asserts that "till women are more rationally educated, the progress of human virtue and improvement in knowledge must receive continual checks" (Wollstonecraft, 1792: 43). Revealing the fact that women's place in society is not equal to men's, Wollstonecraft claims that one half of the human race decides and behaves in the name of the other half whose decisions and voices are disregarded on purpose. She asks "who made the man exclusive judge if woman partake with him the gift of reason?" (Wollstonecraft, 1792: 4). By questioning the lack of women's voice and reason, she mainly centres upon the education of young girls to be well prepared against the social construction of femininity which instructs them "a little knowledge of human weakness, justly termed cunning, softness of temper, outward obedience, and a scrupulous attention to a puerile kind of property, will obtain for them the protection of men" (Wollstonecraft, 1792: 20). She especially argues that in her time the educational system was designed to make women frivolous and incapable on purpose. Therefore, she attributes the misery in society to the failure in the education system:

"....the neglected education of my fellow - creatures is the grand source of the misery I deplore; and that women, in particular, are rendered weak and wretched by a variety of concurring causes originating from one hasty conclusion. The conduct and manners of

women, in fact, evidently prove that their minds are not in a healthy state.....One cause of this....I attribute to a false system of education..."(Wollstonecraft, 1792: 7).

She argues that since women are deprived of education, they are not qualified enough to struggle for a life which is more equal and better. She is disturbed by the fact that women are regarded simply as sexual characters by men rather than rational human beings. Therefore, they have been rendered to "more artificial, weak characters, than they would otherwise have been; and, consequently, more useless members of society" (Wollstonecraft, 1792: 23). Wollstonecraft's ideal image of the woman is the one who is smart, enterprising and adept at blending social responsibilities with familial ones. However, she is aware of the fact that most middle class women would prefer a marriage surrounded by domestic duties. For the possibility of their future economic independence, Wollstonecraft recurrently emphasizes the necessity of girls' education. Considering the false cultural constructions about the relationship of women and men could be corrected at an earlier age, she calls for a revolutionary model which suggests the education of men and women side by side. In addition to this, she desires for women to study medicine and engage in business or politics.

In 1839, it was The Caroline Norton case through which the specific inequalities experienced by women in troubled marriages were demonstrated and this became the first major dispute to undermine the entire legitimate unity of wife and husband. In the early 19th century when a woman got married "the very being or legal existence of [her] is suspended, or at least it is incorporated or consolidated into that of the husband, under whose wing, protection and cover she performs everything" (Blackstone, 1827: 442). In 1836, it became possible to question the legal position of women concerning the custody of children when Caroline Norton's husband kidnapped her children and sued her for divorce by claiming the offence of adultery against him. With Caroline Norton's remarkable efforts and subsequent campaigns over child custody, the Infant Custody Act was actualized in 1839, enabling women who had not committed adultery to have custody of children up to seven and to see their older children. Becoming a major Victorian campaigner, Norton accomplished to secure an important victory for women by making them visible before the law. It was a revolutionary act for women in spite of the fact that the father was still implied as the natural or usual protector of children. However, it was only possible in 1973 for women to have definitely the same legitimate control over their children as fathers.

The property laws of married women were discussed in detail when Caroline Norton couldn't use her own earnings gained by writing after her divorce since they legitimately belonged to her husband. When her husband stopped his financial support from a trust fund that was formed for herself and the children, Ms Norton applied to the court about her financial difficulty which led the property reform of married women. Therefore, Caroline Norton's personal legal difficulties and her investigation on the legal position and rights of women enabled eighteen new laws for women in the 19th century. Of all these new laws "The 1870 Act" namely "the property ownership law" was the most important one as it permitted married women to keep and use their own earnings as well as inheriting their personal properties (Mitchell, 1988: 479).

"The 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act", mainly related to divorce was also re-handled with Caroline Norton's letter of request to the Queen, calling for equal rights for husbands and wives in marriage and with the transfer of "the 1857 Act" to the court of law, this letter resulted in improvements for the justification of divorce for women. Before this law, husbands and wives were not subjected to the same standards in the case of divorce. A woman had to evidence not only "adultery" but also "incest" or "bigamy" in order to sue her husband whereas a husband could apply to the court for divorce only because of "adultery". By means of "the 1857 Act", "cruelty" and "desertion" were added to the list for women to justify divorce (Gamble, 2004: 19).

The 1850s by and large observed a significant renewal of feminist action, and was maybe the main decade of the 19th century for Victorian women. These two cases concerned with Caroline Norton's legal problems played a highly effective role in the announcement of the voices of married women afflicted with such concerns about their legal positions and rights. Besides, a wide range of single women who struggled for economic independence raised their voice to draw the attentions to their limited employment opportunities, arguing that they had difficulty in getting a job because of the insufficient alternatives other than teaching. What is worse, women's education was not qualified enough to prepare them for teaching even for anything else. The most popular journalist of the 19th century Harriet Martineau asserted that "in those days, therefore, the supposition was true which has now become false, and ought to be practically admitted to be false; - that every woman is supported (as the law supposes her to be represented) by her father, her brother or her husband" (Martineau, 1859: 297). Martineau warns women against the false notions preventing them from being economically independent and also demands that more professional areas should be allocated for the uprising middle

class women who started working outside the home to become the supporters of themselves and of a large proportion of households. In her important article "Female Industry", in the <u>Edinburgh Review</u>, Martineau stated that a growing number of women started earning their own bread in England, taking place in various industrial areas such as dairy work, poultry, agricultural processes, coal mining, fishery, shoe-making, printing, painting, photography and textile manufacturing and with the acknowledgment of women's productive power in many areas of life so much misery had been prevented. Moreover, she pointed out the unequal payment of male and female workers though they both worked under the same hard conditions:

"The professional dairywoman ... has been about the cows since she was tall enough to learn to milk, and her days are so filled up, that it is all she can do to keep her clothes in decent order. She drops asleep over the last stage of her work; and grows up ignorant of all other knowledge, and unskilled in all other arts. Such work as this ought at least to be paid as well as the equivalent work of men; indeed, in the dairy farms of the West of England the same labour of milking the kine is now very generally performed by men, and the Dorset milkmaid, tripping along with her pail, is, we fear, becoming a myth. But even in Cheshire the dairymaids receive, it appears, only from 8*l*. to 10*l*. a-year, with board and lodging. The superintendent of a large dairy is a salaried personage of some dignity, with two rooms, partial or entire diet, coal and candle, and wherewithal to keep a servant — 50*l*. a year or more. But of the 64,000 dairywomen of Great Britain, scarcely any can secure a provision for the time when they can no longer lean over the cheese tub, or churn, or carry heavy weights" (Martineau, 1859: 300).

Towards the end of her article, she reveals that every possible way must be introduced to create new areas of employment that are suitable to the abilities of women for the welfare of society.

The image of a middle-class woman who works for a living was a mindset that had to be tackled by employment reformers despite the accepted notion of working-class women doing so. It was thought that it would be suitable for middle class women to start working in areas which were seen as their natural extensions therefore, they were employed in the positions of teaching, nursing and charity. As more girls took education at school rather than being educated by governesses at home, teaching turned into a more professional working area. New colleges such as "Queen's and Bedford" designed for women's education brought the process of girls' training almost to the same standards with boys'. The period between 1860s and 1870s was mainly described as the time of educational reform for women, however they were still subjected to injustice regarding their acceptance into Oxford and Cambridge during this time, as a matter of fact girls

graduated from Cambridge were not given the same degrees with boys until 1948. It was again in the 1860s that women gained new opportunities of work in government departments. In addition to this, local government positions were available for them as well (Gamble, 2004: 21-22).

Victorian women gaining many rights in the areas of marriage law, infant custody, property ownership law, education and work effectively made their presence felt in the patriarchal order within thirty years, but it took much more time to gain the right to vote which became an important issue in the 19th century. Although the struggle for women's voting rights also called as women's suffrage was especially intensive in the United States and Britain, women could not gain the right to vote initially in these countries. In 1893, it was New Zealand that granted women the right of voting in national elections. Respectively Australia, Finland and Norway also gave women enfranchisement in the early years of the 20th century. Following the First World War, the process of women's gaining the right to vote accelerated in European countries and the rest of the world. Besides, "The United Nations Convention on the Political Rights of Women" which was adopted by the General Assembly in 1952 with the purpose of granting women political rights provided that:

"(1) women shall be entitled to vote in all elections on equal terms with men without any discrimination; (2) [they] shall be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies established by national law, on equal terms with men without any discrimination; and (3) [they] shall be entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public functions established by national law, on equal terms with men without any discrimination"(U.N Secretariat, 1983: 125).

Upon gaining significant rights in the political arena, women had the right to reorganize some deep-rooted rules in society in favour of themselves and speak about the governing of the country.

Getting the right of voting on an equal basis with men in 1928, British women realized that much more struggle was required to achieve equality between the sexes as few things had changed in social, economic and political areas since 1920s. Women were still inadequately represented in the Parliament, their admission to many professional working areas remained restricted, they were still unequally paid at factories and they constituted a small number of the student population at universities. Although women gained crucial rights in various areas, patriarchal mentalities had barely changed. Caring for children was still regarded as women's natural role and men were seen as

breadwinners, the money gained by women was underestimated. However, such cultural attitudes and beliefs that continued to keep women in subordinate positions were evaluated as obsolete and unfair particularly by women (Binard, 2017: 2).

"Did women really go home again as a reaction to feminism? The fact is that to women born after 1920, feminism was dead history. It ended as a vital movement in America with the winning of that final right: the vote" (Friedan, 1963: 93). It is obvious that American feminist author Betty Friedan harshly criticizes the disappearance of women who not long ago bravely struggled to have equal rights with men and to create their own place in the world. She wondered what happened to their dreams and what forced them to go back home by giving up the world again. Therefore, Friedan, thinking that feminism was dead, ignited the resurrection of contemporary women's movement entitled as Second Wave Feminism with her book The Feminine Mystique in 1963. About this rebirth of the feminist struggle, American feminist activist and writer Kate Millett states that second wave feminism "might at last accomplish its aim of freeing half the race from its immemorial subordination" (Millett, 1977: 363). Friedan criticizes the halting process of the women's rights movement, stating that women of the 1930s and 1940s were still dealing with human rights and freedom, thus they could not make more improvements on the rights of women. In her analysis "The Problem That Has No Name", she complains about the fact that nothing was mentioned in the columns, books and articles about the problems and dissatisfaction of American women in the middle of 20th century (Friedan, 1963: 11). On the contrary, these publications instructed women to be satisfied with their roles as wives and mothers. Furthermore, women were subjected to the belief that "they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity" (Friedan, 1963: 11). They were also taught that real feminine women should not fight for political rights and independence or ask for career and higher education since these are the things which cause "masculinization of women with enormously dangerous consequences to the home, the children...to the ability of the woman, as well as her husband, to obtain sexual gratification" and for which only old fashioned feminists struggled (Friedan, 1963: 37). The Feminine Mystique is a harsh criticism of the consumer society which created the myth that women could realize and fulfil themselves with the roles of mother and housewife, depriving them of their potential powers in social life and making them prisoners of their homes. Betty Friedan vividly describes the influence of "the feminine mystique" on American women by arguing the fact that "the feminine mystique has succeeded in burying millions of American women alive. There is

no way for these women to break out of their concentration camps except by finally putting forth an effort" to reach beyond the restrictions of their homes and to fulfil their own unique potentials as separate human beings (Friedan, 1963: 325).

Betty Friedan's <u>Feminine Mystique</u> originates in liberal feminist tradition which emerged in the early 1960s in America. This tradition essentially dates back to classical liberal thought, developing in the 17th century, which argues that individuals have legal, political, educational, social and personal rights, but only men can benefit from these rights since they are regarded as innately capable of reason. Challenging this discriminating attitude, liberal feminists put forward that "women, like men, are inherently capable of reason and it is social constraints, rather than biology, that limit their rights and ability to develop their full capacities to achieve self-governance" (Naples et al., 2016: 670). Early feminist Mary Astell, and late 18th century feminists including Mary Wollstonecraft also claimed that women should have the right of education on the same terms with men to maintain their lives independently "rather than being forced by economic necessity to become the property of a man through marriage" since they are as much worthy of being educated as men (Bryson, 1999: 10). Therefore, liberal feminist view aimed to extend the rights of equality and freedom, entitled specifically to men during the Enlightenment period, to women who were as much intelligent and valuable as men.

After the impact of <u>The Feminine Mystique</u>, "National Organization for Women" was founded by Betty Friedan herself in 1966 to present the issues taking place in her book and to deal with the issue of sex discrimination seriously (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006: 11). The aim of this organization was to give women all the privileges and responsibilities on truly equal terms with men and to integrate them into the mainstream of American society. In order to reveal the deep-rooted sexism in traditional thought and practice, the organization "documented sexism in children's books and parents' different responses to girls and boys" (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006: 11). In the late 1960s, consciousness-raising groups for women emerged with an aim of transforming what women experienced personally into political terms. By means of these groups women started to share their personal stories related to their patriarchal oppression in marriage, sexual life, and child care by gaining the recognition that "the personal is political" (Oliver, 2008: 155). That is to say, they realized that they were not alone in their problems as similar traumatic stories concerning the oppression of male authority were shared by a wide range of women and constituted political issues that necessitated collective solutions

(Bryson, 1999: 26-27). Through these groups, women also discovered that it was patriarchy that continually tried to silence and repress them and their experiences as well as conditioning them to believe that their main duties were only domestic ones. Therefore, consciousness-raising groups not only awakened women but also empowered them both individually and collectively. The articulation of their increasing disturbance about the situation in which they were objectified and exploited gave rise to Radical Feminism in the early 1970s. Radical feminists considered the patriarchal structure as the main source of domination over women. They claimed that patriarchy inherently dominates bourgeois society and that "sexual difference is more fundamental than class and race differences" for the oppression of women (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006: 9). They also claimed that since women were primarily attached to the family and procreation, they generated their own class and economy, depending upon "the unpaid work in the home, the productivity of motherhood and their function as a workforce reserve" (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006: 9). Kate Millett, one of the pioneers of radical feminism, argues that in the patriarchal structure, the relationship between the sexes is based on power and then constructed on a political basis. This power shows the dominance of men over women in all areas, becomes gradually natural and then consolidates in all official institutions of the state. However, she adds that this sexual power and domination of men is far from "being inherent or biologically inevitable" since femininity and masculinity are nothing, but "elaborate behavioural constructs for each sex within society, obviously cultural and subject to endless cross-cultural variation" (Millett, 1977: 190-191). According to Millett, the roles of femininity and masculinity constructed culturally within the patriarchal system are the main reasons of the inequality between both genders. In her significant book Sexual Politics, she also insists on the fact that women must have the control of their own body and sexuality which is free of the charges relating to marriage and motherhood.

In short, challenging directly to the idea that "men are biologically superior to women", radical feminist theory asserts that the actions, thoughts and feelings of women are culturally significant and valuable (Wandor, 1986: 134). Moreover, it maintains that women should unite and be in solidarity on the grounds of gender and that women have enough power and capacity to do anything they dream of, they are not "feminine and weak" and finally that women should become autonomous in their sexual tendencies (Wandor, 1986: 135).

Actively participated in radical feminism from its early stages, lesbian women reacted to the subjugation of women to male hegemony by struggling to live their sexual

preferences freely. Thinking that it would be an effective way of forming an all-women society, radical feminists gave their full support to lesbian women's challenge against the heterosexual norm of patriarchy. Lesbian authors like Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde highlighted the link between heterosexuality and the oppression of women in their writings, speeches and poetry. The group of Radicalesbians, crossing the horrible boundary of their sex role, described the lesbian as "the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion. She is the woman who, often beginning at an extremely early age, acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society-perhaps then, but certainly later- cares to allow her" (Radicalesbians, 1970: 1). This definition of lesbianism suggests a close similarity with Women's Liberation Movement and their total fight against the patriarchal sex-role system which forces women into a constant war with people, situations, cultural norms and finally with everything around them and especially with themselves over a period of time.

The most significant protest of the Women's Liberation Movement was made against the "Miss America beauty contest" in 1969 to protest the roles of femininity that all women are forced to play according to the rules of patriarchal society. "The Red Stockings, The New York Radical Feminists" and other important feminist groups participated the protest to demonstrate "how women in pageant competitions were paraded like cattle, highlighting the underlying assumption that the way women look is more important than what they do, what they think, or even whether they think at all" (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006: 8). These groups strongly reacted to women's being turned into objects of beauty by throwing oppressive objects such as bras, corsets, high-heels and cosmetics into trashcan as well as "crowning a sheep Miss America" (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006: 8). Hence, they clearly declared the fact that women were turned into the victims of repressive beauty culture. Feminists in Britain followed this type of protest when they demonstrated against "Miss World Contest" in London in 1970. In parallel with these protests, in the same year the first Women Liberation Movement Conference took place in Oxford which gathered over 500 participants, resulting in the adoption of (1) "Equal pay for equal work", (2) "Equal education and equal opportunities", (3) "Free contraception and abortion on demand", (4) "Free 24 hour nurseries" (Binard, 2017: 6). At the following national conferences, the adoption of three more demands were added to this successful gaining; (5) "Legal and financial independence for all women", (6) "Sexual freedom and ending discrimination against lesbians", (7) "Freedom for all women

from intimidation by the threat or use of male violence, and end to the laws, assumptions and institutions that perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women" (The British Library). These developments created radical changes in the lives of women. Thanks to the laws concerning contraception and abortion, women gained the right to completely control their own fertility. British feminist and sociologist Ann Oakley contends that women's self-determination on their bodies made them realize that what divided the sexes in terms of the so-called consequences of the reproductive function of women was not a natural destiny anymore since couples could decide on the time of having babies, and who should take care of them. She argued that because of the influence of the technological developments on biology, the concepts of "masculinity and femininity" should be redefined (Oakley, 2015: 46). In her book Sex, Gender and Society, she explains the distinction between sex and gender: "Sex is a word that refers to the biological differences between male and female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. Gender, however, is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into masculine and feminine" (Oakley, 2015: 21-22). Most of the feminists in the early 1970s held the same belief with Ann Oakley regarding this theorisation which in fact dates back to Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1949).

Theoretical writings of the 1970s predominantly rely on Beauvoir's groundbreaking concept which suggests the cultural construction of women as "Other". Beauvoir asserts that "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine" (De Beauvoir, 2010: 330). In the same way, Toril Moi argues that socially constructed norms of femininity are imposed on women by making them believe that these determined standards for "femininity" are natural. Therefore, if a woman rejects to obey them, she can be labelled as "unnatural" and "unfeminine", naturally as "Other" (Belsey and Moore, 1989: 123). French theorists Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Héléne Cixous were also of the same mind on the issue of the "women's cultural construction as Other" and they tried to unveil the ways in which language and culture generate sexual differences (Belsey and Moore, 1989: 127). Beauvoir maintains that to be classified as the other is crucial for human beings to form their own subjectivity as we can produce our sense of self opposing to something that is not self. However, men have alleged the classification of self or subject for themselves while positioning women to the status of infinite "Other or Object". In this way, the

category of women has turned into nothing, but male desires and fears. Since religious, mythological, literary productions and popular culture are man-made, what falls to women is to internalise these patriarchal definitions and to learn to "dream through the dreams of men" (De Beauvoir, 2010: 196-197). Nevertheless, women became aware that the inferior position in which they were forced was not resulted from their so-called natural traits but from the cultural constructions of patriarchy produced through unequal social structures. Thus, they raised their voice to be seen as equal members in society, not as subordinate ones or eternal others by emphasizing their ideologically shaped experience of the world.

According to American social activist and author Bell Hooks, feminism in the United States was not initiated by the women who were most persecuted both physically and mentally by sexist oppression. As these women - mostly non-white and poor white - were rendered to be powerless and silent by the male authority, they had no choice but to accept their destiny in life. Hooks asserts that Friedan ignored the existence and plight of these women in her book the Feminine Mystique while focusing only on the troubles of a group of married white women being college educated and belonging to middle and upper class who got tired of their domestic roles and wanted more out of life. In this way, she deflected the attention away from other means of oppression such as classism and racism though majority of women were struggling with ethnic and racial discrimination as well as economic problems during this time (Hooks, 1984: 1-2). Additionally, white feminists' writings were filled with ideas reinforcing white supremacy which prevented the possibility of women's political integration by overcoming racial and ethnic boundaries. Adopting a condescending attitude towards the women of colour, white women adopted the women's movement themselves and they did not understand the fact that the black women "who live daily in oppressive situations often acquire an awareness of patriarchal politics from their lived experience just as they develop strategies of resistance" (Hooks, 1984: 10). Any attempt of the black women who wanted to criticize or introduce new ideas for the improvement of the women's movement was immediately rejected. Anita Cornwell who is an American feminist writer describes the result of this discouraging attitude, stating; "....sadly enough, fear of encountering racism seems to be one of the main reasons that so many black women refuse to join the women's movement" (Cornwell, 1979: 471). Black women were oppressed not only because of their sex but also because of their race in society. With regard to this double burden of oppression, Frances Beale, a black feminist and political activist, states that until white women

adopted "anti-imperialist and anti-racist ideology", they could have "absolutely nothing in common with black women's struggle" (Bambara, 1970: 120).

A well-known theorist of postcolonial feminism, Chela Sandoval describes Second Wave history as "hegemonic feminism" since it started under the leadership of white women who marginalized the world views of black women, ignoring classist and racist analysis while regarding sexism as the ultimate oppression. Having an individual rights-based vision for social change, "hegemonic feminism" aimed to give women equal rights in the same way as men (Sandoval, 2000: 41 - 42). However, this would be only possible with the promotion of sisterhood which can be described as the political and psychological unity of women with the awareness of their common experiences and goals. In order to form this sense of unity and solidarity among women, all women whether they are white, educated, upper class, black, lesbian, poor, undereducated or lower class must respect individual differences as well as supporting each other for their specific needs and problems. The social division in Britain did not stem from race as in America, but it originated in class. Although it was alleged that Women's Liberation Movement defended the rights of all women, there was an obvious gap between the problems of college-educated women belonging to middle and upper classes and the women coming from working class. In spite of the struggle of working women to be visible towards the end of the 1960s, they were excluded from the Women's Liberation Groups to a great extent like black women. Providing explanations and analyses about the division in society based on class, socialist feminism observes that "there are times and issues over which solidarity between women can cut across class or cultural barriers" but it also observes that important differences can occur among women based on their classes (Wandor, 1986: 138). As stated by British playwright Michelene Wandor, while there were times when women accomplished to develop solidarity between them during their fight against patriarchal oppression, there were also times when some groups of women were marginalized because of their class by their fellows. However, looking at the bigger picture from the perspective of class, women were generally regarded as a subordinate class by men because of the inferiority of their social, cultural and economic position in society.

According to socialist feminists, the oppression of women originates in the development of the capitalist system which positioned women's place in society according to men's, thus reduced women to the secondary status while granting men a higher standing. In this system, women were restricted to domestic responsibilities and

child rearing so they could not actively participate in social, political or economic life, as if that was not enough, their labour was not only exploited but also marginalized and trivialised. On the other hand, men became economically more powerful in return for their paid employments and this power made the men the head of the family and caused them to have authority over women (Einsenstein, 1979: 30). It was certain that women were dependent on the breadwinner of the house and expected to be obedient to his rules. As a result of this commitment, they were seen as inferior creatures and underestimated. Karl Marx asserts that throughout the history of capitalism, women have been regarded as "the reserve army of labour" which could be benefited in different fields of production in the time of need but with a low salary (Marx, 1967: 631-639). It is obvious that women's labour, whether at home or in factory, is of no worth. According to Friedrich Engels, women can liberate from the status of secondary class only when they become "completely equal before the law" with men thus establishing "real social equality between the two" (Engels, 2004: 80). In this context, it is necessary for all women to participate in social production, to abolish the family structure of husband and wife, to turn housework into public industry and to reduce their domestic responsibilities to the lowest level. In parallel with Engels' ideas, some socialist feminists, attacking the division of labour, argue that "women must be enabled to do men's work and that men should develop their caring and nurturing qualities through participation in family life and childrearing" (Bryson, 1999: 17). Explaining the oppression of women and their subordinate position in society through capitalism and patriarchy, socialist feminists asserted that without the participation of women in every aspect of life, there could be no socialist revolution and complete equality between the sexes. They also demanded that sexuality must be liberated from gender constructions and "polarities can also be seen as the demand for an end to ascribed and limited gender roles" (Bryson, 1999: 17). In short, socialist feminism not only focuses on gender but also on class and economic conditions to explain the position of women, unveiling the fact that the oppression and exploitation of women within the patriarchal capitalist structure is caused by "the capitalist patriarchal gender division of labour" (Young, 1981: 63).

Women liberationists fighting for the emancipation from traditional and patriarchal values accomplished to spread a counter culture by informing women about the activities of Women's Liberation Movement and making them aware of their oppression through their own publications such as newspapers, journals and magazines. These printed medias not only reflected a wide range of feminist views but also provided

information about women's history, feminist theories and women's experiences by offering mostly first hand accounts. Emerging in 1970s when Second Wave Feminism was on its rise, <u>Spare Rib</u>, one of the most iconic feminist magazines, aimed to "reflect the questions, ideas, and hope that is growing out of [women's] awareness of [themselves] not as 'a bunch of women' but as individuals in their own rights" (Douliére, 2017: 1). <u>Spare Rib</u> not only mirrored its society but also reminded women how far they proceeded in their struggle to be visible under the hegemony of patriarchy.

Although many positive legal developments happened to guarantee social equality of women throughout the second wave of feminism, towards the end of the 1970s second wave feminists realized that they still could not accomplish to have all the legal rights that they dreamed of. Nonetheless, they achieved to make the state recognize the oppression of women and the new laws enabled to raise awareness of discrimination which encouraged women to fight for their dreamed rights in favour of sexual equality by protesting and speaking publicly. Looking back at what they succeeded, they stated that "the women's movement has, at the very least, raised the consciousness, and encouraged the self organization of thousands of women. In doing so, it has also begun to challenge relations of power" (Wainwright, 1980: 2).

1.3. Becoming More Visible and Audible

"So I write this as a plea to all women, especially the women of my generation: Let Thomas' confirmation serve to re-mind you, as it did me, that the fight is far from over. Let this dismissal of a woman's experience move you to anger. Turn that outrage into political power. Do not vote for them unless they work for us. Do not have sex with them, do not break bread with them, do not nurture them if they don't prioritize our freedom to control our bodies and our lives. I am not a post feminism feminist. I am the Third Wave" (Ryan, 2001: 80).

American feminist activist Rebecca Walker, devoting much of her life and energy to the maintenance of gender equality and female empowerment, initiated the third wave of feminism with this famous passage from her article titled as "Becoming the Third Wave" published in <u>Ms. Magazine</u> in 1992 (Ryan, 2001: 78). She became not only the voice of women of colour in America but of the whole world. In her declaration, she argued that women were still devalued, violated and silenced by pointing out a woman called Anita Hill, a law professor subjected to sexual harassment by Clarence Thomas who was appointed to the Supreme Court of the USA despite Hill's testimony on

television in 1991. With her final sentence, Walker formed "the double character of third wave feminism as distinct from both a media endorsed 'after the fact' (post)feminism as well as the extant frameworks of second wave feminism" (Gillis et al., 2004: XXIV). According to Walker, a new version of feminism was required since second wave feminism was viewed as discriminatory, rigid and judgmental by young women. As she argues, they commonly believed that:

"in order to be a feminist one must live in poverty, always critique, never marry, want to censor pornography and/or worship the Goddess. A feminist must never compromise herself, must never make concessions for money or for love, must always be devoted to the uplift of her gender, must only make an admirable and selfless livelihood, preferably working for a women's organization. She fears that if she wants to be spanked before sex, wants to own a BMW, is a Zen priest, wants to be treated like a lady, prioritizes racial oppression over gender oppression, loves misogynist hip-hop music, still speaks to the father that abused her, gets married, wants to get three kids on a farm in Montana, etc., that she can't be a feminist" (Walker, 1995: XXXII).

Discussing the meaning of the term "feminist" with young women, Walker realized that young women were confused with the feminist label since many of them were exposed to different mythologies about its meaning (Walker, 1995: XXXII). For many of them, to be a feminist means to comply with an identity and a way of life that does not include "individuality, complexity, or less than perfect personal histories" (Walker, 1995: XXXIII). Besides, they fear that their lives will be intruded by the dictation and regulation of this identity as they think that they will be forced to adopt rigid and unchanging positions, "female against male, black against white, oppressed against oppressor, good against bad" (Walker, 1995: XXXIII). To perceive the order of the world through these binaries is really hard for a generation that is composed of multiple identities as bisexual, transgender and interracial. Walker explicitly describes the difficulty young women experience when they are compelled to think in categories that disintegrate people as "Us" and "Them" or when compelled to adopt certain identities as "women or feminists" (Walker, 1995: XXXIII). Moreover, she argues that theories that discriminate people according to their gender, race or other parameters are hard to formulate and perpetuate. Therefore, as she explains, she developed a capacious wave of feminism which respects a wide variety of differences and choices.

Rebecca Walker and many early third wave activists appreciated the successes and gains including legal protections and rights obtained in favour of women during the first and second wave feminisms, but they also stated that these accomplishments were

not enough, so much more fight was needed to heal the ignored and repressed situation of women in society. Whereas women of colour and ethnic background notably contributed to the progress of feminism throughout first and second wave by both taking place in the protests and writing, this time, they doubtlessly pioneered the third wave and became the first ones to criticize second wave feminism extensively. The term "third wave" was also used for the first time by these women (Springer, 2002: 1063).

In recognition of contradiction and diversity while shaping their feminisms, third wave writers manifest and admit the fact that queer feminists and feminists of colour profoundly influenced third wave feminist thinking and action. As noted by the author and activist Kayann Short in Genders, the term "third wave" is used by some feminists of colour to define a new type of feminism that sprang from women of colour's challenge to white feminism with racial biases (Heywood, 2006: 29, vol. 2). According to Judith Grant, a professor of political science, there are many variations of feminism along with radical, liberal, socialist and besides these variations, "there is also an underlying feminism that has remained undisclosed, undiscussed and undiscovered" which is the feminism for women of colour (Grant, 1993: 4). This new version of feminism focuses less on legal and political processes, but more on individual identities. Therefore, third wavers determined their ideology on the grounds that women could have many different skin colours, sexual orientations, ethnic origins, nations, religions and cultural backgrounds. American liberal feminist author Naomi Wolf argues that the term "feminism" should be owned by all women regardless of these identity factors and it should be regarded as "a theory of self-worth and the worth of other women"; by this means, being a feminist should be equal to being a human (Wolf, 1994: 149). On this level, the world will be opened to all women on the same terms with men. For Wolf, feminism should also be considered as a humanistic act to ensure social justice for every woman since "it is illogical to claim one's rights as a woman yet deny them to others on the basis of their skin colour or sexual orientation" (Wolf, 1994: 150).

The ideal of sexual liberation, one of the important goals of second wave, is reintroduced into the feminist discourse through third wave feminism. This new movement has a pro-sex agenda with its defence of "pornography, sex work, sadomasochism, butch / femme roles" as well as its recuperation of "heterosexuality, intercourse and marriage from separatist feminist dismissals" (Heywood, 2006: 260, vol. 1). Striving to be inclusive, the third wave of feminism respects different sort of choices made by women concerning their balance between equality and desire. Therefore,

judgemental mentality is rejected by this wave because of its plural constitution. It is not easy to judge a woman's assertion to be a feminist since there is not a common definition of feminism, but there are many stemming from various types of choices. Besides, it is not easy to label a woman's choice as anti-feminist by only looking at her actions because a choice which seems anti - feminist at first might turn out as feminist when it is rightly contextualized. For example, a woman wearing a miniskirt, a crop top and lipstick may seem to consolidate beauty standard of patriarchy, but if she is seen in the arms of a butch lesbian, the ideal image of the patriarchal woman is turned upside - down. Similarly, if a blond woman who claims herself as a feminist poses in a magazine whose readers consider feminists as men hater and anti-sex, she might be exposed to some wrong judgements. However, if she is regarded as a woman who attempts to build support for some political rights such as reproductive rights, the right to work and have safe childcare policies by eroticizing feminism, the wrong judgements may change (Synder, 2010: 259).

Third wave feminists respond to a number of theoretical problems occurring in the second wave with some crucial tactical attempts. The first one is related to the "category of women" debates starting with the criticism of the second wave's assertion that women collectively share something as women such as "a common gender identity" and "set of experiences" (Snyder, 2010: 183). However, third wave feminism harshly criticized the 'essentialist woman' of the second wave since differences among women were ignored and devalued. The essence of their criticism can be understood more clearly with this quote: "By and large within the women's movement today, white women focus upon their oppression as women and ignore differences of race, sexual preference, class, and age. There is a pretense to a homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist" (Ryan, 2001: 316). Therefore, though the essentialist "we" or "sisterhood" of the second wave feminism was seemingly intended to unite the women's movement, it turned out as a painful source of marginalisation - what Elizabeth Spelman, a professor of the humanities at Smith College in the United States, called the "Trojan horse of feminist ethnocentrism" (Spelman, 1988: X).

The terms of "woman", "experience" and "personal politics" constitute the essence of second wave feminism which contends that women share common experiences in patriarchal society, and by sharing these experiences with each other in consciousness-raising groups, they become aware of their own oppression (Grant, 1993: 4). When they notice that what they regarded as personal problems such as domestic violence, unfair sexual division of labour or male oriented sexual experiences are in fact shared by a wide

range of women, they can see that all these stem from patriarchal construction of society, thus "the personal becomes political" (Evans, 2003: 30). Professor Sara Evans argues that this phrase still constitutes the essence of feminism as sharing personal experiences is considered as a sort of consciousness raising (CR) in third wave feminism as well (Evans, 2003: 31). Within the second wave, the gatherings of CR groups took place in face to face setting unofficially. In the same way, the structure of the gatherings in the third wave was deprived of any formalization. In spite of this lack, third wavers were hopeful about the fact that through reading or listening to the life experiences of a diverse group of individuals, young women would gain insight not only about their own lives but also about the structures of society in which they lived. Furthermore, they would recognize that they were not alone in the face of patriarchal oppression and discrimination.

Many stories of the third wave aimed to reveal the distinction between prevalent discourses and women's real lives. In order to demonstrate how the policies of gender, race and class ensue in the lives of people, some of the third wave feminists benefited from their own experiences originating in multicultural or multiracial families. For instance, Cristina Tzintzun, grown up in a multiracial family, is one of those feminists who bravely reveals her white father's contradictory actions, stating that her father is seemingly "liberal, feminist, antiracist, and anticlassist", but he is totally different in his actions like a wolf in sheep's clothing and because of this, she writes "I worry about dating whites, especially white men. I worry that even though my skin is white like theirs, they will try and colonize me. I see what a white man did to my beautiful, brown, Mexican mother. He colonized her" (Heywood, 2006: 195, vol. 2). She also states that what drew her father to her mother was not love but her mother's skin colour, nation, poor education, obedience and low self-esteem since these qualities of her strengthened her father's superiority in his mind. Therefore, as she articulates, he used these differences between them as a means of exploitation. What is more, he encouraged his friends to exploit other Mexican women, expressing that "they are such good cooks and so submissive that they would make anyone the perfect wife" (Heywood, 2006: 196, vol. 2). Such personal stories of women who were subjugated, exploited, and violated as second-class individuals because of their skin colour or ethnic origins enable the readers to criticize the dominant ideologies and culture in society.

The claim that common experiences are universally shared by all women is rightly rejected by third-wave feminists since it can be true that all women are subjected to patriarchal oppression, yet their personal experience of it varies significantly from one

another depending on their race, class, sexual orientation, religious belief or education. Moreover, as third wave feminism argues, women usually interpret similar experiences from different perspectives because women in different subject statuses can have radically different point of views. For instance, as pointed out by a woman of colour, during the second wave of feminism while white women were fighting for getting the right of working beyond the boundaries of the home, black women were already working outside the home compulsorily. As a result, women of colour would desire to care for their own families by staying at home instead of looking after white women's children. It is clear that getting the right of work outside the home was viewed from completely different perspectives by women who used to live under different circumstances. Therefore, the idea of universal female identity which suggests the existence of some essential and universal properties commonly shared by all women and the discourses that overemphasize the experience of white women belonging middle and upper class are opposed by third wavers. In spite of their objection to common experiences of women, third wave feminists do not completely eliminate the concept of experience. Women still appeal to personal experiences to gain knowledge about the operation of the world and to criticize dominant narratives. In fact, personal story forms one of the most distinctive feature of third wave feminism.

Similar to the declining of the category of women in the second wave with the opposition of third wavers, a significant change occurred in the intellectual life from the grand narratives of modernism to the groundless world of postmodernism. Multivocality and localized mini-narratives took the place of grand narratives, revealing multiple realities that emerged from different social locations. Third wave feminism is portrayed as a post-modern rendition of feminism by Gillian Howie, Rebecca Munford and Stacy Gillis. Agreeing with the fact that third wave feminism shows tendency to postmodernism, Leslie Heywood, a Professor of English states that:

"in its emphasis on destabilizing fixed definitions of gender and rejection of unitary notions of 'woman' and 'feminism', third wave feminism is clearly informed and shaped by post modern theory, as well as other anti-foundationalist discourse such as postcolonialism and poststructuralism....Third wave feminist ideas about identity embrace notions of contradiction, multiplicity and ambiguity, building on postmodern theory's critique of ideas about the unified self and engaging with the fluid nature of gender and sexual identity" (Heywood, 2006: 257-258, vol.1).

Third wave feminism responds to postmodern conditions, but it would not be true to identify this wave as literally postmodern depending on Munford, Howie and Gillis' book titled as Third Wave Feminism which depicts that third wave feminism responds to a theoretical world characterized as postmodern rather than being a postmodernist phase of feminist theory. In other words, in its theoretical mode, third wave feminism is not certainly postmodern, however "it responds to a postmodern, post-Marxist world in which all foundations and grand narratives have been called into question" (Snyder, 2010: 187). While responding to postmodernity, third wave movement endeavours to shelter a broader range of identity positions than second wave feminism as it adopts the fact that identity is absolutely constructed by language, discourse and traditional experiences. Deconstructing these fictions is aimed in order to undermine dominant regimes of discourse because affirming constructed identities only recreates and maintains hegemonic discourses and power. On the other hand, emancipating from these opposing structures and subverting them assert a total difference.

Anti-essentialists of the third wave feminism criticize the patriarchal society which is based on the ontological assertion that women form an underprivileged social group in society. Most of the third wave feminists also refuse "the assumption that all members of a particular race, class, gender or sexual orientation share common characteristics" (Heywood, 2006: 122, vol.1). They always assert that making claims that universalize women is false since these universal claims function domineeringly "to normalize particular - socially and culturally privileged - forms of feminine experience" (Gillis et al., 2004: 16). That is to say, these specific types of feminine experience are cast as the norm through false universal claims about women, and this normalization results in "replicating between women the very patterns of oppression and exclusion that feminism should contest" (Gillis et al, 2004: 19).

Third wave feminism acknowledges the fact that feminism could be defined in various ways and all these diverse definitions could exist at the same time. For example, Linda Hirshman, a Professor of women's studies and philosophy, asserts that feminist movement backs women up to lead exactly the same kind of life maintained by men belonging upper and middle class and she argues that since "a life of housework and childcare does not meet standards for a good human life", women should fully participate in the work force and the social life to become self-actualized human beings by using their full capacity (Hirshman, 2006: 33). On the other hand, Lauri Umansky, a Professor of history, draws a progressively favourable consideration of motherhood among

feminists between the years of late 1960s and 1980s in her book <u>Motherhood Reconceived</u>. She reveals some feminist discourses that put forward mothering as a universalizing subject that has the power of uniting all women and emphasizes the roles of these discourses "in the transition from radical to cultural feminism in the early-to mid-1970s" (Umansky, 1996: 11). Besides, she appeals to the discourses which stress the traditional roles of women as a positive option to patriarchal culture. Ariel Levy, a staff writer at the New Yorker magazine, criticizes extremely sexualized American culture, referred by her as "raunch culture", in which women are not only turned into sex objects and motivated to objectify their own bodies but they make each other sex objects as well (Levy, 2005: 16). She questions the radical change in the culture in such a short period of time, stating "only thirty years (my lifetime) ago, our mothers were burning their bras and picketing Playboy and suddenly we were getting implants and wearing the bunny logo as supposed symbols of our liberation" (Levy, 2005: 16). On the contrary, Nina Hartley as a professional pornographic film actress and a sex-positive feminist states that she willingly entered the field of pornography to carry out her "long held fantasy" and to get pleasure from her "strong streak of exhibitionism/voyeurism" as well as keeping in touch with other bisexual women (Hartley, 1997: 57). Hartley aims to express herself sexually, and as she articulates, her sex positive ideology originates in her involvement in the radical movements during the 1960s and 1980s. She believes that she tries to actualise "feminist principles of sharing one's experiences with others" by being a role model for the newer actresses and promoting their empowerment (Hartley, 1997: 59). She not only indulges exploring and presenting her body to the male lust but she also advocates other women's sexual liberation against patriarchal biases.

It can be said that all these feminists have determined their own definitions of feminism through their own experiences. Walker's ideas concerning this issue consolidates the fact that "as [women] struggle to formulate a feminism they can call their own, they debunk the stereotype that there is one life style or manifestation of feminist empowerment, and instead offer self-possession, self-determination and an endless array of non-dichotomous possibilities" (Walker, 1995: XXXIV).

According to third wave of feminism, the choices of all women are equally feminist. For example, a woman may choose to stop working to marry or to raise her kids, another woman may choose to terminate her pregnancy or to have plastic surgery, or another one may choose to lead a life as a surrendered wife. However, these women's choices do not only affect themselves but also affect the lives and the choices of the other

women, therefore every woman should ask whether her choices promote patriarchal culture or undermine it before deciding how to live. In order to be aware of the impact of their choices on each other, women need "some sense of political space and community" (Marso, 2010: 264). It is possible for women to retain a feminist community as well as retaining diversity. In order to achieve this, women should come together as women by recognizing their differences and power relations existing among them. This recognition and solidarity can enable them to alleviate oppressive structures and to improve their personal experiences as well. Only within a feminist community, women could speak about their choices and discover situations in which leaving the workforce or obscenely posing for a magazine might be stated as a feminist choice. When women unite as feminists with all their diversity, they could defend such choices and judge the others by evaluating the impact of each situation on the lives of other women. Thus, they could fight together to end the systematic oppression of women and to gain social justice and more freedom (Marso, 2010: 268).

Third wave feminism is not only all-embracing but also racially diverse in comparison to the second wave. Describing third wave as "a form of inclusiveness", Heywood argues that third wave feminism "respects not only differences between women based on race, ethnicity, religion and economic standing but also makes allowance for different identities within a single person" as well as allowing "for identities that previously may have been seen to clash with feminism" (Heywood, 2006: XX., vol. 1); for example, you can be a boy who wants to be a girl, a girl who wants to be a boy, a black who wants to be or refuses to be white, straight or gay, religiously devout or keen on beauty or sports culture, or apart from all these, you can be someone who finds different ways of existing. This messy characteristic of the third wave vividly reflects its multifaceted structure. It is obvious that by embracing hybridity, third wavers expose the fact that the categories of gender, sexuality and race are sheer constructions of society. Indeed, contradictions are celebrated by young feminists opposing to the categorization of identities. In regard to this, it is argued that as third-wave feminism specifically examines "the gender binary male/female and generally has a non-essentialist approach to thinking about gender, transgender fits much more fully into third wave understandings of gender and sexuality than did second wave thinking" (Heywood, 2006: 326, vol. 1). Besides, "postmodern politics of queer theory", particularly on matters regarding sexuality is embraced mostly by young feminists. Hence, they promote a more inclusive version of feminism that accommodates such gendered subjects as "butch, femme,

transsexuals and transgendered people" (Archer Mann and J. Huffman, 2005: 72). They are also more inclined to regard the second wave of feminism as puritanical since as they assert it has imposed "more restrictions than green lights when it comes to sexuality" (Alfonso and Trigilio, 1997: 12). As a consequence, it is certain that third wave feminism combines a set of identity factors like class, sexuality, race or ethnicity that are as significant as gender. As a matter of fact, taking multiple identities into account makes the feminist analysis more complicated, but according to third wavers, it is essential for feminism to be inclusive to address to the young people's experiences (Snyder, 2010: 180).

Third wavers, endowed with the privileges gained through the first and second wave feminisms, generally regard themselves as powerful, talented and challenging. "The third wave is buoyed by the confidence of having more opportunities and less sexism" (Baumgardner and Richards, 2010: 83). In an attempt to draw the attention of another generation, young feminists regenerate the term "girl" declaring, "And yes that's G.r.r.l.s which is, in our case, cyber-lingo for Great-Girls. Grrl is also a young at heart thing and not limited to the under 18s" (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006: 15). Many girls have gained strength from "the new grrl rhetoric" that stemmed from punk rock bands like Bikini Kill and first generation "riot grrrl" band Brat Mobile in the beginning of 1990s in America (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006: 15). Bikini Kill pioneered "the riot grrrl" movement that played an important role in forming and spreading popular culture with its radical feminist song lyrics and passionate shows. In their independent demo album named "Revolution Girl Style Now" in 1990, this band combined "the feminist strategy of empowerment with the avant-garde or punk strategy of D.I.Y.: Do It Yourself" on which riot grrrl movement was based and this message influenced a great number of "riot grrrl" groups (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006: 16).

Riot grrrl came into existence during the feminist activism of early 90s when young women were disappointed and annoyed with the male-centred punk-rock groups and scenes all over the United States and Europe. Thus, these girls decided to create their own upheaval in order to be taken seriously. Their anger, aggression and assertiveness were reflected through the extra r's in the name of the group. Riot grrrls were quite determined to change the world, beginning with their own life conditions. They had already declared the revolutionary girl power vehemently, so when an English pop girl group "Spice Girls" who achieved worldwide success as a female group in history became pop culture icons in 1990s while talking nonsense about girl power - which was not

exactly described in any way, yet appeared to be epitomized as "Be yourself (and wear a Wonderbra if you wanna)!", people from media, instructors and advertisers seized on "this ephemeral declaration of strength" (Jervis and Zeisler, 2006: 153). Although the pluralized name of women's liberation movement and the riot grrrls gave the sense of collective action, girl power, being sadly singular, lacks such collectivism. While the Spice girls and their mantra "girl power" have receded from the centre of attention in due course, the spirit of girl power maintains to influence popular discussions about gender, girls and fairness (Jervis and Zeisler, 2006: 153). "As a marketing tool, it has so thoroughly saturated the worlds of advertising and popular culture that it's become a cliché" (Jervis and Zeisler, 2006: 153). This cliché has underpinned many film productions for teenagers as well as allowing the emergence of pop stars who allege to be powerful role models. What is worse, girl power phenomenon leads to the popular belief which suggests that feminism has won all the battles, so there is no need for women in America to struggle any more.

Similar to the consciousness raising groups of second wave feminism, young women came together to "deconstruct gender, sexism and patriarchy", and then all at once, riot grrrl groups appeared across the country (Jervis and Zeisler, 2006: 153). They started sharing their experiences of sexual harassment, rape, and the unfair and merciless treatment they were subjected to in the sexist culture in which they had to survive as females. They also talked about sexuality, female empowerment and patriarchal order. In order to make themselves heard, they started singing, writing and painting. Just as their foremothers, they realized that what they regarded as personal was actually political, yet they achieved to turn the political into personal profoundly by creating a culture of their own in the fields of music, art, fashion and press media to allow for female expression freely as they recognized the fact that it is highly significant to give women a platform to raise their voice against abusers. Though riot grrrl seemed to focus generally on personal politics, it also had a powerful activist side: "Individual riot grrrls joined local and national protests such as 1992 march on Washington for reproductive rights while bands such as L7 organized massive pro-choice benefit concerts" (Jervis and Zeisler, 2006: 154). Furthermore, grrrls established networks to support the survivors of sexual abuse, rape or incest as they realized that sexism was systemic and inescapable and that all they needed was to act collectively to struggle against it.

Riot Grrrl movement enabled not only young women but also men to gather in order to protest patriarchal oppression, sexism and violation. This movement was smart,

powerful and shamelessly feminine, causing a real change in the music culture. It also established a new platform through which young people could be reached and informed about the fact that oppression and sexism did not come to an end therefore, their fight for more freedom and equality was still needed, and that each individual had to struggle personally for her own right.

Reaching its audience through various performances, Riot Grrrl movement achieved to awaken not only young but also older generations and contributed to change the values in society.

Third wavers criticized the patriarchal language by denouncing the humiliating labels used for women and girls and they created their own words and types of communication with the inversion of sexist, racist and classist terms, using the postmodernist and poststructuralist techniques. Similar to the groups like "Queer Nation and Niggers With Attitude", third wave feminists declared a kind of linguistic war against their oppressors by exaggerating the stereotypes created to humiliate them, starting with "the very word girl" (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006: 16). Showing off their femininity, they aimed to reclaim such degrading terms as "bitch and slut" that were used against them. Margaret Coe, an American comedian known for her black humour concerning the traditional norms of womanhood, considers the label bitch as a compliment since she believes that "a bitch is assertive, unapologetic, demanding, intimidating, intelligent, fiercely protective, in control - all very positive attributes" (Jervis and Zeisler, 2006: 7). She argues that refusing to be a bitch means not only the acceptance of patriarchal oppression but also not appreciating all the efforts of the "bitches" fought for sexual equality in the past, therefore she tries to be a bitch in order to make her voice heard (Jervis and Zeisler, 2006: 7). Riot Grrrls used to write "slut" on their bodies and juxtapose feminine "girlie" type of clothing with combat boots in order to criticize and subvert social construction of femininity and the sexist terms used against them (Cashen, 2002: 13-14). Moreover, reclamation strategy went on with the occurrence of "Slutwalks" through which feminist activists call for an end to explain or excuse rape in association with sexually molested victims' dressings. The first protesting walk took place in Toronto in 2011 as a reaction to a police officer who suggested that "women should avoid dressing like sluts" in order to protect themselves from any kind of sexual assault (Bell, 2011). After the first walk, subsequent walks occurred around the world in the form of marches mostly by young women wearing short skirts, crop tops and transparent stockings to represent the image of sluts to raise voice against the culture which blames the victim

rather than the abuser. Through their walks, they also aimed to redefine the term "slut" as a person who is in control of her own sexuality and to reclaim it as a site for women's empowerment by subverting its historically negative connotations.

The new world order featured by the theological and cultural conservatism, the advantages and disadvantages of new information technologies, and the collapse of communism also inspired third wave feminism. This new feminist view is known as "grrl feminism" in America and "new feminism" in Europe: "This new 'new' feminism is characterized by local, national, and transnational activism, in areas such as violence against women, trafficking, body surgery, self-mutilation and the overall pornofication of the media" (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006: 17). The new world order including political, cultural or economic changes produced by globalisation also poses new threats for the rights of women, so third wave feminism deals with these threats as well as criticizing the former waves of feminism for introducing universal definitions of femininity and their rigid identity politics. Third wave feminist thinkers refrain from such rigid and oppressive categories while embracing a chaotic world. In her books <u>Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (1990)</u> and <u>Bodies that Matter (1993)</u>, American Gender Theorist Judith Butler reflected this feminist shift through the politics of transgender and queer. In her well-known work <u>Gender Trouble</u>, Butler clarifies that while sex, free of cultural and political determinants, is determined by nature, gender is culturally and politically constructed, and this construction is imposed on people (Butler, 1999: 47). She opposes the reduction of gender to femininity and masculinity and its being performed through these categories. Regarding this, she states that "even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary in their morphology and constitution.....there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two" (Butler, 1999: 10). She also argues that gender category must be extended with the acceptance of different identities, and views that are in contradiction with the norms of society.

In her book <u>Undoing Gender</u>, Butler describes gender as "the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized" (Butler, 2004: 43). It is obvious that gender is constructed unnaturally through the cultural norms of society; however, it is possible to deconstruct this perpetual and deep-rooted structure by creating different performances and identities aimed to undermine these naturalized gender roles. Moreover, Butler objects to the stereotyped sexual norms and argues that it must be possible to assess some sexual practices existing as an outnumbered

group and take them into consideration on the subject of gender: "Briefly, one is a woman, according to this framework, to the extent that one functions as one within the dominant heterosexual frame and to call the frame into question is perhaps to lose something of one's sense of place in gender" (Butler, 1999: XI). As she states, heterosexual dominance in society is so strong that it determines the functions of both genders and when this situation is questioned, losing one's sense of belonging especially for a woman is possible. It is clear that gender roles and norms cannot readily be questioned because of the decisive nature of gender. However, Butler asserts that questioning the concept of gender and accepting different identities, performances and situations which are contrary to social norms remove the limitations both from society and people's lives since the factor of gender constitutes a tremendous impediment in front of people and deprive them of living their own identities as freely as they wish. Butler's ground-breaking views about sex - gender distinction, her critique of the view of universal experience of femininity have significantly contributed to the redefinition of gender and the feminist progress.

Young feminists of the third wave were remarkably active. Their Third Wave Foundation, established by Rebecca Walker and Shannon Liss-Riordan and dedicated to young activists who were fighting for "gender, racial, economic and social justice", was a strong national organization (Brunell, 2009). Their conferences, discussion groups, workshops and seminars sprang across the country in an unexpected way. They initiated "feminist zines, webzines and magazines", achieving considerably high sales with the publication of "Bust Magazine" (Karp and Stoller, 1999: XIV). Particularly zines served as a type of interaction where "youth are the initiators and producers of their own social agendas and representations.... an underground with no centre, built of paper" (Cashen, 2002: 18). Most of their zines were personal similar to diaries written to reveal anger and disappointment (Cashen, 2002: 17).

As this new feminist generation was adept at using new technologies and media tools such as television, magazines, internet publishing and platforms, they created diverse spaces for their voices. By means of blogs and e-zines, they accomplished to reach a global audience towards the end of the 1990s and in the beginning of 2000s. Furthermore, these new communication technologies provided the opportunities they needed to accomplish global feminist movements and the internet was celebrated as "the global consciousness-raising tool" by third wavers (Gillis et al, 2004: 168). Expanding their goals, they aimed to abolish gender-role clichés and broaden feminism to include women having racially and culturally diverse identities. As a result, it is noteworthy to

mention that through the efforts of third wavers, within popular culture, in the media and television of the 90s and 2000s, from music groups to iconic female artists, television series and movies, it became possible to see women who were confident, powerful, aware of their own sexuality as well as women of different ethnicities and skin colours.

All in all, third wave feminists often blame second wave feminism for being snob and ignoring the concerns of women having different colours and ethnic backgrounds. As second wave feminists only focused on the problems of white and middle class women, third wavers questioned their predecessors' beliefs and principles and started a more inclusive and polyvocal version of feminism by applying feminist theory to a wide range of women who were previously excluded from feminist activity. Barbara Smith, a black lesbian feminist, captures the essence of third wave discourse with her definition of feminism as "the political theory and practice to free all women: women of colour, working class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbians, old women, as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement" (Anzaldúa and Moraga, 1981: 61). Constructed on difference, third wave feminism dealt with violence against women involving molestation, sexual abuse and domestic violence as central issues. It also paid attention to women's career development and supported the idea that women needed to be assisted while climbing ladders and shattering glass ceilings in the working environment. Other issues third wave feminism also handled include unfair policies about maternity-leave, supporting single mothers in terms of child care and respecting mothers who either chose to work by leaving their children to a baby-sitter or gave up their careers totally to care for their children. Finally, third wave feminist thinking produced diverse perspectives to understand and shape gender relations by deconstructing and decentring the notions of the second wave.

1.4. Postcolonial Feminism and Its Relation to Kaur's Poetry

Emerging in the 1980s in order to represent diversity of each woman's lived experience, postcolonial feminism evolved as part of the third wave of feminism in parallel with many other ethnically focused feminist movements. Postcolonial feminism developed as a reaction to the feminist activists in developed nations who highlighted the universalizing tendencies about female identity and experiences and argues that the women in non-Western countries are misrepresented. According to postcolonial

feminists, early feminist theorists utilized the term "women" as a universal group, so they defined women only by their gender ignoring the other identity factors such as race, ethnicity or sexual orientation. However, women having these different identity factors also need to be heard and represented. Examining the homogenizing western feminist representation of "the third world woman", American feminist activist Audre Lorde and postcolonial and transnational feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty's essays significantly contributed to the creation of postcolonial feminism. In her essay titled as "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House", Lorde states that by employing the same methods used by patriarchy to oppress women, western feminism is failing to bring constructive change to third-world women (Lorde, 1983). She also discovered that western feminist literature disregarded the differences between women. According to Lorde, the differences between women should be acknowledged and embraced in order to build a community in which women support each other by using their differences as strengths. In her innovative essay "Under Western Eyes" Mohanty claims that Western feminists portray Third World women as a composite, unique concept that is arbitrary and restricting (Mohanty, 1988). Mohanty's main aim is to provide Third World women with an agency and a voice within the feminist movement. Similarly, Indian Canadian poet and illustrator Rupi Kaur aims to give the voice back to the voiceless South Asian women as the Third World Women as well as women of all colors, races, classes or ethnic origins who were excluded from the mainstream feminist movements. Since Kaur is aware of the misrepresentation of these women who were not only oppressed because of their gender but also because of multiple identity factors, she recurrently emphasizes the issues of these women and their multiple layers of oppression through her verses. By means of her strong feminist voice, the issues and the traumas of South Asian women and the women labelled as "Others" have been revealed and brought into feminist discourse. It could be said that Kaur provided not only women of her community but also women of different identity factors such as race, class or sexual orientation with a voice within the feminist movement by eliminating the concept of Third World "Other" through her revolutionary lines.

1.5. Each Women Has a Voice

After the three waves of feminism, a new form of feminism that is being shaped in today's world is seen in the silhouette. Named as Fourth Wave, this new version of

feminism started around 2012, centering on women's empowerment, intersectionality and the use of social media. British feminist scholar Prudence Chamberlain asserts that Fourth Wave focuses on "sexual violence, and especially violence against women" (Chamberlain, 2017: 115). Fourth wave feminism is particularly characterized by feminists using social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr and so on in order to protest misogyny and sexism. In fact, social media has created new spaces for the resurgence of feminist debates and the organizations of feminist activities. It has also made feminism easily accessible for younger generations. It is certain that a "call out" culture enabling discrimination and marginalization to be "called out" and challenged has been created by means of the internet (Munro, 2013: 22-23). The impact of the third wave is apparent in the formation of this culture as this "call out" culture also focuses on the continuing representation of hatred for women and sexism in films, television programs, literature, advertisings and the media (Munro, 2013: 22-23).

According to Jennifer Baumgardner, who is a feminist since birth as she states and a writer, lecturer and film-maker, fourth wave feminists were born into a digital world, hence they experience with technological tools unlike the feminists in previous waves (Baumgardner, 2011: 250). American feminist author and the founder of the website "feministing.com", Jessica Valenti believes that fourth wave includes various movements and waves, but the strongest connection between the activists is the great number of women attending online organizations (Cochrane, 2013: 39). This feature of fourth wave makes it distinctive from the third wave feminist movement introduced by Rebecca Walker in 1992 as technological possibilities have considerably increased and enabled women to organize all around the world since then (Cochrane, 2013: 40).

Martha Rampton, a professor of history and the director of the Gender Equity Center at Pacific University states that:

"The emerging fourth wavers are not just reincarnations of their second wave grandmothers; they bring to the discussion important perspectives taught by third wave feminism; they speak in terms of intersectionality whereby women's suppression can only fully be understood in a context of the marginalization of other groups and genders - feminism is part of a larger consciousness of oppression along with racism, ageism, classism, ableism, and sexual orientation (no 'ism' to go with that)" (Rampton, 2015: 7).

Created by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a professor of law, "the theory of intersectionality" has emerged as the determinant feature of fourth wave feminism (Cochrane, 2013: 56). Despite its occurrence for the analysis of black women's oppression

in the society, and their experience of multiple forms of oppression at an intersection, currently it has expanded a lot with the inclusion of diverse aspects of identity such as gender, race, sex, class, sexual tendency, religious belief, ability and physical appearance. Broadening the objectives of first and second wave feminist movements, intersectionality theory includes multiple experiences of women whether they are black, poor, immigrant, trans or disable. Its acknowledgement of different identities and experiences of women makes it distinct from white feminism which mostly concentrates on the experiences of white and middle class women. According to feminist activist Lili Evans, the notion of intersectionality admits the fact that:

"People don't just lead one issue lives, all the ways that people are oppressed intersect with each other, and you need a movement that recognises that. No person is free until we're all free. I am not free if a black woman is still oppressed. I am not free if women are still being discriminated against because of their mental health. I am not free until transgender women are recognised legally and socially as women, and do not get harassed and murdered violently, regularly, on the streets – because it's not just them who are not safe, it's also me who is not safe, because they are women too" (Cochrane, 2013: 57-58).

Rejuvenating the spirit of their second wave predecessors' street existence and the third wavers' attempt into digital culture, fourth wave feminists not only take advantage of the digital world but also maintain their presence in the streets. British novelist, journalist and advocator of women rights, Kira Cochrane asserts that fourth wave feminists benefit from both "offline and online" areas usually proceeding from online spaces to streets or vice versa.

1.6. Digital Feminism

Emerging as part of the fourth wave feminism, digital feminism can be described as the feminist activism taking place on the internet. Digital feminism, which has grown in popularity as a result of the advent and widespread use of the internet and social media, is a relatively recent phenomenon in the 21st century. In fact, social media reaching and connecting mass audiences in a short time has functioned as a consciousness raising tool for the digital feminists. Digital feminist movement includes notable campaigns, one of which is "Everyday Sexism Project" started by English feminist writer Laura Bates. Having been exposed to sexual comments, and sexual abuse three times in the same week,

Bates decided not to ignore and let all this go. Once she realized that she had never shared these experiences with anyone, she started asking every woman she met whether they had experienced sexism or not. Although she was expecting to hear one or two of them say yes, all of them seemed to experience similar traumatic events like "street harassment, sexual harassment, or workplace discrimination" (Cochrane, 2013: 37). The incidents were diverse, but their common point was that they were rarely shared between women. When Bates was awakened by this fact, she set up a website and officially started "Everyday Sexism Project" in 2012 to make a wide range of documentation exemplifying the sexual discrimination across the world. It was found out that "50.000 experiences had been shared and the project had almost 100.000 Twitter followers" (Cochrane, 2013: 38). Other sites similar to Bates' have also been established in order "to enable participants to recognize, analyze, and address the overlapping layers of marginality and discrimination in their lives" (Chun et al., 2013: 918).

During the 1970s in the second wave, women used to gather in small feminist groups to share their long hidden experiences of rape, sexual abuse or domestic violence. The emergence of the internet and social networking sites have revitalized this consciousness raising process again with a new dimension. Thanks to online platforms, thousands of women have gained the chance of involving in a single discussion, and in this way, they unashamedly began sharing their painful experiences and the stories they had never told anyone before. The creation of hashtag activism is a significant contribution made by digital feminism. Thanks to this activism, a social issue can be shared and discussed by thousands of women on social platforms. For instance, in 2012, Janet Mock, an American writer, producer and transgender rights activist, initiated "the hashtag #GirlsLikeUs" on Twitter and then lots of people highlighted the instances of violence and injustice against trans women and girls by using this hashtag (Cochrane, 2013: 39). Moreover, they drew attention to the fact that the representation of trans people must be healed.

As a sexual harassment survivor, American activist Tarana Burke initiated the Me Too movement on the social networking site Myspace in 2006 with an aim of helping other women who had experienced similar assaults or harassments. Burke wanted to empower women to break up their silence by showing them they were not alone. Besides, she aimed to "show the world how widespread and pervasive sexual violence is" since a wide range of women have survived sexual harassment and assault until now (Chandra and Erlingsdottir, 2020: 99). However, in 2017 Burke's campaign gained widespread

attention when women started using the #MeToo hashtag to tweet about American film producer Harvey Weinstein who had violated and assaulted lots of women in the film industry for years without being punished. In fact, the movement continued to grow and the hashtag became viral on social media by being used millions of times within 24 hours when Allysa Milano, an American actor and activist, posted this message; "If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem" in order to draw attention to the pervasiveness of sexual misconducts (Khomami, 2017). Upon Milano's post, victims of sexual crimes from all over the world began sharing their experiences, and revealing their oppressors or exploiters by using the hashtag #MeToo. Joanna Regulska, a professor of Women's Studies at University of California, describes this situation as "an exciting moment because women are defining what harassment, violence, and assault mean for them. How have these lived experiences affected their own understandings of their bodies or of their positions within the larger society?" (Regulska, 2018: 5). Moreover, Hollywood's famous stars shared their experiences of sexual assaults and gave absolute support to the women violated by Weinstein. Therefore, women's breaking their long lasting silence resulted in condemnations of many powerful and prominent men from politics, entertainment sector, media, academia, medicine and so on (Brunell, 2009). #MeToo movement gathered millions of women from distinct places with diverse backgrounds and experiences to articulate what had been suppressed for so long and empowered women through empathy and solidarity.

In addition to the aforementioned #MeToo movement, many tweet chains have been created on Twitter to let women show their reactions and plan their actions. The hashtag "#BelieveWomen" usually recast as "Believe all Women" has arisen out of the #MeToo as well (Bolinger, 2021: 1). This hashtag gained popularity after Harvey Weinstein's downfall as a reaction to Brett Kavanaugh's nomination for the Supreme Court of the United States in 2018 despite sexual assault accusations made against him by three women. By testifying in the senate against Kavanaugh, Dr Blasey Ford, one of the sexual abuse victims, encouraged women all over the world to announce their stories of violation endured in silence with fear (Chandra and Erlingsdottir, 2020: 380). Concerning this incident, an American feminist author, Sady Doyle stated in Elle that "Believe women" meant "don't assume women as a gender are especially deceptive or vindictive, and recognize that false allegations are less common than real ones" (Doyle,

2017). She lays emphasis on the fact that women are as reliable as men are; hence, their words must be trusted as men's have been believed for a very long time.

When Donald Trump, the former president of the United States, tweeted about his suspicions about Dr Blasey Ford's allegations, stating "if the attack was as bad as she says, she or her parents would have reported to the authorities when it happened more than 30 years ago", victims of sexual misconduct spread the hashtag "#WhyIDidn'tReport" on social media to reveal the fact that sexual abuse or misconduct is usually surrounded by fear, shame and anger, so it is not easy to report about it (Fortin, 2018). In relation to this issue, Carolyn M. West, a professor of psychology said that "It may take a survivor a while to process that trauma, and even to identify what has happened" (Fortin, 2018). Her explanation also confirmed the long buried silence of women who had been traumatized by sexual assault or harassment.

The #MeToo movement accomplished to raise awareness globally about the prevalence of sexual crimes and create a sense of community and solidarity among survivors. Depending on the powerful effect of this movement, some women working in the entertainment sector attempted to solve the problems in work places and started a campaign called "Time's Up", announcing that "the clock has run out on sexual assault, harassment and inequality in the workplace. It is time to do something about it" (Hillstrom, 2018: 65). Supported by hundreds of female Hollywood celebrities including Natalie Portman and Emma Stone, organizers of this movement aimed to move beyond reporting stories of sexual assaults by focusing on the factors that paved the way for abuse in work places. They attempted to make radical changes in law, procedures and the culture of workplaces to remove the inequalities of power that promotes sexual harassment. Founders of the movement announced that "the struggle for women to break in, to rise up the ranks, and to simply be heard and acknowledged in male dominated workplaces must end; time's up on this impenetrable monopoly" (Helmore, 2018). Therefore, the hashtag #TimesUp spread on social media in January 2018 to support the victims of sexual harassment and assault in workplaces and to draw attention to workplace discrimination against women including unfairness in pay and promotion.

Another hashtag campaign through which women raised their voice against sexual abuse is #NoMoore which became trend topic on twitter in November 2017 when the Washington Post published sexual abuse allegations against Roy Moore, Senate candidate of Alabama. Moore was accused of sexually harassing several young women including a fourteen-year-old girl when he was in his thirties (Tatum, 2017). Hence, reactions on

social media grew enormously, especially when some tried to defend Moore's actions by claiming that a 14-year-old girl was mature enough to give consent. Thereupon, hundreds of women including celebrities shared their own photos to indicate that young girls could not approve of their relationship with an adult man.

In April 2015, Canadian writer Courtney Summers invited her followers to offer support, wisdom, positivity, encouragement and love to the women all over the world by using the hashtag #ToTheGirls with her post on her Tumblr account, stating "Take the opportunity to tell the girls you know – and the ones you don't – that they are seen, heard and loved. Share advice. Be encouraging. Tell us about or thank the girls in your life who have made a difference in yours" (Summers, 2015). Thousands of women responded her request with supporting messages concerning friendship, body image and self-reliance as well as expressing love and kindness. This hashtag not only created solidarity between women but also provided young girls being manipulated by media, companies or other things with an effective source of advice not to make them feel alienated and helpless.

With the hashtag "#Girlsforgirls", the virtual sisterhood created by Polish women transformed into a political power in real world. In October 2016, digital feminist activists in Poland organized a national strike on social media across the country in order to protest "the most restrictive abortion laws in Europe" proposed by the Polish Parliament (www.amnesty.org). They immediately achieved to gain a great deal of attention and support at a global level through their online and offline protests. It can be said that the use of social media opened a new space for women to play a role in political activities as well as providing them with a voice claiming for the recognition of reproductive rights, "legal and social citizenship free of sexism, gender-based-violence and racism" (Mendizabal, 2018).

"The hashtag #HeforShe" launched as a campaign by United Nations (UN) emerged as a global movement of solidarity for the improvement of gender inequality in 2014 (www.facebook.com). Based on the belief that gender inequality influences all people in social, economic and political aspects, #HeforShe aimed to get the support of men and boys to achieve the construction of gender equality for the sake of which women had been fighting alone for a very long time. This campaign made an overwhelming impression, gaining the support of millions of men including celebrities, politicians and businessmen all around the world. Besides, in Turkey, well-known actors and actresses such as Mert Fırat, Kerem Bürsin, Arzum Onan, Özge Özpirinçci, and so on also invited men of all ages to advocate gender equality and women's rights with their impressive

slogan "society without women is a society without a future" in order to bolster #HeforShe movement (www.facebook.com).

In 2013, with "the hashtag #EffYourBeautyStandards", Tess Holliday, an American oversized model, started a movement on Instagram to declare the fact that women do not have to have a certain size to be satisfied with their bodies and that they should not dictate fashion choices to their bodies. Embracing the word fat, she advocates the idea that women should eat whatever and as much as they want without fear of public pressure. Through her campaign, Holliday challenged the constructed beauty standards by inviting women of all sizes to love and embrace their bodies, stating: "Why be our own worst enemy? Even if you don't have a partner to dress up (or take it off) for, do it for yourself. Our relationships with ourselves and our bodies are the most important ones we will ever have" (www.huffingtonpost.com).

The latest online campaign was launched by women in Afghanistan in March 2021 with the hashtag "#IamMySong" since the Ministry of Education banned Afghan schoolgirls older than 12 years old from singing at public events unless the audience was composed of only women (Glinski, 2021). It was also stipulated that girls would no longer get music education from a male teacher. This misogynistic ban was reacted with widespread outrage, accusing the government of prompting gender discrimination. In order to protest this discriminative prohibition, Afghan women and many high-profile leaders throughout the country recorded their songs and shared under "the hashtag #IAmMySong" on social media and then women all around the world started recording their singing and posted them via this hashtag to demonstrate their solidarity to Afghan women and to tell the authorities to repeal the order officially by letting women sing as much as they want (Glinski, 2021). As all women stood up to this nationwide singing ban by creating a global sisterhood, they accomplished to make the government hear their rising voices and overturn the ban.

It is seen that women have been using social media platforms to raise awareness about the issues of sexual harassment, rape, workplace discrimination, domestic violence, gender inequality, sexism, patriarchy and many other problems of women suppressed with fear and shame. Thanks to digital feminism, women all around the world have raised their voice against patriarchal oppression and gender inequality via social networking sites as they are silenced in other spaces. The dissemination of feminist ideas has also radically changed with the advent of the internet. While feminist literary canon was once restricted into libraries and generally ignored by mainstream media, social media and

feminist blogs have transformed all that. Feminist issues have come to the fore from the margins and any issues debated on social media by thousands of women have been published by newspapers and magazines. Although the voices of "white, male, heterosexual, cisgender (people whose gender identity is compatible with their biological sex)" have been dominant and it is mostly the white women who are talked about in the media, with the emergence of social networking sites it is possible to hear the views of everyone simultaneously (Cochrane, 2013: 44). The remarkable influence of digital platforms on the circulation of feminist ideas is emphasized as follows:

"Historically women have had little to no way to meet up and to discuss and share ideas, which has arguably lead to a narrow and white feminism being dominant, yet now through social media being accessible for many it is so much more easier to share ideas, to discuss and develop feminism, to help others through advice and through petitions, through raising awareness, and through holding others to a higher standard and pointing out others' inexcusable misogyny" (Mendes et al, 2018: 241).

To conclude, online feminist campaigns organized through social platforms have provided crucial spaces for all women and girls regardless of their race, age, ethnicity or other factors to engage in public discussions about women's rights, sexism, misogyny, rape culture, female body and so on. Besides, these platforms are regarded as safer and easier to reach rather than streets by most of the feminists in spite of the online harassment or death threats they have experienced because of the hashtag campaigns. Through the hashtags, women have accomplished to form a strong solidarity which turns into a consciousness raising for feminism, so they have all realized that sexual violence from which they have been suffering is "a structural rather than personal problem" (Mendes et al., 2018: 238). In fact, as women share their personal stories of sexual violence, not only they feel the healing influence of reporting, they also understand that their individual experiences are just a small part of a wider structural social problem. Besides, their virtual experience enables them to express their anger in public places and to experience sisterhood in real world. It is highly probable that collective feminist consciousness gained through digital feminist activism is paving the way for a social change and a fairer society: "The themes of global reach, speed, immediacy, dialogue, visibility, engagement, contact, connection, collectivity and shared understanding" came out as significant for digital feminist activists (Mendes et al., 2018: 240). Therefore, the internet environment has become a medium where women's problems are discussed and women unite and show

their reactions. All this shows that digital feminism is significant because it is a powerful tool to create social movements and societal changes.

CHAPTER II

POPULAR CULTURE AND POETRY

2.1. Diverse Definitions and the Growth of Popular Culture

The term 'popular culture' or 'pop culture' has been examined and described in various ways by the scholars. With regard to the difficulty of defining this term, British sociologist Tony Bennett articulates that "the concept of popular culture is virtually useless, a melting pot of confused and contradictory meanings capable of misdirecting inquiry up any number of theoretical blind alleys" (Bennett, 1980: 18). Before defining the term popular culture, it is necessary to define the term "culture" which was called as "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" by the Welsh author and critic Raymond Williams who proposed three thorough definitions in order to enlighten this complexity (Williams, 1983: 87). To begin with, culture might be defined as "a broad process of intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic development" (Williams, 1983: 90). For instance, we might discuss Western Europe's cultural evolution only in terms of academic, religious and artistic aspects- "great philosophers, great artists and great poets" (Storey, 2006: 2). Secondly, the term "culture" refers to "a particular way of life whether of a people, a period or a group" (Williams, 1983: 90). When we use this definition while talking about the cultural evolution of Western Europe, we would be referring to the things like education level, vacations, sporting activities and religious events, not only intellectual and aesthetic aspects. Lastly, Williams says that culture might relate to "the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity" (Williams, 1983: 90). To put it another way, in this last definition culture refers to the texts and practices which principally aim to indicate, generate or provide the occasion for the formation of meaning. We may certainly think of "poetry, the novel, ballet, opera, and fine art" as examples of this concept (Storey, 2006: 2). When we talk about popular culture, we are typically referring to the second and third definitions examined above rather than the initial definition which is considered by few people.

Any attempt to describe popular culture should begin with this statement: "popular culture is simply culture that is widely favoured or well liked by many people" (Storey, 2006: 5). And, without a doubt, many individuals would approve of such a quantitative assessment. We may look at book sales, CD and DVD sales. We may also look at concert,

athletic event, and festival attendance records as well as the audience interests for various TV programmes. It is certain that this kind of examination will provide us with a great deal of information. However, it is also evident that a quantitative assessment alone is insufficient to offer a true depiction of popular culture. Second definition of popular culture suggests that it is the culture that remains after the definition of high culture is determined. This depicts the secondary status of popular culture which includes texts and activities devoid of necessary requirements to be classified as high culture. That is to say, popular culture is defined as inferior culture. Besides, popular culture is defined as "mass culture" by some people who actually claim the fact that "popular culture is a hopelessly commercial culture" (Storey, 2006: 8). It is manufactured in huge quantities for the general public. Its public is a mass of individuals who are non-discriminatory. The culture is mechanical and could be manipulated by the politics as it is consumed with brain numbing and mindless apathy. There is a moderate version for the aspect of mass culture which suggests that the writings and activities of popular culture are viewed as manifestations of public fantasy. Popular culture is viewed as a communal fantasy world. According to Richard Maltby - the author of Hollywood Cinema - popular culture offers "escapism that is not an escape from or to anywhere, but an escape of our utopian selves" (Maltby, 1989: 14). In this connection, it might be claimed that cultural rituals like the new year celebration and summer vacations are similar to dreams in that they express collective but suppressed wants and desires in a disguised manner. This critique of the mass culture is quite moderate since, as Maltby claims, "If it is the crime of popular culture that it has taken our dreams and packaged them and sold them back to us, it is also the achievement of popular culture that it has brought us more and more varied dreams than we could otherwise ever have known" (Maltby, 1989: 14). Fourth definition of popular culture suggests that pop culture is the culture which emanates from the general population. It objects to any idea which suggests that it is something forced on the masses. This definition asserts the fact that pop culture can only be used to refer to a culture that is genuine and belongs to the people. This culture is known as folk culture which is created by and for the people. Popular culture is mostly linked with "a highly romanticised concept of working-class culture construed as the major source of symbolic protest within contemporary capitalism" (Bennett, 1980: 27). One issue with this method is the question of who is eligible to be included in the category of 'people'. Another issue is that it avoids the 'commercial' character of many of the resources used to create popular culture. Regardless of how certain we are about this notion, the truth remains that individuals do

not spontaneously create culture from their own raw materials since these materials are commercially available. Furthermore, the fifth definition of pop culture is based on Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's political analysis, notably on his formulation of the idea of hegemony. The term 'hegemony' is used by Gramsci to describe the process by which hegemonic groups in society strive to gain the agreement of subordinated groups through cultural institutions to keep their power in the capitalist order. According to Gramsci, dominant groups establish hegemonic culture through ideology rather than using violence, intimidation or economic pressure. Hegemonic culture spreads its own values and conventions until they become common sense ideals for everybody, therefore maintaining the status quo. Thus, cultural hegemony is utilized to keep people willingly supporting the capitalist system, instead of using violence to do it. Cultural theorists adopting Gramsci's political philosophy used it to describe "the nature and politics of popular culture" (Storey, 2006: 10). Those using this perspective consider popular culture as a battleground between the subordinated groups and the forces working for the benefit of dominating classes. Popular culture, within this context, is neither a culture imposed by the dominant classes nor a natural one arising from subordinate classes. It is a place for dialog and negotiation between both: a field characterized by resistance and integration as already indicated. That is to say, scholars who study "popular culture" through the lens of hegemony theory perceive it as a battlefield of ideologies between "dominant and subordinate classes", as well as "dominant and subordinate cultures" (Storey, 2006:10). As it is explained by Bennett:

"The field of popular culture is structured by the attempt of the ruling class to win hegemony and by forms of opposition to this endeavour. As such, it consists not simply of an imposed mass culture that is coincident with dominant ideology, nor simply of spontaneously oppositional cultures, but is rather an area of negotiation between the two within which – in different particular types of popular culture – dominant, subordinate and oppositional cultural and ideological values and elements are 'mixed' in different permutations" (qtd. in Storey, 2006: 10).

The class conflict is the focus of Bennett's analysis, however hegemony theory may also be utilized to examine and clarify such conflicts as ethnic origin, gender, sexual orientation and more. All of which are going through periods of intense cultural conflict as they attempt to resist the assimilating influences of the dominant culture. The sixth and

last definition of pop culture is based on the latest thoughts on the discussion about postmodernism. The line between genuine and commercial is obscured in the post modern era, namely in today's world. In pop culture nowadays, consumers have the option of either embracing the produced material or altering it for their own purposes, or rejecting it completely and creating their own.

Eventually, all the abovementioned definitions of popular culture assert the fact that pop culture is certainly a culture which arose only after industrialization and urbanization. Scholars attribute the origin and growth of pop culture to the establishment of the middle class as a result of the Industrial Revolution which changed radically the cultural relations within the terrain of pop culture. During this period people who were classified as working class migrated to urban areas far from their conventional rural life started producing their own culture and shared it with their colleagues, as a way of distancing from their parents and employers. Their new life style created a cultural space for the creation of a pop culture beyond the control of dominant classes while destroying the traditional one. In relation to this, English literary critic F.R Leavis argues that "there was in the seventeenth century a real culture of the people...a rich traditional culture...a positive culture which has disappeared" (Leavis, 1984: 188-189). According to him, the changes caused by the Industrial Revolution ruined most of this culture.

In the aftermath of World War II, technological advances in mass media resulted in social and cultural transformations in the western world. Simultaneously, capitalism, especially the desire for profit assumed the role of marketing, thus newly produced commodities started to be sold to people from different classes. Then the meaning of the term pop culture came to conflate with the meanings of such terms as mass culture, consumer culture as well as image and media culture. Furthermore, mass media through which pop culture is formed and disseminated has altered drastically over the past two decades. Therefore, it is challenging for researchers to identify how it operates. Even though in 2000, only printed materials like books, magazines, newspapers and broadcasting organs like television, radio and lastly cinema were considered as mass media, today it covers a wide range of social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook and etc. The new cultural atmosphere created by these networking sites is extremely participative, enabling lots of options for cultural expression and innovation. Moreover, the cost of artistic production has decreased and reaching a large number of audience has become easier thanks to technological developments. Therefore, an increasing number of people are devoting much of their free time to the creation of art

such as in the field of "music, photography, filmmaking, blogging, graphic art, creative writing, or videogame design" (Grindstaff, 2008: 214-215).

2.2. Women, Feminism and Popular Culture

A considerable amount of feminist analysis has focused on popular culture. As Michéle Barrett, a prominent social theorist, notes "cultural politics are crucially important to feminism because they involve struggles over *meaning*" (Barrett, 1982: 37). Professor Lana Rakow who was identified as a leading female academic in media and mass communication in 2000, makes a similar point with Barrett by stating that "Feminists approaching popular culture proceed from a variety of theoretical positions that carry with them a deeper social analysis and political agenda" (Rakow, 2009: 195). Additionally, as Rakow points out:

"Though contemporary feminists have taken a diversity of approaches to popular culture, they have shared two major assumptions. The first is that women have a particular relationship to popular culture that is different from men's. . . . The second assumption is that understanding how popular culture functions both for women and for a patriarchal culture is important if women are to gain control over their own identities and change both social mythologies and social relations. . . . Feminists are saying that popular culture plays a role in patriarchal society and that theoretical analysis of this role warrants a major position in ongoing discussions" (Rakow, 2009: 186).

Feminists criticize the popular cultural manifestations that marginalise or devalue women, the scarcity of women participating in cultural creation and the disregard of women as viewers for pop culture. They have also been critical of how academic research has worsened these processes by not taking women's position and gender oppression more seriously. Obviously, both pop culture and academic researchers have trivialized, disregarded or omitted women as a social class. Therefore, they have been challenged by feminists on philosophical and political issues. Most of the previous researches on women and pop culture has been concerned with "what [American sociologist Gaye] Tuchman has called the symbolic annihilation of women" (Strinati, 2004: 167). This represents how cultural products and media portray women, failing to include them, ignoring them, or marginalising them. In general, women are either missing or stereotyped based on their sexual beauty and domestic work performance. That is to say, the media symbolically destroys them by omitting, condemning or trivializing. Besides, it is claimed that women's

cultural portrayal in the mass media supports and perpetuates the prevalent sexual division of labour, and socially constructed feminine roles. Mass media symbolically murders women by depicting them only in the roles of wife, mother or housewife while it also portrays these roles as "the fate of women in a patriarchal society" (Strinati, 2004: 167). Using the evidence from the years between 1950s to the late 1970s in America, Tuchman has found out that women were generally underrepresented while men dominated most of the programmes on television, that male representatives were shown having an occupation while few women shown working were reflected as ineffective and not definitely as capable as their male colleagues and that "more generally, women [did not] appear in the same professions as men: men [were] doctors, women, nurses; men [were] lawyers, women secretaries..." (Tuchman, 1981: 173).

Tuchman also argues that women's symbolic annihilation is reinforced through the advertisements on TV: "In voice-overs and one-sex (all-male or all-female) ads, commercials neglect or stereotype women. In their portrayal of women, the ads banish females to the role of housewife, mother, homemaker, and sex object, limiting the roles women may play in society" (Tuchman, 1981: 175). It is asserted by Sociology Lecturer Dominic Strinati that not only television programmes and adverts but also the press and women's magazines contributed to "this symbolic annihilation of women" in our time (Strinati, 2004: 169). In fact, it is obvious that representations of women and men by the mass media serve to the aims of patriarchy, reproducing traditional sex roles and unequal power relations between women and men. Thus, men are typically portrayed as dominant, energetic and authoritarian, having a range of significant and various roles that require intellectual competence, power, courage and determination to be implemented in a successful way. Women, in contrast, are often portrayed as subordinate, weak and obedient, furthermore the tasks they are performing are restricted to their domesticity and sexuality. It is clear that the mass media confirms the inherent nature of sex roles, hence promotes gender discrimination by portraying men and women in these ways. In essence, the mass media does not truly reflect women, their issues, experiences, rights, interests or desires rather it offers a fantasy world by serving to the ideologies of patriarchy and dominant social values. As a result, women are being deceived by their inaccurate portrayals.

Although mass media and popular culture annihilate the image of women by reflecting false images, women have accomplished to challenge this deceptive portrayal by undermining the dominant ideologies through new media formats such as Instagram,

Tumblr, Twitter or personal blogs. Thanks to these platforms, women have become the active producers of pop culture rather than passive victims. As it is argued in the following quotation: "It is not enough to dismiss popular culture as merely serving the complementary systems of capitalism and patriarchy, peddling 'false consciousness' to the duped masses. It can also be seen as a site where means are contested and where dominant ideologies can be disturbed" (Gamman and Marshment, 1988:1).

2.3. Women's Poetry in Popular Culture

Since the emergence of "women's poetry" as an academic discipline throughout the 1970s, the illogical utilization of pop culture has become "a key signature hidden in plain sight" (Bryant, 2011: 2). However, this illogical use disappeared when popular culture was introduced into academia by women's studies and second wave feminist thinking for a required and continuous criticism, recognizing sexist portrayals of women. Simultaneously, feminist literary criticism discovered the ways in which renowned female writers were consistently neglected throughout literary history, hence a women's canon was created to counteract this repeated neglect. Theorists of women's poetry discussing the status of the poets as "canonical outsiders" emphasized the subversive characteristic of it in order to fight institutional systems which excluded women unfairly (Bryant, 2011: 2). This urge for transgression is distilled by historian Louise Bernikow with the following words: "A woman poet, authentic and in rebellion, is subversive of standard economic, political, social, artistic, and psychic orders" (Bernikow, 1974: 9). The outsider model was transferred into the subconscious and female subjectivity by the feminist-psychoanalytic critics throughout the 1990s with the discovery of distinctive rhythms and tonalities in the writings of women which deviated from the symbolic or patriarchal structure of language. According to American feminist poet Alicia S. Ostriker, female poets in America are social outcasts who liberate themselves from the symbolic order of language (patriarchal language) and start "a quest for autonomous self-definition" (Ostriker, 1986: 10-11). Jan Montefiore, a professor of English literature who is more cautious about a distinctive tradition, also argues that female poets are linguistic outcasts even before their entrance into public circle since their entrance into language - "a system of signifiers constituted purely by difference" - is psychologically distinct from that of men (Montefiore, 2004: 102). As if it wasn't enough that female poets were regarded and labelled as social outsiders, they were also scolded from time to time because "they

[wrote] too much, reveal[ed] too much and push[ed] their poetics too far", even some of them were blamed for segregation and their style was considered as "unladylike" (Ford, 1997: 10-14). As a reaction to this accusation, British poet Carol Rumens invited women poets to defy the notion of ladylike behaviour, saying that "niceness has very little to do with poetry" (Rumens, 1985: 14).

English actress and poet Greta Bellamacina explains the current status of poetry, especially women's poetry in popular culture with the following statements:

"It's a really interesting time for poetry at the moment – and especially for women. Because of the internet people can self-publish their work and have the audience decide if they like it or not. Women especially can write freely about things they might not have been able to write about before. I' m surrounded by an incredible community of female poets" (Williams, 2017).

Bellamacina points out that this community comprises of women poets from all over the world and they all agree on the fact that it has become quite simple to communicate across continents through social media which also enables poetry to find a huge public audience. Instagram poets are becoming literary sensations with a great number of followers day by day. The Indian born Canadian poet Rupi Kaur is one of those insta-poets who has gained much popularity through her insta-poems and publications.

By adopting politics, popular culture, feminism, and the truth of women's experiences, and by simply using the new technology, poetry is gaining both younger audience and writers today. According to British poet Salena Godden "audiences have changed a lot;....the people participating have changed. There's more poets of colour, more women poets, more feminism, people are more awake, there's fight going on" (Williams, 2017). Moreover, contemporary female poets are more inclined than their male counterparts to dive into the darker corners of their mind, examining bodily concerns, break-ups or sexual assault. These can be quite strong, but they can also be highly revealing. They all think that women have much thing to be furious about as they were grown up, being convinced that they did not have a voice and there was no space for them to be heard, yet today they realize that they have a voice and really a strong one. Therefore, they started raising their voice by revealing what they have suppressed for so long through poetry and performance.

Poetry has currently made its way out of the classics and the classroom into the social media platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, Tumblr and etc. As a consequence

of this, poetry and pop culture has become much closer than ever. With more accessibility and connectivity, poets have become more available and connected to their followers and wider audiences, hence this situation has led to an increase in the popularity of poetry and especially instapoetry. Moreover, numerous young poets have accomplished to turn their success in the digital world into popular published collections. These poems have touched people's hearts and thoughts, therefore they have been liked, bought, captured, consumed and shared many times, gaining widespread praise. In today's world, the use of poetry in pop culture has considerably contributed to the development of fourth wave feminist thinking, enabling to challenge patriarchal and hegemonic ideologies and make the voice of women heard globally. Besides, contents of contemporary poetry particular to 21st century correspond to larger societal changes, notably fourth wave feminism. Young women's angry activism seeking to be heard manifests itself loudly and clearly along with the extroversion about relationships, psychological health, physical functioning and sex that we have witnessed in various art forms before.

2.4. Rupi Kaur and Her Rising Voice in Popular Culture

Being born in Punjab, India, Rupi Kaur is a twenty-nine year-old poet, artist and performer. When she was four, her family immigrated to Canada in order to escape from the genocide of Sikh people by the Indian government. Leaving the struggles and oppression in their homeland, the family started a new life in this foreign country. Kaur became interested in painting and drawing with the support and encouragement of her mother in her early childhood, so her artistic and creative ability started to emerge. Though in the early stages of her life she could not develop much passion for writing because of the language barrier, she started trials of writing to express herself at school after she had learnt English. However, in 2013 when she encountered marvellous writers like Warsaw Shire and Virginia Woolf, everything changed for her. She describes the impact of these authors on her in an interview by denoting them as her source of inspiration as follows:

"I was astounded by the way they were able to put all my intricate feelings into simple words. I was completely transfixed about how heavily their poetry moved me. That form of expression, the ability to knock the breath out of someone's stomach with a sentence, to me that was power" (Kaur Life, 2014).

Inspired by the remarkable authors, Kaur focused on both writing and performing poetry. She managed to pursue her passion with her degree in Rhetoric and Professional Writing from the University of Waterloo. When she started sharing her poetry reflecting both her personal experience and observational viewpoint firstly on the blogging site Tumblr and then Instagram, she gained widespread popularity. With her new and simple style accompanied with simple thematic and hand-drawn illustrations she became the representative of instapoetry. Kaur has made a great success with her self-published book Milk and Honey (2014) that sold more than three million copies across the world and remained on the New York Times best seller list for a long time. In 2017, with her second work The Sun and Her Flowers, she has been listed on the BBC's 100 Women as an inspirational and influential woman. Having currently over four million followers on Instagram, Kaur continues to reach new audiences by reshaping the literary form. The great power and success of her works grow out of their potential of appealing to a wide range of audience. She has been introduced into the market as a "social media star" and acknowledged by a huge number of followers, so she is described as "a millennial publishing sensation" and "poetry's Beyoncé" by the Indian journalist and literary critic Nilanjana Roy (Perryer, 2018).

Rupi Kaur disrupts the concepts of "genre, gender and race in order to reveal deep-seated cultural anxieties about the imbrication of women, trauma and power" (Miller, 2019: 2). Embracing the ideas of third wave feminism, she has been undoubtedly contributing to the fourth wave of feminism to a great extent by giving voice to the systematic silencing of women, socially constructed ideas on female bodies, sexual trauma, and violence. She also challenges the taboos of society related to female sexuality and biology via digital tools. As she states, digital platforms have enabled her to speak of "unspeakable things" such as harassment (Keller et al, 2018: 22). Even Kaur's instagram account is functioning as a platform where many of her followers share their own experiences and discuss global issues of women in the comment section of her poems. Therefore, it can be said that Kaur's instapoetry which has become a popular cultural product has the power of integrating women of all nations, ages and ethnic backgrounds. In this sense, her poetry functions similar to feminist hashtags like #MeToo, thus contributing to the digital feminist activism substantially.

As a popular Instapoet, Rupi Kaur challenges the status quo in her poems by emphasizing the injustices in the system and shares them on social media which has a great influence on the formation of 21st century popular culture. In a white dominated

literary scene, the Indian born poet has become the voice of all women including the ones that have been kept out as the others for a long time, therefore their voices are silenced and marginalized. "Kaur has managed to strike a chord with countless young brown women who don't or can't share their voices outside the internet. In her work, they've found themselves, and if that isn't the job of poetry - online or offline - I'm not sure what is" (Ahsan, 2017). That is to say, as a young woman of colour Kaur tells a truth that cannot be understood by the literary establishment in a world in which white, male pleasures are seen as the barometer of absolute pleasures. The swift development of social networking sites as the perfect vehicle for communication and their significant influence on the formation and spread of pop culture in the 21st century have prepared the conditions for Kaur to raise her voice, therefore she has innovated the conventional art form, and popularized it in digital platforms like Instagram and Tumblr among a new demographic, because these areas also denote spaces for those who have historically been denied access to social, economic and political areas to build a community, organize social resistance and tell their stories. Sharing her poetry via these platforms, Kaur has created a digital feminist environment where women all over the world can easily share their own stories of survival in the patriarchal order and support each other by promoting sisterhood. It could finally be said that Kaur has managed to offer an exciting new field through which differences can be expressed and the boundaries of traditional literary culture can be defied to allow diverse voices to arise via virtual spaces in the 21st popular culture.

2.5. Instapoetry as a Popular Cultural Product

With its limited number of words conveying profound messages, instapoetry is "a sub-genre of poetry" which is especially written for social networking sites such as Instagram, Tumblr and Twitter, and simplicity is the first distinguishing characteristic of it (Pâquet, 2019: 302). German philologist and culturalist Claudia Benthien describes instapoetry as "short, simple, often kitschy poems designed for smart phones....adorned with visual elements, such as handwriting, drawings, photos and adorned script" (Benthien, 2020: 8). She also argues that "such easy-to-grasp poems question established norms of poetry as a literary form, as they tend to lack the complexity, thickness and literariness that has adhered to this genre" (Benthien, 2020: 3). For this reason, as she states, contemporary poets with artistic desires move away from the easily consumed language of advertising in their poems. Alongside the formal features of instapoetry when

we examine the common themes tackled in these poems, the themes of sexual violence and female sexuality come into prominence. Even though all the instapoets are not female, instapoems are mostly female-oriented, dealing with feminist issues and encouraging women's empowerment (Pâquet, 2019: 305). Other themes like race, racism and immigrant life are also tackled by some instapoets including Rupi Kaur.

The instant success and development of this new sub-type of poetry titled as instapoetry is characterized as a provocative genre to a greater extent by some critics who claim that this movement is ruining the traditional form of art. Making claims in the same way with these critics, British poet Rebecca Watts states that instapoetry is indicatory of a "muddle-headed conspiracy to democratize poetry" that only discloses crude and belligerent "anti-establishmentism" (Watts, 2018: 14-16). In parallel with these statements, Canadian writer Soraya Roberts describes instapoetry as "a boutique of perfectly curated objets de commerce" that sells "a sanitized unreality" and presents "a filtered reflection of an anxious generation scrambling for distraction" (Roberts, 2018). She even defines it as "the poetry of capitalism" which addresses not only to souls but also to business (Roberts, 2018). Most critics lay emphasis on the fact that instapoetry is an artless work which is easily produced and consumed in a digital environment which has reduced the potential of individuals for endeavour and complication. However, supporters of the instapoetry respond to these critics, asserting that such critics fail to realize the worth of the rising digital culture and in such a digitalized world, reading instapoetry could be a practical way of consuming poetry, because "the world has changed since the time of Whitman, Plath, Chaucer, Bronte, or whoever your favorite traditional poet might be....... poetry has changed with it" (Burnam, 2019). They also hold the belief that instapoetry offers a new realm through which the silenced ones could find a voice. Somalian British poet Momtaza Mehri emphasizes that young female poets experimenting instapoetry do not "need to be patronized or lectured to about Real Poetry" (Mehri, 2018). According to Lili Pâquet, Writing and Rhetoric Lecturer at the University of New England, instapoetry unites "poetry and self-help literature" (Pâquet, 2019: 296). Its validity is due to its poetic and wider appeal, moreover instapoetry as an art form is rather justified by the way its practitioners' employment of the "poetic techniques of ekphrasis" (Pâquet, 2019: 296). Not only Rupi Kaur's books and poetry sites but also the works and sites of other instapoets such as Atticus, Lang Leav and Alicia Cook obviously show that academic scholarship should acknowledge instapoetry as an important subgenre since it suits very well to the medium and the users of Instagram as well as

offering "a self-help aesthetic" which contradicts with the shallowness of the social media platforms (Pâquet, 2019: 297). Especially, in response to the criticisms about the quality of poems written by Kaur, poetry critic and editor Jeremy Noel-Tod states that "Kaur's style is artless and therefore sincere; its lack of workbench polish is the mark of immediacy. This is poetry that aspires to be message rather than music - and it is a potently direct and feminist message" (qtd. in Pâquet, 2019: 305). Moreover, this revolutionary genre has brought a wide range of audience to poetry who might not have been interested in it at all as well as causing a power shift in the white-male dominated contemporary poetry. Finally, it can be said that interpreting the immediate success of instapoetry as the sign of the ending of poetry would be to reject the verses containing courage, beauty and wisdom unfairly.

Whereas instapoetry developed with the advent of the online platforms due to the digitalization in popular culture, the confessional mode of the poetry written by Kaur is in fact based on a long historical background in literature. Initially, American poet and critic M. L. Rosenthal coined the term "confessional poetry" in his influential critique of Life Studies, a book of poems by the American poet Robert Lowell, in 1959 (Ashton, 2013: 31). In this book, Lowell generously details the difficulties and dissentions he experienced in his marriage as well as conflict of generations and mental disease. The personal had invariably fed poetry, yet as Rosenthal claims "Lowell removes the mask [that was being worn by previous poets writing about their lives]. His speaker is unequivocally himself, and it is hard not to think of Life Studies as a series of personal confidences, rather shameful, that one is honor-bound not to reveal" (Rosenthal, 1991: 109). As it is understood from the content of Lowell's poetry collection, confessional poetry discloses private facts about the poet's life. Since 1950s, this literary genre has played an important role in American poetry by focusing on especially "painful moments or experiences often related to more general historical or cultural problems" (Ousby, 2006: 233).

American literary critic and poet Sandra Gilbert states that "confessional poetry" is mostly identified with a group of "contemporary male poets such as Berryman, Lowell and Snodgrass" (Gilbert, 1977: 444). It is also argued that confessional poetry found its roots in the classes of Lowell "who taught Sexton, Plath and Snodgrass" at Harvard and Boston University (Ashton, 2013: 32). However, this poetry tradition can be traced in the works of the "male mythologies of the self as Whitman and Yeats to Wordsworth and Byron" (Gilbert, 1977: 444). Tracing back in history, it is also possible to realize that the

term "confessional" originates in earlier times as "confessional writing is part of a religious tradition that dates back to Augustine and became part of a therapeutic tradition even before the advent of psychotherapy which certainly shaped and accelerated the outpouring of personal self revelation in the twentieth century" (Ashton, 2013: 33). In the political sphere, most significantly in the movement of feminism, as well as in the movements of civil rights and queer liberation, talking individually was regarded as an important way of interference both in the public realm and in the development of politics. In most of these circumstances, the personal voice was a scolding to what was progressively considered as a deceptive impartiality or a false universalism. "The revelations of confessional poetry were extreme and transgressive particularly with respect to norms of white, middle-class, heterosexual society. Sexton, Lowell, Plath, Berryman and Snodgrass made poems about marital failure and infidelity, (hetero) sexual transgression, abortion, rage, mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse. They wrote about the body, often in its most degraded or vulnerable states" (Ashton, 2013: 34). In this regard, Sexton has become the most notable voice with her poem "Menstruation at Forty" (1966), drawing a great deal of reaction from the critics of the time (Ashton, 2013: 34).

Although the main themes of the poems written by the contemporary male poets using confessional mode mostly consist of the poets' private lives, they achieve to be "at once private and public, lyrical and rhetorical" since the poet's personal crisis "is felt at the same time as a symbolic embodiment of national and cultural crisis" (Rosenthal, 1967: 15). Gilbert considers that "the self defining confessional genre" which insistently asserts identity and stresses on "a central mythology of the self" could be a poetic mode that specifically belongs to female poets at least in our time (Gilbert, 1977: 444). It is also argued that confessional poetry is gendered since "the male confessional poet, in other words, even while romantically exploring his own psyche, observes himself as a representative specimen with a sort of scientific exactitude" (Gilbert, 1977: 445). However, the female confessional poet is deprived of such a status and exactness (Gilbert, 1977: 445). Moreover, while the male confessional poet can easily portray himself as Everyman, the female confessional poet feels bizarre, not representative of Everywoman. Male confessional poets like Yeats, Lowell and Berryman regarding themselves as the grandsons of history write with the conviction that they are the inheritors of an important culture, as Harold Bloom - a prominent American literary critic - argues, the uncertainty of the past has defined their concerns and shaped them in the same way it shaped their fathers (Bloom, 1997: 5-16). On the other hand, female poets write with the intention of

finding or designating "a self, a certainty, a tradition" (Gilbert, 1977: 446). While endeavouring for self-recognition, they experiment with different suggestions about their own nature and never feel as relaxed as their male counterparts since they see themselves establishing a new tradition desperately rather than contributing to an old one. Because of this reason, as Gilbert argues, the verses of the confessional female poets like Sexton, Rich or Plath include repetitive self-defining statements. Furthermore, female poets are portrayed as isolated from the social circle and attached to domestic life, but they reject such an identity which is enforced on them. Their constrained identity is reflected in verses like the following: "[S]he perceives that she is supposed to be living quietly in [their] kitchen, adhering as Plath wrathfully wrote to rules, to rules, to rules" (Gilbert, 1977: 449).

In this sense, with her confessional mode of poetry Rupi Kaur can be considered as one of the challengers against the ongoing tradition which constructs the identities of women according to socio-cultural norms. Refusing a closure in the depths of history like Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, Kaur attempts to disturb and overthrow the limitations imposed on the women's identities by celebrating the issues considered as taboo like menstruation and visible breastfeeding as well as concentrating on the themes of "female desire, sexual violence and abuse" (Miller, 2019: 4). Her challenge against prevailing societal menstruation taboo through the menstruation themed photos shared on Instagram is one of her notable work. When Kaur posted a range of photos revealing the private details of her menstrual cycle with the blood stains both on her clothes and sheets, Instagram removed them, claiming that these photographs were not appropriate for the terms of the site. This censorship attempt on her posts "positioned Kaur as a cultural producer who appeals to women (particularly women of colour) who are suppressed, shamed, and silenced", and most importantly she has proven the fact that the bodies of women are censored and controlled by the patriarchal order which determines what kind of female experiences should be felt publicly or secretly behind the doors through these photographs that are described as a piece of visual poetry (Pâquet, 2019: 298). The censorship also enabled Kaur to create a platform where she could question the social reactions to the natural states of women's bodies. And by exposing the reality of menstruation, she constructed a reliable public image that is outspokenly feminist. After the censorship incident, Kaur has continued to use social media tools for feminist purposes by sharing poems that carry feminist messages, "[e]xtolling women's inner strength, calling for self-confidence and bodily autonomy, celebrating histories of

struggle, decrying abuse" (Tambe, 2017). Thus, she gained too much support as well as drawing excessive attention to her photographs and poetry.

2.6. Kaur's Writing Style and Illustration

Kaur's poetry is characterized by her minimalistic style which is a way of writing she encountered and admired through the performance of Sikh traditions with holy scriptures written in poetic verse. She deconstructs the language conventions by writing in all lower case letters and using only periods as punctuation. She explains why she adopts such a distinctive style on her website in this way:

"When I began writing poetry, I could read and understand my mother tongue (Punjabi), but I hadn't yet developed the skill set to write poetry in it. Punjabi is written in either Shahmukhi or Gurmukhi script. Within the Gurmukhi script, there are no uppercase or lowercase letters. The letters are treated the same. I enjoy this simplicity. It's symmetrical and straightforward. I also feel there is a level of equality this visuality brings to the work. A visual representation of what i want to see more of within the world: equallness" (Kaur, 2021).

Kaur aims to represent and preserve these little nuances of her mother language by ascribing them into her works. Her writing style visually manifests her diasporic identity as an Indian-born Canadian woman. As she states, she utilizes her style as a means to create a tie with her own history and heritage. It is also clear that one of her primary aim is to establish a sort of letter equality which she extends to issues of gender and racial equality that are central to her works. Besides, through her simplistic style she aims for accessibility which is the defining feature of digital feminism. Kaur believes that art should not be tailored in a way that keeps people out rather it should be available to the general public. Based on this belief, she has achieved to make feminist activity accessible to a vast number of people who would otherwise be excluded. Many of Kaur's poems are only a few lines long which make them quite fit into the digital spaces. Her poems frequently end with a final italicized phrase that either identifies the poem's audience or articulates the theme or states her name. Kaur's usage of such defining phrases at the end of her poems are likened to the hashtags used in digital feminist activism to share a social issue and raise awareness about it on social media.

Kaur's simple hand drawn illustrations accompany most of her poems. The illustrations which depict the events and topics mentioned in the text complement the poetry with a sense of uniqueness. As she explains, she has intentionally drawn so simply not to detract from poetry. Besides, the simple style of her drawings creates a juxtaposition with the serious subject matters tackled in the poems. Kaur's drawings are striking and often irritating when compared to the poetry. As she states, her style is meant to be identifiable and to create a brand. Moreover, her impressive drawings can be regarded as a kind of language for women who, like Kaur's mother, lost their voice, cannot learn a language or cannot express themselves well enough in the community to which they migrated. As a result, it can also be said that Kaur not only writes or performs her poetry but she also draws. It is obvious that she has been challenging the patriarchal order in multiple ways since she has been oppressed in multiple ways like thousands of women, too. In other words, she uses her full potential both to challenge the patriarchal treatment and to raise awareness about it.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF KAUR'S POETRY

3.1. Kaur as a Feminist Poet within Popular Culture

Self-published in 2014, Rupi Kaur's best-selling book <u>Milk and Honey</u> is a collection of poems and prose. The book consists of four chapters titled respectively as "hurting, loving, breaking and healing" (Kaur, 2015: 5). Each chapter serves a different purpose by dealing with a different struggle and healing a different heartache. Kaur states that "Milk and Honey takes readers through a journey of the most bitter moments in life and finds sweetness in them" because she thinks that "there is sweetness everywhere if you are just willing to look" (Kaur, 2015: 203). As for the name of the book, Kaur says that she always knew that it would be titled as Milk and Honey after she had been stuck with the metaphor she used in one of her poems written in 2013. The poem is about the persecution of Sikhs by the Indian government in 1984 when the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was murdered by her Sikh bodyguards. In the poem, Kaur describes the widows of the massacre who had to endure the pain of losing their husbands and entire families while they were also suffering from the wounds inflicted on their souls due to rape and torture, and she writes that those widows came through "that terror as smooth as milk and as thick as honey" (HT Correspondent, 2017). Namely, this metaphor, influenced and inspired her enough to name her first collection of poetry after it. Moreover, Kaur chose this title since these words remind her the times when her father believing in the healing power of the mixture used to take care of her when she got sick by mixing some herbs or almonds into milk and honey. It could be said that just as Kaur's father healed her by benefiting from the curative effect of milk and honey, Kaur personally aims to heal all the women who have been oppressed, silenced, stereotyped, raped or tortured on account of their sex, race, class or sexual tendency for a long time with her poetry. Therefore, her main purpose has become to question socially constructed ideas on female bodies as well as challenging the taboos related to female sexuality and biology in this collection.

In 2017, Kaur published her second poetry collection, <u>The Sun and Her Flowers</u> which is "a journey of wilting, falling, rooting, rising and blooming" (Kaur, 2017: 244).

Referring to the life-cycle of a flower through these phrases, Kaur depicts the various stages of a relationship and the compassionate liberation that comes with self-acceptance, self-empowerment and self love. As she says, she chose this title because she was captivated with the way sunflowers adore the sun, the way they rise with the sun and follow it around. According to her, it is a wonderful symbol of love and relationships: a woman could be represented by the sun, and the relationships that she has throughout her life could be represented by flowers. Focusing on the themes of love, loss, sexual abuse, trauma, womanhood, female body, women's empowerment and self-acceptance, Kaur fights against women's oppression through subversion and fragmentation of taboos constructed on female's body in both of her collections. Even though she differentiates the motivations behind these two works, they are both founded on the healing power of expressing.

A closer look at both the form and the content of her two collections enable one to observe Kaur's progress as a feminist writer. Although her writing is remarkable even in her very first poems, she still seems to look for a direction in them. However, this search finds answers one by one through Milk and Honey and her attitude, voice and style become more visible in The Sun and Her Flowers. In this respect, her writing best reveals itself in a chronological reading.

As documented in Milk and Honey, Kaur's feminist battle can be seen in action not only in her private environment but also in her public. In her private realm, Kaur struggles with patriarchal ideologies in the communities of South Asia and in her family environment. As for her public realm, she refuses to conform to the societal assumptions about femininity, female biology and sexuality. Through her poetry, as she claims, Kaur reacts to the treatment she was exposed to as a woman in her world and the treatment towards the other women around her. Women's struggle for their place in her community was a driving factor for her to write her poetry. Belonging to a family that follows Sikhism, Kaur argues that although their religion promotes equality between women and men and opposes all forms of gender discrimination, the treatment imposed on the women in the Sikh community including her sister and her mother is completely different and far from equality. She also defies the silence frequently forced on women and defends her freedom to express herself via poetry. In the following verses, she exposes how the women in her family were silenced through patriarchal violence, and how she developed the idea that women are subservient to men:

"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" (Kaur, 2015: 32)

When her father tells her mother "to never speak with her mouth full", he is actually telling her not to express her personal ideas by always keeping her mouth shut (Kaur, 2015: 32). It is important to note that the illustration of a dinner table accompanied with the poem gives the sense that these scenarios often occur within the family. This is the usual treatment towards the women in Sikh community as she claims. Therefore, it can be argued that by describing a familial event which exemplifies how her mother is silenced by the male authority at home, Kaur basically exposes how women in her community are treated. It can also be understood from the poem that by manipulating the voice of women and limiting their speech, patriarchy conditioned them to maintain their silence and pushed them into nothingness. In fact, Kaur's familial event not only occurs in her community but almost all over the world in patriarchal societies, so the seeds of injustices and inequalities are disseminated systematically in this way.

By means of her poetry, Kaur especially gives the voice which has been silenced by her father and the patriarchal society back to her voiceless mother. As an Indian woman Kaur's mother has grown up in a deep-rooted patriarchal culture which regards women as victims "of humiliation, torture and exploitation" (Nirola, 2017: 27). Women in Indian society have frequently been subjected to violence, rape, murder, abuse and discrimination. Therefore, they do not feel safe "alone on the streets, at work, in markets or at home, even though they have learned how to cope with this existential anxiety" (Narayan, 2018: 2). In order to survive in such a threatening environment, Indian women censor their speech, clothing, entertainment and behaviours. Obviously patriarchal threats oppress and silence the women in India by taking the control of their lives and bodies. Witnessing the constant state of vigilance in her mother's behaviour and realizing the fear in the eyes of her, Kaur states that:

"i can't tell if my mother is
terrified or in love with
my father it all
looks the same" (Kaur, 2015: 37)

It can be said that the fear and the existential anxiety is so ingrained in her mother's actions that she is unable to feel and reflect any other emotion. Since she is culturally trained to act as if she does not exist and to minimise her presence to survive all her life, she has had to suppress her feelings like a lifeless object which is the reason why Kaur cannot differentiate the emotions of her mother. While living in India, her mother suffered only from patriarchal oppression, but with the immigration of the family to Canada in 1995, her oppression increased in multiple forms. That is to say, she was not only oppressed because of her gender, but also because of her race, ethnicity, religion and her class as a poor immigrant woman in a white Western society. During that time just like Kaur's mother, a great number of South Asian women in Canada or women having different identity factors anywhere in the world were oppressed based on their race, ethnicity, economic standing, religion or sexual tendency. In addition, these women were afraid of raising their voice against this discriminative culture. The multiple oppression of these women, and their exclusion from the second wave feminist movement were the main factors for the emergence of third wave and postcolonial feminism which expanded feminist movements by including women with diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. By recounting her mother's oppression in terms of sex, race, class, language and ethnicity, Kaur also becomes the voice of third wave feminist activism during which women having different skin colours, nations, religions or cultural backgrounds raised their voice to expose the fact that not only white middle class and college educated women were oppressed and needed equal rights on the same terms with men in society but also there were many others with diverse identity factors. Kaur's mother was just one of the millions of those marginalized women who struggled like a "warrior" in a new world which oppressed her in many ways (Kaur, 2017: 142). The following verses vividly reflect the plights of Kaur's parents after their immigration from India to Canada and especially her mother's difficulties and sacrifices in order to hold on to life as a poor, immigrant and South Asian woman with four children:

broken english
"i think about the way my father
pulled the family out of poverty
without knowing what a vowel was
and my mother raised four children
without being able to construct
a perfect sentence in english
a discombobulated couple
who landed in the new world with hopes

that left the bitter taste of rejection in their mouths
no family
no friends
just man and wife
two university degrees that meant nothing
one mother tongue that was broken now
one swollen belly with a baby inside
a father worrying about jobs and rent
cause no matter what this baby was coming
and they thought to themselves for a split second
was it worth it to put all of our money
into the dream of a country
that is swallowing us whole

papa looks at his woman's eyes
and sees loneliness living where the iris was
wants to give her a home in a country that looks at her
with the word *visitor* wrapped around its tongue
on their wedding day
she left an entire village to be his wife
now she left an entire country to be a warrior
and when the winter came
they had nothing but the heat of their own bodies
to keep the coldness out

like two brackets they faced one another
to hold the dearest parts of them—their children—close
they turned a suitcase full of clothes into a life
and regular paychecks
to make sure the children of immigrants
wouldn't hate them for being the children of immigrants
they worked too hard
you can tell by their hands
their eyes are begging for sleep
but our mouths were begging to be fed
and that is the most artistic thing i have ever seen
it is poetry to these ears
that have never heard what passion sounds like
and my mouth is full of *likes* and *ums* when
i look at their masterpiece
cause there are no words in the english language
that can articulate that kind of beauty
i can't compact their existence into twenty-six letters and call
it a description
i tried once
but the adjectives needed to describe them
don't even exist
so instead i ended up with pages and pages
full of words followed by commas and
more words and more commas

only to realize there are some things
in the world so infinite
they could never use a full stop
so how dare you mock your mother
when she opens her mouth and
broken english spills out
don't be ashamed of the fact that
she split through countries to be here
so you wouldn't have to cross a shoreline
her accent is thick like honey
hold it with your life
it's the only thing she has left of home
don't you stomp on that richness
instead hang it up on the walls of museums
next to dali and van gogh
her life is brilliant and tragic
kiss the side of her tender cheek
she already knows what it feels like
to have an entire nation laugh when she speaks
she is more than our punctuation and language
we might be able to paint pictures and write stories
but she made an entire world for herself" (Kaur, 2017: 142-144)

As Kaur states, her mother whose voice had already been silenced by the Indian patriarchal culture came to face with more hardships and oppressions in the country whose language and culture she was completely stranger to. She sympathizes with her, stating: "leaving her country / was not easy for my mother / i still catch her searching for it / in foreign films and the international food aisle" (Kaur, 2017: 116). Despite the difficulties, her mother managed to raise her children in a country to which she did not feel any belonging. Her courageous actions and wisdom influenced Kaur greatly and made her change the silent and passive image of a woman whom Kaur used to see in her community. It can be stated that Kaur's revealing her mother's personal story as an immigrant woman and her redefinition of the femininity - which was once associated with weakness and passivity because of the societal construction - as strength, power and endeavor by paying homage to her mother's struggle directly serve to the aims of postcolonial feminists who "embraced individualism in women and diversity" by attempting to destabilize and deconstruct the dominant constructions of femininity in society (Evans, 2015: 22).

The status of women in India has been determined by the religious writings in the early time and now by means of the diverse discourses maintained by men. It is clear from the earliest records that "women are the extension of men" and they are described as pure,

beautiful, dutiful, obedient, silent and caring (Pandian, 2020: 121). Their main function in society is to give birth especially to a male child, therefore fertility is a crucial factor for defining women's identity. While the male child is glorified, female child is considered as "a burden to the family and the potential to bring disgrace" (Pandian, 2020: 121). Furthermore, in some parts of the country female children are killed as they are viewed as a curse to the family they are born. This issue of female infanticide is exemplified by Kaur through her poems titled in a chronological way as follows:

1790
"he takes the newborn girl from his wife
carries her to the neighboring room
cradles her head with his left hand
and gently snaps her neck with his right"

1890
"*a wet towel to wrap her in*
grains of rice and
sand in the nose
a mother shares the trick with her daughter-in-law
i had to do it she says
as did my mother
and her mother before her"

1990
"a newspaper article reads
a hundred baby girls were found buried
behind a doctor's house in a neighboring village
the wife wonders if that's where he took her
she imagines her daughter becoming the soil
fertilizing the roots that feed this country"

1998
"oceans away in a toronto basement
a doctor performs an illegal abortion
on an indian woman who already has a daughter
one is burden enough she says"

2006
"*it's easier than you think* my aunties tell my mother
they know a family
who've done it three times
they know a clinic. they could get mumma the number.
the doctor even prescribes pills that guarantee a boy.
they worked for the woman down the street they say
now she has three sons"

2012
"twelve hospitals in the toronto area
refuse to reveal a baby's gender to expecting families
until the thirtieth week of pregnancy
all twelve hospitals are located in areas with high south asian immigrant
populations"

- "*female infanticide | female feticide*" (Kaur, 2017: 137-138).

Pointing out the babies who were killed because of their gender before they were born or as soon as they were born throughout the centuries, Kaur emphasizes the deep-rooted misogyny still persisting in the patriarchal South Asian societies such as India, Pakistan or Afghanistan. Low status of women, gender bias against them and some cultural rituals such as the dowry system in India are some of the given reasons for female infanticide in male-dominated societies. To be more precise, poor families in rural regions of India kill their female children deliberately for fear of not being able to "raise a suitable dowry and then being socially ostracized" (Girija et al, 2016: 71). Although this cultural practice was made illegal with the Female Infanticide Prevention Act in 1870 in India, female children are still killed not only in India but also in different parts of the world, even in the 21st century revealing "a baby's gender to expecting families" can cause a deliberate killing since girls are considered nothing but a burden and boys are viewed as much more valuable in these societies (Kaur, 2017: 138). It can be said that through the above-mentioned lines Kaur confirms this situation by expressing the women's quest for having male children and the social pressure forced upon her mother to give birth to a boy by her relatives.

Kaur boldly tells the oppression that her mother and other women in her family or community were subjected to because of their gender, nation, language, class, religious or cultural belief in patriarchal and racist societies. By covering these issues in her poems she succeeds in being the strong voice of the third wave feminist movement. Moreover, she achieves to build a bridge between generations when she reflects on the current status of women in today's society and her own status as a South Asian woman in a Western country. She witnesses that the problems experienced by women all around the world have not changed much. Although they accomplished to gain many rights in social, economic or political spheres of life, women are still abused, objectified, silenced, marginalized and humiliated. Besides, their bodies are still intruded by the constructed ideas of patriarchal society. Drawing attention to the objectification and sexual exploitation of women by revealing her own trauma of sexual abuse and emphasising on

the marginalization of women and their consequent silencing, Kaur successfully challenges the deep-seated cultural constructions both on the minds and bodies of women and encourages them to break their silence through her uncensored speech and poetry in the digital platforms and in her live performances. It can be said that Kaur's bold digital feminist activism makes her one of the powerful voices of fourth wave feminism.

"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" (Kaur, 2015: 7)

Through these verses from the first chapter of Milk and Honey (the hurting) Kaur conveys the harsh reality about the general treatment of women in patriarchal societies based on her own maltreatment as a woman. When the speaker in the poem is questioned about the great kindness in her actions toward people, she states that it may result from the general unkindness she has been exposed to. Although the speaker has suffered from bad treatment for a long time, she chooses to fight it back with kindness. It is apparent that the speaker can survive when bitterness is prevalent; hence, it can be said that she is strong enough not to be shattered in the moments of cruelty. These verses can also be interpreted as the bold feminist voice of Kaur herself as she declares that as a woman, she has not been treated kindly because of her sex, race or gender like millions of women around the world who have been caused to suffer on account of this maltreatment in the patriarchal or racist societies. As regards to this issue, in an interview she explains how she spent half her time hating to be a woman and later how she realized that "it wasn't being a woman that [she] hated. It was being treated in a specific manner for being a woman that [she] disliked" (Spencer, 2017). Kaur boldly declares that women are treated in a way that make them hate their womanhood since they are always kept dominated and subordinate. As patriarchal systems give the right of complete control and priority to men "through institutions such as the academy, the church, and the family, each of which justifies and reinforces women's subordination to men" (Millett, 1977: 35), it is natural that women feel inferior and secondary with a growing hate of themselves.

After revealing the fact that in patriarchal societies women are treated in such a way that they start hating themselves and their bodies, Kaur elaborates this maltreatment by referring to the commodification of women and their sexual exploitation from early ages by accounting for her personal trauma of sexual abuse with these lines:

"the first boy that kissed me
held my shoulders down
like the handlebars of
the first bicycle he ever rode
i was five
he had the smell of
starvation on his lips
which he picked up from
his father feasting on his mother at 4 a.m.
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
and my god
did i feel as empty as his mother at 4:25 a.m" (Kaur, 2015: 8)

In the poem, the simile of the female's body to the "handlebars" of the bicycle evidently shows the nature of the objectification of women and the male control and domination over their bodies and lives. In the lines following, Kaur describes the feeling of hunger on the lips of the abuser. His feeling of "starvation" is triggered with the motivation of the objectification of the female body. In addition, she constantly refers to the mother of the abuser, revealing the fact that she has also experienced the same objectification and humiliation, therefore it is obvious that her abuser has acquired the habit of abusing women "from his father feasting on his mother at 4 a.m." through traditional transmission and social learning (Kaur, 2015: 8). As it is known since ancient times gender biases have existed in societal traditions and they have been adopted and maintained by people like an ideology. In this poem, Kaur harshly criticizes these deep-rooted traditions of the society which convey gender biases from generation to generation. Terms like "starvation" and "feasting" are crystal clear references to the ancient practices of men (Kaur, 2015: 8). Besides, Kaur's use of such words unveils the inferior and subordinate place of women in the eyes of the male counterparts who regard them as something to be fed on. Towards the end of the poem, Kaur states that it is the abuser who taught her the fact that "[her] body was for giving to those that wanted / that she should feel anything / less than whole" (Kaur, 2015: 8). Apparently, she is instructed to put her

body into the service of men who want to instill her to feel incomplete. With the abovementioned lines, Kaur makes it clear that women's knowledge about their own body is socially constructed in the patriarchal society by pointing out the fact that women gather knowledge about their womanhood and their body from other people and their surroundings that instruct them to feel deficient and incomplete, hence causing them to internalize themselves as inferior and defective creatures in society. It can be said that women's cultural construction and conditioning confirm the fact that "one is not born a woman, but, rather becomes one" always under cultural impositions (De Beauvoir, 1973: 301). In the final verse, the speaker once again considers the mother of the abuser and she compares her feelings of emptiness and incompleteness with her, stating "did I feel as empty / as his mother at 4.25 a.m." (Kaur, 2015: 8). Kaur implies that even the feeling of emptiness is transmitted from generation to generation through patriarchal traditions and teachings.

Childlike imagery combined with the themes of abuse is constantly used by Kaur. Through her drawings, she hammers the message that she aims to convey more successfully by adding the technique of shock which leaves greater impact on the readers. This shock is crucial since it allows others who have never been abused to comprehend what these women have been subjected to. The following poem can be a good example for this technique through which Kaur presents us a drawing of a naked and headless female's body and settles the verses in the vaginal space of her. By emphasizing the assertion in the previous lines, she openly reveals the constructed ideas on the bodies of women:

"You
have been
taught your legs
are a pit stop for men
that need a place to rest
a vacant body empty enough" (Kaur, 2015: 9)

Judith Butler argues that "whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (Butler, 1990: 6). Depending on this assertion about the cultural construction of gender and identities, as Kaur demonstrates, women are culturally instructed to see their bodies as a desirable place for men to have a rest for a short time. They are also made to believe that there will be no one to care and love their bodies

forever since they are worthless and their bodies can only serve as objects of pleasure. Therefore, the bodies of women are turned into "passive medium[s] on which cultural meanings are inscribed" (Butler, 1990: 8). In addition, women have been taught that their bodies do not belong to them but they are only the properties of men since birth, hence "those bodies are understood as passive recipients of an inexorable cultural law" (Butler, 1990: 8).

In the next poem, it is implied that the speaker is sexually abused in the domestic environment and she is asked to forget the unbearable pain of sexual abuse. She replies, telling "it is your blood / in my veins / tell me how I'm / supposed to forget" (Kaur, 2015: 10). In spite of her cry, she is doomed to be silent like millions of women who have been sexually exploited and then silenced. Moreover, with the successive verses: "the therapist places / the doll in front of you / it is the size of girls / your uncles like touching", Kaur refers to the harsh realities about the sexual exploitation of women especially in South Asian communities since early ages by the close relatives (Kaur, 2015: 11). Besides, she exposes how these victims of rape are forced to live with a lump in their throats, as shown in the following lines:

"how're you feeling
you pull the lump
in your throat out
with your teeth
and say *fine*
numb really" (Kaur, 2015: 11)

Through her lines Kaur actually aims to reveal the countless examples of gender based violence that women in her family and community are exposed to. These women are afraid to speak up as they believe that they will not get justice, in addition to this they will be humiliated by the members of their family and community for the rest of their lives. Therefore, they feel compelled to hold on to life numb with pain. In other words, they become strangers to their own silenced screams.

"You were so afraid
of my voice
i decided to be
afraid of it too" (Kaur, 2015: 14)

The speaker announces that her voice is regarded as something to be feared of, namely as a threat to the patriarchal order because if women break up their silence, male authority can be questioned and even devastated. She tells that she became afraid of her voice as well. She kept her silence rather than raising her voice when needed since she believes that being silent is an appropriate behaviour for women. The fear in the eyes of the woman whose mouth forcibly covered by a man's hand is also demonstrated by Kaur with her illustration. Moreover, through these lines, Kaur refers to the prevalent belief among women in male-dominated societies. According to this belief which dates back to biblical times, being silent was an appropriate behaviour for women, therefore they were all expected to be silent and obedient. This notion was culturally instructed as part of Christian tradition, depending on commands like the following one by Saint Paul: "A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 1 do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (1 Timothy 2: 11-12). It is obvious that religious doctrines and cultural beliefs played an important role in the construction of women's identities. It is also evident that while women's marginalization and consequent silencing isolated them from social, political and economic domains of life, male domination gained more power in patriarchal societies.

Sharing the abovementioned lines on her Instagram page, Kaur adds the following comment to empower women to break up their silence against oppressive ideologies:

"our voice is one of our greatest powers. but so many of us go through most of our lives without stepping into our voice. because somewhere along the journey of our life we were silenced. we were constantly told that we were wrong. not smart enough. ill-informed. that we lacked value. our voice was so shamed that this place of silence became our normal. our familiar place. and although now our circumstances may have changed. and we may not be around the people and situations that feared our voice. we still do. because we don't know any other place to be. and carving out a new place is hard. we remain quiet because we haven't given ourselves permission to burst open and let the world hear our song. so we have to speak up. be louder. we have to share our stories. even if it makes us uncomfortable. we have to pull each other up. create a new normal" (Kaur, 2019).

Similar to Laura Bates who disclosed the high prevalence of sexual abuse that women experienced throughout their lives across the world, and similar to Tarana Burke who empowered millions of women to reveal their experience of sexual harassment through Me Too movement, Rupi Kaur reveals and decries the frequency of sexual abuse faced by women in her South Asian community during their lifetime. Regarding this issue, she states that "we know sexual violence intimately. we experience alarming rates

of rape. from thousands of years of shame and oppression. from the community and from colonizer after colonizer" (Kaur, 2021). Throughout <u>Milk and Honey</u>, Kaur points out a common experience of South Asian women which is defined by abusive relatives and dread. She indicates her intention to speak for a bigger population and diaspora of South Asians rather than for herself alone. She is aware of the fact that this trauma has not only been experienced by the women of her time but also by several generations in the past. In reference to colonial violence, she argues that: "our trauma escapes the confines of our own times. we're not just healing from what has been inflicted on to us as children. my experiences have happened to my mother and her mother and her mother before that. it is generations of pain embedded into our souls" (Kaur, 2021). Through these statements Kaur highlights again the fact that women have been reliving traumas that have not changed for generations despite years of struggle for the rights of women. Recognizing the suffering and pain endured by women for generations, Kaur exposes the trauma of sexual abuse experienced by herself, other women in her family or community as well as their abusers with the following poem:

"our knees
pried open
by cousins
and uncles
and men
our bodies touched
by all the wrong people
that even in a bed full of safety
we are afraid" (Kaur, 2015: 33)

In one of her poems titled as "home" from the collection <u>The Sun and Her Flowers</u>, Kaur tackles the issue of gender based violence in more detail by speaking out her own experience of sexual assault by a trustworthy acquaintance and its traumatic influence on her life. The poem opens with Kaur's description of daily routines:

"it began as a typical thursday from what I recall
sunlight kissed my eyelids good morning
i remember it exactly climbing out of bed
making coffee to the sound of children playing outside
putting music on
loading the dishwasher
i remember placing flowers in a vase
in the middle of the kitchen table

only when my apartment was spotless
did i step into the bathtub
wash yesterday out of my hair
i decorated myself
like the walls of my home were decorated
with frames bookshelves photos
i hung a necklace around my neck
hooked earrings in
applied lipstick like paint
swept my hair back-just your typical thursday" (Kaur, 2017: 63)

Kaur repeats the phrase "typical thursday" throughout the poem in order to highlight the pervasiveness of sexual assault and how it may occur at any time and in any location. The following verses show that her attacker is a family acquaintance as stated in the line "i said yes because our dads worked at the same company / and you'd been to my place for dinner many times" (Kaur, 2017: 63). Kaur emphasizes the fact that she has been abused by the person whom she initially trusted. Furthermore, when the attacker began to abuse her, she says:

"all different parts of me
turned the lights off
shut the blinds
locked the doors
while i hid at the back of some upstairs closet of my mind as
someone broke the windows – you" (Kaur, 2017: 64)

As these verses indicate, Kaur creates a powerful metaphor between her own body and the actual construction of a house. She points out that invading someone's house is a breach of privacy by implying the fact that the body is the only consistent home that each human has. She directly addresses her violator by calling "you" which gives the readers a sense of witnessing a direct confrontation. Moreover, she describes in detail what her abuser has done to her by using food and eating metaphors. She becomes more outrageous at him and states:

"who dove into me with a fork and a knife
eyes glinting with starvation
like you hadn't eaten in weeks
i was a hundred and ten pounds of fresh meat
you skinned and gutted with your fingers" (Kaur, 2017: 64)

In the following stanzas, Kaur tells the traumatic influence of the sexual abuse on her body and soul. She is shocked and disappointed, so she grows a strong sense of anger at her attacker. Now, she struggles with both emotional and physical wounds left on her, conveying her feelings openly:

"when you broke into my home
it never felt like mine again
i can't even let a lover in without getting sick
i lose sleep after the first date
lose my appetite
become more bone and less skin
forget to breathe
every night my bedroom becomes a psych ward
where panic attacks turn men
into doctors to keep me calm
every lover who touches me—feels like you
their fingers—you
mouths—you
until they're not the ones
on top of me anymore—it's you" (Kaur, 2017: 65)

She states that she has lost her sense of belonging to her own body since her "home" was violated. This abuse and the previous ones she has been subjected to have lasting effects on her self-confidence and relationships with the other men and most importantly her perception of the world. Since her prior traumatic sexual encounters have haunted her love relationships, as she writes, she is terrified with any male touch on her body. Besides, the parts of her raped body still hurt deeply, as she says:

"i flinch when you touch me

i fear it is him" (Kaur, 2015: 41)

"parts of my body still ache

from the first time they were touched" (Kaur, 2017: 87)

The following lines also expose how Kaur stopped loving herself and started hating her own body, thinking that her body has caused the sexual harassment she has experienced. In addition, her verses clearly show how rape can inflict serious wounds on the soul of a woman and kill her while she is alive:

"somewhere along the way
i lost the self-love
and became my greatest enemy
i thought i'd seen the devil before
in the uncles who touched us as children
the mobs that burned our city to the ground
but i'd never seen someone as hungry
for my flesh as i was
i peeled my skin off just to feel awake
wore it inside out
sprinkled it with salt to punish myself
turmoil clotted my nerves
my blood curdled
i even tried to bury myself alive
but the dirt recoiled
you have already rotted it said
there is nothing left for me to do"

- "*self-hate"* (Kaur, 2017: 96)

In contrast to her mother and other women in her family and community who kept their silence in the case of sexual harassment, Kaur chooses to declare her abuser's crime through poetry rather than isolating herself from the social life as a victim, so she turns into an empowered survivor. It is a known fact that survivors of sexual abuse are frequently rejected and blamed for their trauma by the society. Thus, they are enforced to live in silence with the burden of the shame of their abusers. However, Kaur aims to challenge this societal construction by expressing the following verses:

"it is too heavy to carry out your guilt - i'm setting it down
i'm tired of decorating this place with your shame
as if it belongs to me
it is too much to walk around with
what your hands have done
if it is not my hands that have done it" (Kaur, 2017: 65)

It is obvious that Kaur presents how hard it is to live with the shame which does not belong to her and she talks openly and thoughtfully about her sexual trauma in an attempt to prevent people from blaming or shaming the victims cruelly. She also adds that she has achieved to regain her body and soul after a long time suffering and now she is decisive not to give them back, as she claims "this home is what i came into this world with / was the first home / will be the last home" (Kaur, 2017: 66). The final part of the

moving poem "home" shows that Kaur takes the plunge for her healing process by naming herself as a fighter:

"the truth comes to me suddenly—after years of rain
the truth comes like sunlight
pouring through an open window
it takes a long time to get here
but it all comes full circle
it takes a broken person to come searching
for meaning between my legs
it takes a complete. whole. perfectly designed
person to survive it
it takes monsters to steal souls
and fighters to reclaim them" (Kaur, 2017: 66)

Kaur has spoken everything -her bewilderment, rage, guilt, humiliation, and trauma- and has reached a place of self-forgiveness and acceptance. Gaining a sense of tranquillity, she emphasizes the fact that she has taken the control of her body back. She states that she will not be described by her experiences anymore since she has rebuilt her home and her life via self-healing. She has achieved to reclaim and heal her body by rewriting power and feminine identity into it. However, her traumatic experiences prevent her from having new relations with men since she is taught to spread her legs only for men who scared her and she also has learnt that sex is necessarily violent. Therefore, she does not know how "to accept a healthy love" (Kaur, 2017: 149):

"how do i welcome in kindness
when i have only practiced
spreading my legs for the terrifying
what am i to do with you
if my idea of love is violence
but you are sweet
if your concept of passion is eye contact
but mine is rage
how can i call this intimacy
if i crave sharp edges
but your edges aren't even edges
they are soft landings
how do i teach myself
to accept a healthy love
if all i've ever known is pain" (Kaur, 2017: 149)

Kaur's personal experiences as a victim and survivor of sexual harassment have caused her to develop negative ideas concerning sexuality. Besides, her past cultural learning, such as that men like to dominate women and that women are nothing but sex objects in their eyes, therefore they use women for entertainment, pose a challenge for her to have a healthy relationship. She realizes that she can reshape her internalization about masculinity when she meets gentle and understanding men whom she does not know how to love. Moreover, she notices that she needs to define love and sex all over again as well as improving her understanding of what it is to be a woman. In order to recover from her childhood traumas and redefine all the cultural constructions about being a woman, she starts loving herself because she believes that the way to love her lover is to love herself first, as she says:

"i'm learning
how to love him
by loving myself" (Kaur, 2015: 50)

Kaur states that she writes and shares her poetry via social media tools, because she believes that her detailed description of the patriarchal oppression and sexual harassment she experienced will not only become a driving force in breaking the silence of women who have been suffering from the same traumas, but her verses will be a hope for these women, exposing the possibility of healing and feeling powerful again. In this context, it could be said that Kaur's poems both raise women's awareness and give hope for their recovery since she states that it is necessary for her and all the other women to heal from the trauma of sexual exploitation and discrimination. According to her, this is the only way to create a real change. Through her digital feminist activism to represent the collective trauma of women in South Asian communities, Kaur has disclosed the buried pain of women who have been sexually abused and silenced by fear and shame; hence, she becomes the powerful voice of fourth wave feminist movement.

After taking the control of her body and reshaping her ideas about sexuality and love, Kaur reflects on her position as a woman in a male dominated society, as she says:

"trying to convince myself
i am allowed
to take up space
is like writing with
my left hand

when i was born
to use my right"

- *"the idea of shrinking is hereditary*" (Kaur, 2015: 26)

Kaur's questioning her status in patriarchal society as a woman reminds us the ongoing struggle of women and the high price they paid in order to gain a place in the world which is equal to men's since the early waves of feminism. Centuries ago, feminist philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft argued that women's position in society was not equal to that of males and their decision and voices were intentionally disregarded though they were as reasoning as men. It seems pathetic that in the 21st century, a woman still questions her place, being devoid of the sense of belonging to the society which she is a member of as a human being. Using a simile "to take up space is like writing with / my left hand", Kaur highlights all the women who strive to find a place for themselves and speak up in a culture which actively works to keep them silent (Kaur, 2015: 26). She also makes a comparison between being a member of patriarchal society and writing with the right hand by emphasizing the concept of determinism which suggests that the fates of women are predetermined by birth and they cannot have the power to change them. She argues that while looking for her place in society, she is feeling as if she is doing something against her nature because she has been instructed and culturally constructed as a woman who was born to be placeless and "is left in a state of placelessness or dereliction" as argued by Luce Irigaray (Schwab, 2020: 80). Kaur vividly demonstrates women's placelessness and disappearance in society through the below mentioned lines:

"emptying out of my mother's belly
was my first act of disappearance
learning to shrink for a family
who likes their daughters invisible
was the second
the art of being empty
is simple
believe them when they say
you are nothing
repeat it to yourself
like a wish
i am nothing
i am nothing
i am nothing
so often
the only reason you know
you're still alive is from the

heaving of your chest"

- *"the art of being empty*" (Kaur, 2015: 30)

With this poem, Kaur reveals that women's invalidation occurs as soon as they are born. Based on her own experience of trivialisation and marginalisation by birth, she points out that from the time women empty "out of [their] mother's belly", they have no worth in South Asian communities which shows their "first act of disappearance" (Kaur, 2015: 30). She asserts that when individuals convince them to believe the fact that they are not visible, women disappear once again, and this situation reinforces their sense of emptiness. Moreover, the repetition of the clause "I'm nothing" discloses the bitter process of conditioning that women are exposed to (Kaur, 2015: 30). By repeating this notion over and over again "like a wish", women strive to persuade themselves of the ideas instilled in their minds by society (Kaur, 2015: 30). They can only realize their existence "from the heaving of [their] chest" (Kaur, 2015: 30). When it is considered that there are still a great number of women who are pushed into nothingness and placelessness in many cultures today, these expressions become much more meaningful. These women try to survive by denying their own existence and identities as women. Although this situation is simply explained by Kaur with her plain language, this is not that easy for women to live in bodies which exist against their will but in accordance with social norms.

Revealing how patriarchal society renders women invisible and placeless through its cultural teachings, Kaur develops a revolutionary side with her multiple identity and opposes all these social and cultural teachings. In the successive poems, she challenges one by one the oppression of patriarchal society, cultural conditioning of women and the compelling beauty standards imposed on them through media tools and popular culture. Finally, she celebrates the natural beauty of women's bodies and their biological processes which are covered up and condemned by society.

"when my daughter is living in my belly
I will speak to her like
she's already changed the world
she will walk out of me on a red carpet
fully equipped with the knowledge
that she's capable of
anything she sets her mind to" (Kaur, 2017: 226)

With this poem, Kaur challenges all the cultural and social constructions which stereotype women, locating them in an inferior status in society by drawing an image of a mother who really desires to change these deep-seated notions by instilling her feminist ideas in her daughter's mind through recitations of a woman's capacity. Rather than telling her daughter that she will be born into a world in which women are discriminated because of their sex, race, class and other factors, the mother tells her that even her existence in her belly made a change in the world. Besides, the speaker is sure that her daughter will be informed enough to actualize herself since she will not let her be passivized and silenced by patriarchal doctrines of the society. The lines "she has already changed the world.....that she is capable of anything she sets her mind to" are in accordance with Butler's gender theory which states that gender is a social construct that is shaped by specific repetitive activities and recitations rather than biological differences (Kaur, 2017: 226; Butler, 1990: 33). This poem successfully demonstrates how gender discrimination is not a matter of physical constitution but rather of the mind. It is also clearly indicated that women have the potential to do many things as long as they are determined to do so.

"my issue with what they consider beautiful
is their concept of beauty
centers around excluding people
i find hair beautiful
when a woman wears it
like a garden on her skin
that is the definition of beauty
big hooked noses
pointing upward to sky
like they're rising
to the occasion
skin the color of earth
my ancestors planted crops on
to feed a lineage of women with
thighs thick as tree trunks
eyes like almonds
deeply hooded with conviction
the rivers of Punjab
flow through my bloodstream so
don't tell me my women
aren't as beautiful
as the ones in
your country" (Kaur, 2015: 163)

Patriarchal Western standards of beauty and possession which focuses on "excluding people" are defied by Kaur (Kaur, 2015: 163). Her resistance is expressed both lyrically and visually by means of her illustrations which provide further explanation in her collections. In this poem, Kaur refers to the marginalization of women who do not comply with the mainstream beauty standards which were constructed by whitewashed patriarchal society and spread through popular culture and media. It can be said that Western beauty advertisements have a key influence in defining women's attitude towards their bodies in our global industry by presenting an unachievable beauty that does not allow for cultural and individual variations. On a global scale, Western beauty standards compel women to be thin, fair skinned, hairless and look physically young and attractive. Feeling this pressure on them, women strive for the standardized beauty ideals and this situation makes them disregard enormous diversity of beauty. However, "beauty is not universal or changeless" (Wolf, 2002: 12). Through her poem, Kaur emphasizes that various forms of beauty can exist in a woman's body despite the fact that they do not conform to beauty standards defined by society. She also implies that whiteness is not synonymous with beauty just as blackness is not synonymous with ugliness. She pridefully describes the skin colour of women in her community as "the color of earth [her] ancestors planted crops on / to feed a lineage of women" (Kaur, 2015: 163). She also uses concrete images like "big hooked noses", "thighs thick as tree trunks" to describe different types of beauty South Asian women could have by challenging the stereotypical norms which exclude women who do not meet Western ideals of beauty (Kaur, 2015: 163). Kaur tells these women that they are still beautiful even if they do not look like the women who are praised by society for their physical appearances. She points out that women of her community are oppressed because of many factors such as their gender, race, ethnicity, physical appearance and more. By revealing multiple forms of oppression experienced at an intersection by these women she highlights "the theory of intersectionality" which is the defining feature of fourth wave feminism (Cochrane, 2013: 56). Kaur also believes that Indian women have a lot to "learn and unlearn", and she adds "maybe unlearn the idea that they are not beautiful enough, that their skin colour is not good enough or their bodies aren't nice enough", thus they can be uplifted to a status where their beauty is also recognized and appreciated (Magan, 2018). Moreover, in the poem she confesses the beauty of hair on women's skin by likening it to "a garden" (Kaur, 2015: 163). Via this comparison, she obviously celebrates her femininity and deconstructs beauty standards imposed on women by society. Besides, in another poem she illustrates

the body hair as the flowers and leaves sprouting on the body of a woman, accompanying with these subversive lines:

"the next time he
points out the
hair on your legs is
growing back remind
that boy your body
is not his home
he is a guest
warn him to
never outstep
his welcome
again" (Kaur, 2015: 158)

Kaur presents the metaphor of home again in this poem. Associating her body with an actual home, she challenges socially constructed beliefs about body hair being unattractive and needing to be removed. It is pointed out in her verses that it is women who have exclusive authority over their bodies and their choices, not men. Their bodies may welcome guests, but these guests will never be able to call this place home since women's bodies and perceptions are not theirs to possess. With the final lines of the poem, Kaur argues that patriarchal mentality that interferes with women's biology must be prevented in order to preserve the autonomy of women's bodies.

In her next poem, she emphasizes again the fact that women's bodies only belong to themselves, therefore they are the only ones who decide whether to remove the hair on their bodies or not with their free will rather than conforming to the beauty norms imposed by society via the following verses:

"removing all the hair
off your body is okay
if that's what you want to do
just as much as keeping all the hair
on your body is okay
if that's what you want to do"

- *"you belong only to yourself"* (Kaur, 2015: 170)

Through the images and adverts in popular culture, women are pushed to think that their value is mainly determined by their physical beauty. Because advertisers have enormous control over media content, women from a very early age are taught to believe

that their bodies should also fit into the norms of Western beauty. If they achieve to enhance their physical appearance, as they believe, the quality of their lives will naturally improve. However, reaching these ideals is getting more and more severe as the criteria for attaining such ideals has become increasingly difficult. Media tools and products of popular culture especially films, series, magazines or social media posts mostly present thinner women with perfectly smooth skin and women who achieve to look young and attractive despite growing older. Besides, the advancements in modern imaging technologies offer the opportunity to reflect the women in commercials or magazines much more beautiful and attractive than they really are. As a result, many women who cannot meet these ideals of beauty start hating their physical appearance and regard their bodies as sources of pain, so they turn to beauty industry which offers a series of solutions to fix their so called imperfections by means of cosmetic products or operations. In the below-mentioned poem, Kaur vividly reflects the relentless pressure on her as a woman and her desperate quest to achieve Western beauty standards:

"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*" (Kaur, 2017: 78)

It could be inferred from these verses that Kaur exposes how the constructed beauty ideals drag women away from their bodies on a never ending quest to attain standard beauty stereotypes imposed by society and pop culture. She also points out that

these women live their bodies as objects of pleasure for the patriarchal others by poisoning their freedom. However, as she says:

"we are all born
so beautiful
the greatest tragedy is
being convinced we are not" (Kaur, 2015: 177)

Obviously Kaur argues that all women are appealing by birth but they are persuaded to the contrary because the modern economy is currently dependent on "the representation of women within the beauty myth" (Wolf, 2002: 18). "if [women] believed [they] were beautiful enough already, a trillion-dollar industry would collapse" (Kaur, 2017: 213). Through her lines Kaur reveals how global beauty market makes profit by fostering insecurities in women about their bodies and how manipulative the concept of beauty is. The illustration of women's body parts on the mass production line accompanied with the abovementioned lines is an obvious criticism of the increasing number of women having plastic surgery to reach the ideal body shape and size. Kaur's drawing actually refers to the fact that most women have become very similar to each other day by day with their thin bodies, silicone breasts, full lips, contoured eyebrows, botox injected faces and steep hips. Thus, in their pursuit of Western ideals of beauty, they seem to be products made in the same factory, eliminating differences in the human body and the sense of beauty.

It is also argued that the societal construction of the women's bodies as requiring cosmetic surgery is especially troublesome when contemplating the sorts of female bodies declared "in need of change", but women with "too-long Jewish noses, too flat African-American noses, Oriental eyelids, and, of course, any indication of aging" are at the top of the list of those who need cosmetic surgery (Darling and Wolf, 2009: 254). Namely, it is stated that any features that steer women away from the socially constructed ideals of beauty need to be changed since women who are "not white enough, not young enough, not middle-class enough, not thin enough, not abled enough" labelled as deviants (Darling and Wolf, 2009: 254). What is more tragic is the fact that more women are being defined as pathological in Western culture due to the large number of women having cosmetic surgery, causing the standards of normality to become stricter. As can be seen, women are losing what they have by birth while trying to pursue the ideals set for them and Kaur opposes these societal constructs on women's bodies, inviting them to "accept

[themselves] / as they were designed" (Kaur, 2015: 166). She tells them to be aware of the beauties in their bodies, stating:

"your body
is a museum
of natural disasters
can you grasp how
stunning that is" (Kaur, 2015: 167)

Inviting women to accept their own natural beauty by stopping their relentless struggle with their bodies, Kaur highlights the importance of self-acceptance and love, a significant issue emphasized by fourth wave feminists in the process of women's empowerment. She utilizes her own confidence and self-esteem to motivate and educate girls and women who are still in the early phases of identity development. As American model Tess Holliday asserted, women do not need to fit into a specific size to be happy with their bodies (www.huffingtonpost.com). However, they are not aware of this fact since they are surrounded by the messages and beliefs imposed on them through the media and advertising. They accept and internalize the ideas and customs without questioning their validity, hence they start a war with their bodies in order to put them into the ideal shape determined by the society. Women must love and accept each of their physical characteristic non-judgementally, as she states it is necessary for them to "notice everything [they] do not have / and decide it is beautiful" because it will not be possible for them to be accepted by the world unless they accept themselves first (Kaur, 2017: 54). Kaur expresses the crisis she experienced while judging her body harshly as follows:

"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
which way back to the womb" (Kaur, 2017: 82)

As these verses suggest, female competition produces so much pressure and stress on women that they lose the joy of life, wishing to turn "back to the womb" (Kaur, 2017: 82). Based upon her own experience and observation of women in her community, Kaur actually refers to all the women who feel the pressure of beauty due to overt and covert messages and thus begin comparing their physical appearance with other women who comply with the society's beauty standards. It can be indisputably said that female competition is largely driven by societal mechanisms rather than biological imperatives. Women, being born and grown up in a male dominated society, acquire and accept the masculine viewpoint as their own. The masculine perception of women as essentially sexual objects grows into a self-fulfilling prophecy. As women begin to see being coveted by men as their ultimate source of power, value, success and identity, they feel obliged to compete with other women for the prize. Kaur reflects the women's cruel treatment to their bodies in the process of emulating other women as follows:

"*why are you so unkind to me*
my body cries

cause you don't look like them
i tell her" (Kaur, 2017: 57)

Since women regard other females as their competitors, they fail to realize the fact that the real threat to their body, identity, value and achievement is not posed by other women, instead by the male establishment which has complete control over not only their bodies but also their whole lives. Kaur aims to make women who are already oppressed because of their sex, race or class in the patriarchal society realize that they are subjecting themselves to more pressure by trying to comply with the beauty standards as well as involving in a battle with other women. Therefore, she especially aims to annihilate the competition between women by raising their awareness concerning this issue via these lines: "other women's bodies / are not our battlegrounds" (Kaur, 2015: 169). It can be stated that women simply make their situation in society worse by both criticizing the appearance of other women and seeing them as their competitors rather than as their sisters. As the American feminist journalist and activist Gloria Steinem says, when "[women] stop being comparatives. They begin to be unique" (Steinem, 1982: 29). Kaur also emphasizes the significance of solidarity and sisterhood between women in their fight for gender equality, stating:

"we all move forward when
we recognize how resilient
and striking the women
around us are" (Kaur, 2015: 185)

"my heart aches for sisters more than anything
it aches for women helping women
like flowers ache for spring" (Kaur, 2015: 181)

Kaur's emphasis on female community is crucial to frame Milk and Honey as a feminist manifesto. She repeatedly points out the necessity for women to unite in order to avoid the harmful competition fostered by patriarchy and draws attention to the women who "foam at the mouth with envy / when others succeed" (Kaur, 2015: 195). She tries to make women who view other females as foes recognize that they are engaging in the types of schadenfreude ingrained by sexism and capitalism. She also promotes sisterhood and solidarity among women of all colour and ethnic background to fight against oppressive cultural norms and gender discrimination, expressing her desire as "nurture and serve the sisterhood / to raise those that need raising" (Kaur, 2015: 178). Kaur, embracing the ideas of third wave feminist thinkers, frames the female bodies as energetic, fertile and divine by subverting rigid and oppressive categories for feminine identity and she gives voice to these traits in order to strengthen the women to whom they belong. Besides, her writing gives value to the various experiences of women that have been labelled as other, thus undermining the view of universal experience of womanhood asserted by second wave feminists. Namely, through Instagram, Kaur "creates alternative, spatialized narratives" of women who have "traditionally been relegated" to the margins (Kruger, 2017: 17). As a result, it could be said that women like her may establish a community apart from patriarchal authority and sexism with discourses of care centred on femininity and women's progress.

Kaur creates a space of and a room for identity in the digital context through language, and claims the right to inhabit that place when it is challenged. Her poetry expresses the body and reassigns it into a welcoming, safe and valuable environment. Though the process of inhabiting a place in the digital world is made harder by the restrictions and censoring techniques of social networking platforms, "Kaur's art practice of the written body is an alternate form of self-representation" (Hagerman, 2019: 115). By focusing on the marginalized status of women in society, her poetry as an expression of digital feminism challenges the patriarchal norms and societal pressures which attempt to eliminate for instance a menstruating female body. In women's representation, censorship is a continuing concern which is also depicted in the following poem:

"apparently it is ungraceful of me
to mention my period in public
cause the actual biology
of my body is too real
it is okay to sell what's
between a woman's legs
more than it is okay to
mention its inner workings
the recreational use of
this body is seen as
beautiful while
its nature is
seen as ugly" (Kaur, 2015: 171)

Social taboos associated with female biology, especially menstrual cycle, are handled in these lines. As it is known, menstruation is a female specific phenomenon. However, there have always been taboos and beliefs surrounding this occurrence in many societies, and because of these taboos, lots of women and girls are restricted from several parts of socio-cultural life. Besides, in some societies menstruating women are not allowed to access in some parts of the home and holy places. They are also prohibited from praying or handling sacred texts. The underlying basis for these restrictions is the cultural notions of impurity regarding menstruation. That is to say, menstruating women are culturally and religiously regarded as impure. Moreover, menstruation is commonly associated with bad spirits, humiliation and embarrassment due to cultural and religious taboos, which lead women to associate their bodies with curse and impurity, thus distancing themselves away from their own nature as well as distorting their biological perceptions. Kaur draws attention to female censoring by denouncing the menstrual shame on her facebook account with her piece named as "period":

"i bleed each month to help make humankind a possibility. my womb is home to the divine. a source of life for our species. whether i choose to create or not. but very few times it is seen that way. in older civilizations this blood was considered holy. in some it still is. but a majority of people. societies. and communities shun this natural process. some are more comfortable with the pornification of women. the sexualization of women. the violence and degradation of women than this. they cannot be bothered to express their disgust about all that. but will be angered and bothered by this. we menstruate and they see it as dirty. attention seeking. sick. a burden. as if this process is less natural than breathing. as if it is not a bridge between this universe and the last. as if this process is not love. labour. life. selfless and strikingly beautiful" (Kaur, 2015).

Kaur boldly objects to the myths shaped by the society about women's biology and she harshly criticizes the patriarchal order which approves "to sell what's between a woman's legs" for entertainment purposes but disapproves to talk about "its inner workings" publicly (Kaur, 2015: 171). Menstrual blood disgust, she says, is connected to disparagement and dehumanization of women's bodies, both of which are the manifestations of patriarchal misogyny in society. Seeing the menstruation as "a bridge between this universe and the last", Kaur adds a spiritual touch, implying that patriarchal dictates have no authority over what she considers to be divinely inscribed (Kaur, 2015: 171). Through her lines in the abovementioned poem, she condemns the harsh reality that when the female body is used for recreation it is viewed as beautiful, yet its menstruation cycle which is necessary for reproduction is considered impure, therefore it is surrounded by social taboos. It can be said that Kaur's verses and the illustration of a vagina embellished with flowers, associating femininity with nature, aim to subvert what has been falsely imposed on women about their own nature to make them feel shameful and defective. Her objective is to liberate women from the societal constraints that limit their access to information and self-created identity. Besides, her lines function as a means for her to reclaim her body and express the power of her feminine identity. Finally, Kaur also intends to raise consciousness against these oppressive ideologies especially among young girls as they grow up having limited understanding about menstruation due to their moms and other women's avoidance from discussing the issues concerning their biology and she openly urges women not to be ashamed of their menstruation.

All in all, finding her voice in the 21st century popular culture through social media tools, Rupi Kaur has managed to be the rising voice of all women who have been subjugated, violated, culturally constructed and silenced for generations. By doing this, she has exposed not only the oppressive and abusive treatment experienced by the women of her community especially by her mother but also she has revealed her personal sufferings from this treatment and the traumatic influence of it on her body and soul. Adopting the notions of third wave feminism, she has successfully reflected the multiple oppression of women in patriarchal and racist societies as well as her own existential anxiety as a Punjabi Canadian woman in a Western country. Besides, Kaur manages to awaken all the women to patriarchal traditions and teachings which are constructed both on the bodies and minds of them through her digital feminist activism. After she has proven the healing power of expressing, she encourages and invites women to break up their silence in order to challenge this oppressive system and fight for gender equality by

forming a global sisterhood. Finally, it could be said that Kaur's poetry not only functions as a consciousness raising tool but also gives hope for the recovery and rebirth of women afflicted with the trauma of sexual exploitation and gender-based violence.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, a group of poems from the best-selling poetry and prose collections of Rupi Kaur's <u>Milk and Honey</u> and <u>The Sun and Her Flowers</u> are analysed in detail with the purpose of discussing how the Punjabi Canadian poet Rupi Kaur has become the powerful voice of both third and fourth waves of feminism by building an empire on the online platforms through her digital feminist activism. Her poetry is also studied within the framework of popular culture since Kaur has gained success and popularity through her insta-poems that are regarded as the significant cultural products of popular culture.

"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"

- "*legacy"* (Kaur, 2017: 202)

As stated in these verses, Kaur appreciates the successes and gains obtained in favour of women thanks to the struggle for women's rights which has been proceeding for centuries. Paying homage to the sacrifices of her foremothers, she aims to support and contribute to this struggle through her subversive poetry. In accordance with this purpose, similar to third wave feminist activists, she draws attention to the fact that women are oppressed, silenced and marginalised not only because of their gender but also because of their race, class, ethnic background, sexual tendency or other identity factors. Besides, through her poems related to the patriarchal treatment of her mother and other women in her family or community that she witnessed and experienced as a young girl, Kaur reveals how the lives and bodies of these women are controlled, censored and stereotyped, and how their voice is silenced by patriarchal authority. When she reflects both her mother's and the other South Asian women's multiple layers of oppression and their marginalized voices, she has accomplished to make all these women and others - who are oppressed due to different identity variants and dismissed as trivial - become visible. Moreover, their once marginalized voices are now audible thanks to the power of new media tools which are effectively used by Kaur for feminist purposes. All these reflections about her mother and other marginalised women in her community or anywhere in the world and her

challenge against the cultural construction of femininity obviously makes Kaur the powerful voice of third wave of feminism and postcolonial feminism as part of it.

As a woman Kaur herself, as she states, has been exposed to patriarchal oppression, discrimination and marginalisation due to her gender, race, ethnic or religious background just in the same way as millions of women in the world. However, she achieves to raise her voice against this maltreatment rather than keeping her silence and submission as many women feel compelled to do. Through her poetry which reveals the trauma of sexual harassment and rape experienced by herself and the other women in South Asian communities, Kaur has successfully empowered all the women around the world who have been sexually abused and silenced to disclose their abusers in order to be freed from the burden of the shame. Besides, she encourages them to unite in order to end this sexual violence suffered by women for generations. She believes that it is highly important to heal the women whose bodies are inflicted with the physical and emotional wounds caused by their sexual traumas; therefore, she aims not only to heal herself but also all the women suffering from the same problem through the healing power of expressing. Moreover, throughout her lines Kaur conveys in detail how patriarchy causes women to hate their own bodies by objectifying, abusing and commoditising them and how women acquire the knowledge about their own bodies by means of patriarchal and cultural teachings of the society which always instruct them the feeling of incompleteness, defectiveness and inferiority. In this respect, she draws attention to the fact that cultural constructions dictated to women's bodies and sexuality not only distance them from their bodies, but also distort their perception about themselves. Thus, women are prevented from developing autonomous identities as they are socially and culturally instructed to be in accordance with patriarchal norms.

While asserting her autonomous female identity through writing, Kaur also creates an awareness about the limitations imposed upon women of all nations and classes in today's world by repeatedly implying cultural construction of gender and gender discrimination through patriarchal ideology. Using the internet and social media as a consciousness raising tool, Kaur has challenged all these cultural and patriarchal assumptions which stereotype, oppress, exclude or silence women through her modest but provocative poems. In addition, she defies and deconstructs the patriarchal Western standards of beauty and possession imposed on women by the popular culture and media through the poems celebrating her femininity and the natural characteristics of the female body. Encouraging women to accept and love their bodies as they are, Kaur asks them to

stop trying to comply with the society's beauty norms. In conclusion, Rupi Kaur, finding a voice within popular culture through her digital feminist activism, has challenged patriarchy, misogyny and social taboos relating female biology, and accomplished to foster women's empowerment and gender equality by building a bridge between 20th and 21st century feminisms by means of her instapoetry.

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