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## Rupi Kaur's *milk and honey* (2015) & Panna Naik's *The Astrologer's Sparrow* (2018) – Diasporic Proclamation of Woman's Heart

Darsha Jani

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### Abstract:

Rupi Kaur (b. 1992), a contemporary young Canadian poetess has become extremely popular by her Instagram posts and publication of her collection of poems entitled *milk and honey* in 2015 and *the sun and her flowers* in 2017. As a diasporic writer, her poems are based on “her desire to express” herself. According to Rupi Kaur, “*milk and honey* is a collection of poetry about survival... it is about the experience of violence, abuse, love, loss and femininity.” Panna Naik (b. 1933), the most distinguished postmodern & post-colonial Gujarati diasporic writer residing in US, has to her credit several volumes of unconventional poetry voicing the subtle feminine emotions. Her distinct voice proclaiming the essence of womanhood and imparting dignity to women makes her poems fascinating and close to women's hearts. The present paper focusses on the diasporic experiences revealed in the poetic collections of Rupi Kaur's *milk and honey* (2015) and Panna Naik's *The Astrologer's Sparrow* (2018) The paper reveals their courageous stance as poets in fathoming the unfathomed and imparting a bold voice to the inner desires of woman.

### Key Words:

Diasporic, femininity, transnational, self-love, hurting, loving, breaking & healing.

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Diaspora could be described as a movement of people from one country, region or continent for economic, political, social and cultural reasons resulting in the societies of countries turning multicultural, multi-ethnic, multi-racial and pluralistic. In the anthology *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, Braziel, Jana Evans and Anita Mannur describe diaspora as “communities dislocated or displaced from their native homelands.” Homi Bhabha, a Post-colonial theorist refer to the process of diaspora as “unhoming” and this state of being (in the diasporic subjectivity) as “unhomeliness” which means that diasporic identity experiences unhomeliness in a multitude of ways. Gayatri Gopinath, a Queer theorist enumerates how “discourses of female sexuality are central to the mutual constitution of diaspora and nation.” The transnational feminist theorist Chandra Talpade Mohanty opines that “women are not only mobilized in the ‘service’ of the nation, but they become the ground on which discourses of morality and nationalism are written.”

### Rupi Kaur – Bold Voice of Canadian Diaspora

Rupi Kaur, 25-year-old Canadian poetess, artist and performer has become one of the most popular Insta poets in the present times. She is a Punjabi Sikh woman who has boldly opened her heart out in her poems and illustrations. She is a liberal feminist writer who raises her voice against the domination by men folk. Rupi talks at length about her experiences of her journey as an immigrant into the mainstream world of Canada from her birthplace India. With the publication of her first collection *milk and honey* in 2014 which has been translated into 40 languages and has sold 3.5 million copies, the book has hit the *New York Times* best-seller list in 2016. Rupi started her career by posting her work to Tumblr in 2012 and then gradually switched to Instagram. Rupi has now more than 3 million Instagram followers. While talking about her writing, Rupi Kaur says, “I would have been a designer if I was not a poet.” Rupi holds a degree in Professional Writing, Rhetoric Studies and Business. She uses social media to share her work and build a strong community of

followers. Regarding her inspiration in writing poetry, Rupi says that she was getting suffocated due to a lot of silence and restrictions at home regarding certain things. She asserts that "Since I was feeling these things so strongly, I was heavily motivated to express them. And when I expressed them, I realized that the feelings were universal." Her poems are based on love, loss, heart break, womanhood and femininity. The book *milk and honey* is highly appreciated for its distinctive grace and uniqueness. Though the poems are diversified as regards subject matter, yet they share common themes of femininity.

### **Rupi's *milk and honey* – A Vehement Voice of New Generation**

*milk and honey* is a collection of short poems divided into four sections: "the hurting", "the loving", "the breaking" and "the healing." Each page constitutes a single poem, although there are few poems that are spread over two pages. Rupi Kaur has made use of lower case in the title *milk and honey* and its poems to emphasize the simplicity and informality of her poetry. By imparting same level of importance to all the letters, Rupi takes the power away from certain words that could distract others. This allows the readers to search meaning in every word of her poems rather than the emphasized corners of the poems. Many of her poems contain ink doodles that accompany the poetry. The purpose of visual symbols is to add depth through juxtaposition. Each section of the collection focusses on a different aspect of the speaker's journey about love, abuse, femininity and self-discovery.

Part I, "the hurting" largely focusses on the speaker's experience of being emotionally traumatized and abused. The tone of the poems suggest that the speaker is female, and she was sexually abused at a young age by males in her family and that she comes from a history in which women are generally mistreated. Her poems are full of examples which talk about a woman being treated as a machine –

*"the first boy that kissed me  
held my shoulders down  
like the handlebars of the first bicycle  
he ever rode  
i was five"* (Kaur, *The hurting* 2015, p 12)

The speaker further talks about her confusion and pain that comes along her role as a woman and a daughter in a patriarchal world. The speaker has a complicated relationship with her mother as she follows conservative, traditional cultural norms regarding gender relations. She is bewildered as she states, "*I can't tell if my mother is/ terrified or in love with/ my father/ it all/ looks the same.*" Regarding the obscure relationship between her mother and father, she remarks –

*"when my mother opens her mouth to  
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* (p 36)

The speaker describes the exploitation by the males – her own uncle, cousins and all other 'wrong men' in the initial stage of her life, yet she is taught by her alcoholic father to remain quiet. She poignantly reveals her own experience – when "*our knees/ pried open/ by cousins/ and uncles/ and men/ our bodies touched/ by all the wrong people/ that even in the bed full of safety/ we are afraid.*" (p 36) The speaker's longing for love and then rejection from her male counterpart is evident in the following lines –

*“she was a rose  
in the hands of those  
who had no intention  
of keeping her.” (p 18)*

A profound misogyny is evident in the poems as when woman expects love, it is returned with hate. She expresses her agony as she writes– *“I flinch when you touch me/ I fear it is him.”* The love she gets from male gender is akin to incest or rape which is heart breaking. The speaker cries out –

*“you  
have been  
taught your legs  
are a pit stop for men  
that need a place to rest  
a vacant body empty enough  
for guest but no one  
ever comes and is  
willing to  
stay.” (p 13)*

The speaker affirms that the voice of a girl child is stifled since her childhood and she is taught to accept the ways of the patriarchal world. She writes –

*“You were so afraid  
of my voice  
I decided to be  
afraid of it too... “(p 17)*

A girl child is mentally and culturally chained by the patriarchal society that crushes her very soul. She expresses her agony –

*“You pinned my legs to the ground  
With your feet and demanded  
I stand up.” (p 25)*

The speaker asserts that a woman is compelled to learn the lesson of “the art of being empty” in a male dominated world. She shares her experience when a child –

*“emptying out of my mother’s belly  
Was my first act of disappearance  
.....  
Believe them when they say  
You are nothing  
Repeat it to yourself  
I am nothing  
I am nothing  
I am nothing.” (p 33)*

Rupi Kaur wishes to depict the quintessential South Asian female experience through her poems and strives to reach a larger mainstream audience. She does not want her stories of her friends and family remain untold. She has faced lot many abuses from various seemingly trustworthy males in her life. Though every woman may not have undergone sexual or physical abuse, yet most of them have faced oppression and dehumanization in one way or another. By giving voice through unnamed speaker, Kaur intends to humanize victims of oppression, abuse, violence, molestation, objectification and debasement. Kaur says, “I began writing pieces about violence at the age of 16

after seeing what the women around me were enduring and facing... It was my way of reflecting on all of these issues.” (excerpt from interview by Shannon Carlin)

In the Part II, “The Loving” the speaker celebrates her happiness derived out of her relationship with a loving and sensitive male partner. She is so much fascinated by her male counterpart that she poignantly remarks “*I struggle so deeply/ to understand/ how someone can/ pour their entire soul/ blood and energy/ into someone/ without wanting/ anything in/ return.*” (p 46) She admits “*...you make my/ tongue so weak it forgets/ what language to speak in.*” (p 61) In her aura of love, she wonders, “*how do you turn/ a forest fire like me/ so soft I turn into/ running water.*” (p 65) She experiences the fullness of new love. She boldly affirms –

*“I do not want to have you  
To fill the empty parts of me  
I want to be full on my own  
I want to be so complete  
I could light a whole city  
And then  
I want to have you  
Cause the two of us  
Combined could set it on fire.”* (Kaur “The Loving” p 59)

The third part of the collection *milk and honey* “the breaking” incorporates the experiences of agony, grief and complexities of a deteriorating relationship. The speaker asks, “*how can I write/ if he took my hands/with him*” (121) The focus is on the consequences and mindset of the speaker after the relationship comes to an end. The attitude of the speaker is ambivalent, in that there is a mixture of both loss and longing. The speaker says –

*“neither of us is happy  
but neither of us wants to leave  
so we keep breaking one another  
And calling it love.”* (p 122)

The speaker is now regressed in her previously lonely & dissatisfied life. She tries to understand the intricacies of love and grasp the difference between sex and love.

*“this is where you must  
Understand the difference  
Between want and need  
You may want that boy  
But you certainly  
Don't need him.”* (p 86)

The speaker realizes that she needs to forget the pain and shame resulting from the break-up with her boyfriend as it is necessary to sustain her emotional health, yet she continues to be whirlpool of her emotions and sexual desires. However, the breakup and the resultant suffering eventually turns out to be the driving force of healing from her past oppression. She understands that she can withstand all kinds of suffering and pain without crippling support of anyone else. She finds herself stronger and independent after this heart-breaking incident. She says, “*I am a museum full of art/ but you had your eyes shut.*” (p 100) She continues, “*I was music/ but you had your ears cut off.*” (p 115) Although on the surface, this part speaks of suffering of a broken heart, it is in fact enlivening example of the freedom of independence. The speaker asserts –

*“you were not wrong for leaving  
You were wrong for coming back  
And thinking*

*You could have me  
When it was convenient  
And leave me when it was not.*” (p 120)

Feminist scholar Jane Rendell rightly suggests that “Femininity is connected with chaotic and disorderly space while logocentric space remains masculine.” (p 107) In an interview given to WildSpice Magazine, Rupi Kaur says, “We are so graceful. So regal. We have the universe inside of us. The power of our bodies is a miracle. I love my womanly curves [...] I love that about us, how capable we are of letting ourselves feel so much... that takes strength. Just being a woman, calling myself woman, makes me feel like a queen.” (Brown)

In the final chapter “The Healing,” the speaker wishes to break the myth that a woman is incomplete without man. Though she is reminded of disasters and abuses - *Our backs tell stories no books have spine to carry*” (p 171), yet she firmly believes that “*just being a woman calling myself a woman makes me utterly whole and complete.*” (p 169) Reflecting upon the societal norms, the speaker remarks –

*“You are in the habit  
Of co-depending on people to make up for what you think you lack  
Who tricked you into believing  
Another person was meant to complete you  
When the most they can do is complement.”* (p 154)

She believes that woman is complete in herself and needs a man just to complement her. She can illuminate the world by her own personality, identity and worth. She wants to “*fall in love with your own solitude*” (p 161) She discovers that she is capable of self-love and is strong, independent and worthy despite others calling her otherwise. Contrary to her doleful past, the speaker is able to find goodness in everything that surrounds her. However, unlike before, she now experiences the bliss of love and moves beyond the bitterness of her breakup. She makes efforts to experience self-value, self-worth and self-identification. She realizes that “*you must enter a relationship/ with yourself/before anyone else*” (p 150) & “*accept yourself / as you were designed.*” (p 172) She consoles her heart saying, “*accept that you deserve more/ than painful love/ life is moving/ the healthiest thing/ for your heart is/ to move with it.*” (p 151) She regains the strength to rise and consoles her “*the hurt will pass/ as it always does/ if you give it time and/ let it so let it/ go/ slowly/ like a broken promise/ let it go.*” (p 168) In an interview with journalist Rachel Grate on the website *Hellogiggles*, Kaur invokes sisterly solidarity by emphasizing the centrality of women in her life and art, “It’s the strength in women that has inspired me. My mother, my sisters, my friends, the women throughout history who have endured, who have fought against patriarchy and fought for the rights of those around them [...] since I’ve embraced and began to nurture sisterhood at a grassroots level in my community, I’ve really started to grow, and have been able to help some and see other women rise, and that’s all it’s about the power to uplift. We have that within ourselves and we have to use it.” (Grate)

The title *milk and honey* chosen by Rupi Kaur is very significant. Though the text is non-religious in nature, yet a Biblical reference is evident in the very choice of the title. In the Bible, God instructs the Moses to lead the Israelites to a good, spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey. It aims to represent how plentiful and rich their new home would be in comparison to Egypt. In addition to this, a variety of religious and historical texts have referred to milk and honey to indicate their natural healing powers. (Grade saver) Rupi Kaur uses the term milk and honey as a title to the anthology of her poems to unveil the magnificence of life. Her poems are a voyage of a young woman from self-hatred and shame to self-love, complacency, acceptance and a feeling of bliss. In a letter at the end of the text, she tells her readers to “*stay grounded and rooted*”. She encourages

them to find sweetness in all their bitter places. She reminds the readers that healing is possible provided “*our feet [are] planted firmly onto the earth.*” While *milk and honey* appears to be a series of poems regarding a girl and her broken heart, it embraces a much deeper connotation of self-love and empowered transformation that she discovers later in her life. Also, the drawings and specific images used in the text intend to evoke the emotions of the readers and contribute to their understanding of the poems.

### **Panna Naik's *The Astrologer's Sparrow* (2018) – Masterful Collection of Poetry**

Panna Naik, an eminent American Gujarati litterateur, 87 years of age and resident of America since 1960 has been active on Gujarati literary front for about four decades. She has to her credit eleven collections of poetry, one short story collection and various articles published in leading journals of great repute. Her poetry gives voice to the inner agony experienced by women of all generations. Her poetry collection *The Astrologer's Sparrow* published in 2018 reveals the plight of women forced to adjust in a world devoid of love, warmth, compassion and understanding. Panna's nonmetric style of poetry impart the intensity and poignancy to the feminine heart laid bare before the readers. According to Carlo Coppola, Professor Emeritus, Department of Modern Languages and Literatures in Us, “*The Astrologer's Sparrow* is a masterful collection of poetry. Elegant diction and resonant tone highlight the creative sensibility of an important contemporary poet, someone who has long pondered upon, and has much to say about, the vagaries, contradictions and confusions that plague the human condition.” Pamela Sutton, MSJ, MFA remarks that “Panna Naik's remarkable book of Poetry *The Astrologer's Sparrow* makes India's diaspora very personal and tactile. This is the language of courage: as one who left home and family in search of a wider view of the world. Hers is the language of the explorer with acute emotion that readers are not likely to find elsewhere.” Pradyumna Chauhan, Professor of English at Arcadia University comments, “Panna Naik's *The Astrologer's Sparrow* sings of the puzzles of life and riddles of existence. Every poem here is an encounter with a truth one was too lethargic to note or too timid to sound, but which now dawns with the radical suddenness of a revelation.”

### **Panna's Poems: A Resounding, Gutsy Voice of Feminine Heart**

Panna's poems are repository of woman's emotions, feelings, desires, longings and hopes which no woman is ready to forgo under even the most adverse of circumstances. She tries to adjust herself and dreams of a miracle that would dig her out of the pit of isolation and hopelessness. Her poems reflect the autobiographical stance and portray her own experience as a woman when she came to America from India in 1960 after her marriage. Panna in her poem “*Doll's House*”, expresses her mental agony of not being able to adjust in a new place. She says – “*I live in this home but/ I am just a doll/ in a doll house/ a plaything for many!*” (p 6)

Panna was not able feel the warmth of love after her marriage and always craved for a child that she could not bear during her life. The theme of childlessness is poignantly revealed in her poem “*And I*”–

“*Each time after love-making  
You drop into slumber,  
And I,  
Keep tossing and turning  
In nightmares about my child  
Never to be born.*” (p 10)

Panna talks about the inner isolation and emptiness that a woman faces in the event of an incongruous marriage. The world appears hollow and meaningless when only two bodies unite but

there is no union of hearts. The wordlessness fills the air when such a couple meet. In the poem “The Witness Candles”, Panna exclaims –

*“A terrace.  
An evening  
Rain in the background  
Candles as witnesses.  
Two chairs. One couple.  
No sooner than they start to talk,  
The jealous wind snuffs out  
The light of their opening dialogue.”* (p 16)

The marriage is a holy union of two souls that are complementary to each other. But if the souls do not sing a harmonious tune, then the bodies cry for liberty and break the shackles of pious relationship. The single feeling that pervades is that of accusation where each person considers the other responsible for the deteriorating relationship. In the poem “Concentration Camp of Amnesia”, the poetess asks –

*“Why do you now  
Whip me with his name and accusations?  
I am tired  
Of this boring punishment  
I ask for  
New violence!”* (p 17)

Panna focusses on the ideologies of the patriarchal world where woman enjoys a subservient position. The traditional culture requires woman to follow all the norms of the husband’s family and not raise her voice against any kind of injustice. She must become “a tamed animal” (18) and if she disagrees to do so and speak of her rights, she is disapproved by her partner. In “Lioness”, the poetess remarks –

*“See, I am a tamed lioness.  
But you don’t want me as a pet.  
I know, you want to let me loose  
Somewhere in the Acacia forest.  
I also know why. It’s because  
I refuse to meet your demand.  
You want a lioness that never roars.”* (p 18)

Panna believes that woman’s voice cannot be suppressed. She poignantly remarks that woman with embittered soul and crushed emotions must express her feelings. As regards the submissive women, she emphatically declares, “Oh naivete! / No such creature exists. / You seek mythology.” (18)

Panna is bewildered to find how the two bodies meet without consent of their souls. She asks a very rugged question to her mother through the poem “Midnight Questions”–

*“Was the intimacy  
A climax of your so-called happy married life  
Or  
Your decision to ‘get it over with’?  
Did the fragrance of night blooming flowers, all around the house,  
Touch your bodies?  
Were there bells of joy ringing at your lips?  
Did your eyes dance?  
Did your cheeks glow?”*



*Asking all these questions  
Knowing your answer is 'yes',  
Why do I feel that  
After sex  
A seed of sadness  
Had been sown in your womb?"* (22)

Panna's voice is heard aloud in America, India and globally everywhere where she is read and heard by her admirers. Panna talks about women empowerment that allows woman to live with dignity, respect and self-recognition. She believes in fighting out the toughest of situations with utmost bravery and tactfulness. During times of difficulty, she does not believe in jumping before the train like Anna Karenina, swallowing poison like Madam Bovary, putting her head in an oven like Sylvia Plath or breathing carbon monoxide in a closed garage like Anne Sexton. She declares-

*"I want to live and rule  
Like Queen Elizabeth  
I want to be a Renaissance woman."* (p 35)

Panna asks, "*Can the Sun's heat/ heal/ the burns scaled / by winter's ice?*" The answer is in the negation because "*Between eyelids/ spread/ tall, wide / heaps / of salt.*" (p 39) The feelings of alienation, loneliness, seclusion and withdrawal reign supreme among the women who are the incessant victims of male domination. They make enduring efforts to keep their relations alive "*but somehow deep somewhere rings the eternal echo of split canyons.*" (40) Panna writes –

*"We are  
Two pages in a book  
Facing each other  
Bound but separate  
Sewn together by predestined  
Mortal ties."* (p 40)

The innate frustration of unsatisfied love inhibits the couple to discuss vital issues of their lives. Panna expresses her agony –

*"All our lives  
We talked  
And talked and talked  
About the living room  
I wish  
At least once  
Someday, some night  
We had talked  
About the bedroom."* (41)

Panna is pivotal in dealing with feminine issues associated with estrangement, nostalgia, homesickness, and the inner contexture of woman's mind battling to find solace through expression. Her poems reflect the agony of diasporic women striving to adjust in a new environment devoid of fragrance of native flowers and trees. Panna emphasized that modern gadgets and social media prove miserably ineffective in diminishing the wide mental gulf created between the couples who lead a frigid life devoid of emotional health and peace. It is significant that some of the poems of Panna are truly autobiographical in nature and they reveal her own despondence, doldrum and resentment. She admits –

*"I, too, wanted to build a home,  
But not of bricks.  
I, too, wanted to set up a regime  
Ruled by love." (p 43)*

She asks, "Can one live an entire life resting only with a pillow?" (44) She is still "searching for that long-lost ring of recognition [her] synonym for happiness." (45) She does not know "how do I recreate a flower from disintegrated petals?" (54) Panna un masks her feminine dreams of leading a contended life of togetherness, fulfillment and satisfaction and refers to what she experiences – a gush of torrential pain. She painfully admits –

*"Pain  
Lives in your favorite room  
Continue measuring its walls  
Foot after foot  
Happiness  
Steps out of that very room  
Forgetting all its  
Measurements and dimensions." (49)*

Panna brings to light innate desire of a woman who wishes to fulfil her aspirations but faces impediments in actualizing her dreams. In "Green-Grape Tear", she writes, "Hand in hand and empty-handed. / Lip on lip but disconnected. / The final embrace." (61) She asks her partner, "Is it possible/ when you are with me/ I find / butterflies more vibrant, / each blade of grass a green lamp, / and the rains moist as fire?" (62) "...how do you define/ the fate of living right beneath/ the roaring ocean and yet/ doomed to swim in a desert?" (65)

### **Diasporic World of Panna Naik**

Panna's poems exhibit intense longing and desperateness for her native land India. In the initial years of her life in America, she experienced acute loneliness and estrangement. In "Empty Forest", Panna admits –

*"Darkness all around  
Empty forest.  
Not even a cricket-sound  
I am lost in a wooden labyrinth.  
.....  
Dryness grasps my throat –  
Can thirst be quenched with wet sand?" (p 5)*

Panna's association with India and her love for her birthplace blooms when her "eyes look for India in the national and international columns" and she proudly proclaims – "I have never left India." (29) She asks, "How can I survive/ in this Arctic desert without my people?" (38) She tries to forget her mother land so that she can adjust faster in the new land of America. In her poem, "Illegal Alien", she writes –

*"It has been years since  
I deported Memory,  
Once my constant companion.  
.....  
"I tell myself,*

*Memory banished  
wouldn't return this boldly*

.....  
*Does he not know  
that in America,  
an illegal alien is arrested,  
handcuffed, jailed, tried in court;  
and, if found guilty, deported once more?" (34)*

In a well-known poem "Homesickness", Panna admits that it was extremely difficult for her to adjust herself in the new atmosphere of America in the early years of her life when she was merely 27 years of age. She writes, "*I am homesick. / Feel like/ packing my bags and going home...But where is my home now?" (32)* She turns nostalgic about the sweet memories associated with her family and the time she had spent with them in Mumbai. She utters a cry –

*"Uprooting  
A flowering tree  
From faraway tropical Mumbai  
I replanted it  
In Philadelphia's cold, alien soil.*

.....  
*But I long for  
The lost season of rains,  
The monsoon fragrance of India  
That still caresses my skin.  
Here, we have everything.  
And nothing." (p 32)*

Panna, after staying for more than four decades in America is accustomed to the new bearings - people, lifestyle, customs, manners and traditions of America. She writes in "Protector", "*When I visit India/ landing at Mumbai Airport/ America follows me like a shadow/ playing the protector.*" (30)

### **Comparison between Rupi Kaur and Panna Naik as Diasporic Poets**

Rupi Kaur (Born 1992) and Panna Naik (Born 1933) are Canadian and American diasporic poets respectively, born in India but settled in countries other than their own. Rupi talks about her own feminine experiences she had encountered with males of her family and outside world whereas Panna's poems are based on her experience as a wife of an insensitive partner who could never understand her emotions. Panna's isolated, dejected and dispirited life inspired her to voice her ardent feelings in the form of poems. Her unhesitant and bold expression of emotions in the poems proved to be catharsis of her pent-up feelings. The poems were highly praised by all the literary establishments, both in India and America. She was awarded several honours for her outstanding literary contributions – such as Gardi Diaspora Writing Award in 2014, Gujarati Sahitya Parishad Award in 2008, Chunilal Velji Mehta Award in 2002, Gujarat State Award in 1978, Krishnalal Zaveri Award in 1954 and Mohanlal Suchak Award in 1953. Panna has given a distinct voice to women of India and America as well which is evidenced by her world-wide followers. According to Pradyumna Chauhan, Professor of English, Arcadia University, "Her [Panna's] images, tender or etched with the sharpness of steel, ignite a reflection that liberates the mind and illuminates the life lived and forgotten. To read her poems is really to experience the heaving ocean that, for a receptive

mind, storms behind ordinary objects of the world. An encounter with this book *The Astrologer's Sparrow* (2018) is a commencement of self-renewal.”

Rupi Kaur with the publication of her debut, *milk and honey* (2015) became extremely popular and in the first week of its release, her follow-up was duking it out for the top spot on Amazon's best-seller list and it became New York Times bestselling books. She became an impassioned voice for women of colour and feminism. The major conflict in her poems is the complex emotional puzzles that arise when others mistreat you when you were depending on them to help you learn to love yourself better. The poems incorporated in the collection *milk and honey* are written in the style of “confessional poetry” wherein the speaker puts forth her own thoughts and experiences. Kaur makes use of line breaks to indicate where a reader requires to pause during their reading. Kaur, being a talented artist, her sketches accompany more than half of the poems in the collection. These sketches are the indicative of the themes, characters and situations described in the poems.

### Use of Images and Symbols in the Poetry

Rupi Kaur as well as Panna Naik have made abundant use of images and symbols in their poetry. In the second part of *milk and honey*, Rupi Kaur writes, “*I want to have you/ cause the two of us combined/ could set it on fire.*” (59) She further writes, “*how do you turn/ a forest fire like me/ so soft I turn into/ running water.*” (65) The use of “forest fire” represents love, passion, determination, force and energy. It stands for speaker's turbulent emotions as she remembers the past and wrestles with the psychological mutilation it caused. Water however is a symbol of coolness as it dampens the fire, however temporarily and provides mental healing to the speaker.

Panna in her collection of poems *The Astrologer's Sparrow* (2018) makes abundant use of images of flowers - *Dahlia, Gulmohar, Ratrani, Champa, Chameli, Parijat, Borsali, kevdo* and *Mogro* (Jasmine) which are found in plenty in India but are missing in Philadelphia. They are replaced in America by flowers such as *Mapel, daffodils, tulips, petunia, Japanese Maple* and *Chrysanthemums*. She writes, “*Tightly arranged chrysanthemums/ in a painted glass vase/ wilted now in stale water... How do I recreate a flower from disintegrated petals?*” (54) She further writes, “*Jasmines/ plucked in a dream/ are long lost;/ but why does their fragrance / still stick to my fingers?*” (55) The use of other natural symbols as stars, sun, moon, plants, rain, fish, ocean, desert, butterfly, cloud, monsoon etc are also found in exuberance in her poems. She writes in the poem “*Cloud Touches*”, “*The ocean breath/ in a cloud/ touches/ the far away sky. / You are/ much closer.*” (73) Another example of imagery is evident in the poem “*Trail*”, “*In the evening's half light, / obstructing my dreams,/ stand/ those trees// naked, sterile deserts and broken pieces of sky...*” (74)

### Conclusion

Rupi Kaur and Panna Naik – both have contributed pronouncedly to the world through their respective diasporic writings. Both of them have become the voices of present-day generation of 21<sup>st</sup> century women who wish to be treated with dignity, equality, respect, love and care. Women today have been able to prove their abilities in the areas where male monopoly was established till recent times. Though the status of women has undergone a vital change in the modern age, yet a substantial transformation in the mind-set of male counterparts is inevitable. If men become an integral part of the progressive, dynamic and enlightened journey of women, then positive societal change is bound to come resulting in true ‘women empowerment.’

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## BIO-NOTE

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