

Rupi Kaur, giving the voice back to the voiceless

By Priya Kudhail



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‘I want to leave behind a literary legacy that will show readers how powerful they are. How they are the revolution they've been waiting for.’

– Kaur

In a world where 54% of domestic abuse cases go unreported along with the 4.5 million females who have been domestically abused since the age of 16, it is no wonder that Rupi Kaur's collection 'Milk and Honey' made such a massive impact not only in the literary world, but also with the wider public. Her collection reached and held its place on the New York Times bestsellers list for 78 consecutive weeks, as well as racking up sales of a staggering £10.5m, reaching people all over the globe. This success was not mere luck, but down to her strong poetry that tackles typically 'taboo' subjects such as rape, abuse, love and pain; each topic is tackled head on with no restraint, something that is quite refreshing in a world that hides behind literary technique and ambiguity.

‘I don't want someone to read my poetry and think: what does that mean? So every time I'm writing, I'm thinking: OK, what word can I take out? How do I make this more direct? What's too technical?’ – Kaur

Kaur's stance on domestic abuse and rape is clear from her forward, “my thoughts go to the sexual violence we endure as south asian women”, the way that she phrases her opinions are compassionate yet strong and understanding; no wonder it resonated with so many women going through their own hardships.



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‘The hurting’ is one of the more impactful chapters of the collection it deals with so much raw pain and grief. Kaur is unapologetic in how she crafts each poem for a different purpose, but despite the difference in purpose they all share the same end goal of shining light where light has never been shone before.

Her constant use of childlike imagery mixed with themes of abuse have a greater effect on the reader, hammering the message that she is trying to share more effectively with the added technique of shock.

‘the first boy that kissed me
held my shoulders down
like the handle bars of the first
bicycle
he ever rode
i was five’

- milk and honey, p.4

This shock is paramount to this collection as it makes those who have not been subjected to abuse understand what these women and men go through. Showing that the abuse is not always obvious and often hides in the mundane things of life, she also shows that it can stem from an early time in a person’s life and be confused for affection.

‘you teach her to confuse
anger with kindness’
- to fathers with daughters
- milk and honey, p.11

This blurred line between affection and abuse is done in a way to express how victims feel as well as how they find it

difficult to distinguish one from the other. It is easy to comment from the outside, so Kaur gives us a different point of view she allows us to see and hear the thoughts of the victims so that we can then have a greater understanding. This opening of eyes gives victims of domestic abuse an area to be more understood rather than ridiculed, pave the way to a society where all domestic abuse is reported and treated with the care and compassion that is needed.

‘trying to convince myself

I am allowed to take up space’

- the idea of shrinking is

hereditary

- milk and honey, p.21

Kaur breaks up these long periods of suffering with short interjections of strength, which I feel accurately represent a human experience. If you are suffering it is not just a linear cycle, there are times when you can build the courage to be strong but a lot of the time you are in pain, its these small windows of strength that we hold on to. It gives us hope as to what the future could look like. People suffering with abuse may find these windows rare but no matter how small they are, they are still there.

‘the rape will

tear you
in half
but it
will not *end you*
- milk and honey, p.18

Rupi Kaur has a magical way of expressing life in a way that it is not normally expressed, she gave a voice to those who are usually ignored and liberated the voices of women around the globe. In an interview with ShelfAwareness Kaur shares how her audience would,

“reach out, send letters, post comments about how the poetry allowed them to feel proud to be women. How they had experienced such pains but for the first time since, they wanted to own their womanhood rather than be ashamed of it.”

Proving her presence in the literary world is needed and long awaited. Her voice is a reminder that there are people suffering; and the ones that suffer most, do so in silence.



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