

Feminine Space, Gender Norms and Social Issues in Ismat Chughtai's *Lifting the Veil*

Dissertation

Submitted to
Department of English, School of Languages
Doon University, Dehradun in Partial
Fulfilment of the Requirements for The
Award of the Degree of

**Bachelor of Arts in
English**

By

Prekshi Negi



**Department of English School of Languages
Doon University**

2022

Declaration

I declare that the work presented in the dissertation entitled 'Feminine Space, Gender Norms and Social Issues in Ismat Chughtai's *Lifting the Veil*' being submitted to the Department of English, School of Languages, Doon University, Dehradun for the award of Bachelor in English is my original research work.

The Dissertation embodies the results of investigations, observations, and experiments carried out by me. I have neither plagiarized any part of the dissertation nor have submitted the same work for the award of any other degree/diploma anywhere.

Dated: 20 July, 2022

Prekshi Negi

Place: Doon University, Dehradun

SLE 1064

B.A. English

Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled 'Feminine Space, Gender Norms and Social Issues in Ismat Chughtai's *Lifting the Veil*' submitted by Ms. Prekshi Negi has been done under my supervision. It is also certified that the work in this Dissertation embodies original research and hard work of the candidate.

The assistance and support received during the course of investigation and all the sources of literature have been fully acknowledged.

Dr. Chetana Pokhriyal

(Head of Department)
Department of English
School of Languages
Doon University

Dr. Chetana Pokhriyal

(Supervisor)

Acknowledgement

It is a genuine pleasure to express my deep sense of thanks and gratitude to the Head of the English Department and my supervisor, Dr. Chetana Pokhriyal for giving me this opportunity and providing constructive criticism which helped me in expanding my knowledge for the completion of the research work. I would also like to acknowledge and give my warmest thanks to my mentor, Ms. Aporwa Siwali, for extending continuous support during the research period.

In addition, I would like to dedicate my work to all my faculty members who supported me in building my foundations that helped me in this work. My work would not have been possible without their support and guidance.

I am also thankful to all my peers who provided suggestions which helped me in moving forward with the project.

Abstract

The research work intends to explore the feminine space in Ismat Chughtai's select short stories from the collection of short stories *Lifting the Veil*. The selected stories are: "Gainda"

(The Marigold), “Lihaaf” (The Quilt), “Touch-me-not”, “Sacred Duty”, and “Roots”, which reflect the reality of India through the micro tale of the massive instances of gender differences, subjugation and patriarchy. Furthermore, it deals with female sexuality that Ismat presents in her works. The paper also offers an insight into the dual oppression that women go through throughout their lives. The child playfulness that questions the hypocrisy through Ismat’s pen, and the several social issues of child marriage, oppressive domesticity, early widowhood, female exploitation and inequality, hidden under the veil, are uncovered. Ismat writes in a way that different real life characters are incorporated into a single character whereas each character still gets highlighted in its own uniqueness. Each character merged inside Gaiinda speaks individually; Gaiinda as a child, Gaiinda as a widow, Gaiinda as a female, Gaiinda as a friend, Gaiinda as a lover, Gaiinda as a mother, and most importantly Gaiinda as a victim. Through the protagonists: Begum Jan, Samina, Amma and Bhabi Jan, Ismat observes the society bluntly, and pens it down in a similar manner.

Table of Contents

Declaration

Certificate

Acknowledgement

Abstract

Chapter I: Introduction 1-9

Chapter II: Analysis 10-31

Chapter III: Conclusion..... 32-35

Bibliography.....36-37

Department of English(Doon University)

Chapter I

Introduction

Women in different facets of life are subjugated in ways that are not always prominent. There is a mental and a deep seated effect of such long lasting norms of patriarchy that they consider it a reality, and surround their lives, reasons and ideals around it. In the garb of societal norms they succumb to these prejudices and tend to propagate them without questioning them. Ismat Chughtai saw these realities in the lives of women and gave word to it. She can be seen as portraying these realities without a judgment and neither siding with anyone. It is a story as it is, but in a style unique to Ismat.

About the Author

“In my stories, I've put down everything with objectivity. Now, if some people find them obscene, let them go to hell”.

~Ismat Chughtai

Ismat's writings contain many powerful personal components. All of her works may be linked back to specific life events and personal encounters that served as their inspiration. Because of this, it is impossible to truly evaluate her works without having a thorough knowledge of her biographical details as well as her historical and socioeconomic background.

Born in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh, to Khan Bahadur Mirza Qaseem Beg Chughtai and Nusrat Khanam, Ismat Chughtai was the ninth kid in the family. She believed that she was not welcomed, in part because she was the ninth child out of ten, and in part because she was a girl,

a fact that she appeared to have disliked since she was too young to remember or understand it. Even her own mother never gave her a chance to feel cherished or appreciated. Nusrat Khanam was overburdened with so many children as well as other chores, that she did not have time for even basic motherly passions like coaxing, coddling, and pampering. Ismat was raised by an ayah when she was an infant and afterwards by Farhat Khanam, her older sister. Son of Farhat Khanam, Dr. Farhan Mujib, says: "The gap between the sisters was so much that my mother practically brought up Ismat Apa" (Negi 7).

Her father was a deputy collector who, in his lifetime worked in different places such as Mewar, as well as at Agra, Bahraich, Jaunpur, Kanpur, and Lucknow. Her mother, Nusrat Khanam, was an uneducated, pious woman who worried more for Ismat's soul than anyone else's because she was the only one in her family who chose to follow a less traditional route. She was not expected to study or offer an opinion because she was a woman. Although her family was progressive but, it did not mean a complete freedom from norms. Women still had to remain inside the boundaries set within the household.

Influences on Ismat Chughtai

She had a very close relationship with her older brother Mirza Azeem Beg Chughtai, a wellknown author at the time. He had one of the key influences on Chughtai. He encouraged her to read the Quran, and introduced her to a plethora of literary luminaries. In Chughtai's opinion, her brother Azeem Beg was the one who showed her the way and encouraged her to pursue writing. In an interview she says:

Starting with Hardy and Bronte sisters, I arrived at George Bernard Shaw. But the books by Russian litterateurs had the greatest influence because I

encountered them when I was looking around for a guiding spirit.” She recalls how Azeem Beg, her brother, instigated and persuaded her to engage in translation exercises. “The works of Dostoyevsky and Somerset Maugham had a great impact on her, and she also developed a special fondness for Chekhov. (Chughtai 38)

Rashid Jahan, in Ismat's words, had the greatest impact on her and radically altered the direction of her thoughts and writing. In an interview, Chughtai said that she stored the works of Rashid Jahan like pearls. She further observes, “The handsome heroes and pretty heroines of my stories, the candle like figures, the lime blossoms and the crimson outfits all vanished into thin air.” Rashid Jahan gave her a taste of life in its reality and thus, became the greatest influence in the life of Ismat Chughtai.

Such was the influence of Rashid Jahan in Ismat’s life that she even based the protagonists of her work on her. They had the same candour and boldness that Ismat found in her. Chughtai was constantly motivated by Rashid Jahan to be independent, forthright, and courageous. Chughtai became more intrigued by *Angaare* after reading it stealthily.

She was also greatly influenced by the works of two other well-known authors of the time, Hijab Imtiaz Ali and Nazar Sajjad Hyder. However, they had a short-lived impact on Chughtai due to their romantic themes and conventionally submissive female characters. Her writings: ‘The Troublemaker’ (Fasaadi, 1937) and ‘The Quilt’ (Lihaaf, 1942), notably deviated from this influence.

Among Urdu writers, Munshi Premchand was her favourite, and understandably so; having been influenced by Dickens, Tolstoy and, later, Gandhi, Premchand was the first Indian writer to pay special attention to the

technical aspects of the short story and novel as developed in the West. (Naqvi 38)

Tahira Naqvi, in her tribute to Ismat Chughtai, writes about the influences that shape Ismat's works:

Like her male contemporaries such as Saadat Hasan Manto, Rajinder Singh Bedi, and Krishan Chander, Ismat was influenced a great deal by Western fiction writers of the late nineteenth century. This influence was most noticeable in her conscious selection of social and sexual themes. She treated these themes with frankness and sensitivity, without being judgmental. The subject matter was delivered in a style which was bold, innovative, rebellious, and unabashedly realistic in both its portrayal of character and its analysis of the human condition. (Naqvi 40)

Some of the bold writers that influenced her were known to be banned from a few geographies of the world like Zola from France and Chekhov from England. From Chekhov she learnt that it was the responsibility of a writer to mirror the world.

Ismat wanted to complete her schooling from Aligarh Girls' School and that is why when her father was posted to Rajasthan, she persuaded them to let her go, and threatened them with conversion into a Christian. Being the mother of a headstrong young woman like Chughtai made her mother curse herself. Her father was forced to consider the situation again after witnessing her boldness and tenacity.

She joined Isabella Thoburn College in 1933. These are considered as the most important and freeing years of her life. Chughtai's childhood companion Sultana Jafri, who subsequently married Ali Sardar Jafri, reported that in college, Chughtai excelled in debates rather than at sports.

As she joined Isabella Thoburn College, Apa's mind was bristling with questions, and the books she read only stimulated her thoughts. When she read the Bible, she was scandalized by the fact that it accorded women a secondary status. (Negi 16)

It is further known that Ismat read many authors from the west and the influence was not always positive. "Reading Sigmund Freud disabused her of the romantic notions about love and man-woman relationships. Though she was never entirely convinced of Freudian theories, maintaining that "Freud was a Fraud", all this reading and more, did make a deep impression on the young mind and contributed to the artistic sensibility in her adult life" (Negi 16).

During this time, she had the chance to attend the initial meeting of Progressive writers in 1935 while still a college student, where she met Rashid Jahan, Munshi Premchand, and other Angaare group writers.

Her graduation led to a number of prestigious teaching positions, and in 1937 she was appointed as principal at Javare before moving on to Bareilly's Islamia Girls School. She made the decision to resign from her position and trained to become a teacher "thus becoming the first Indian Muslim woman to have earned both degrees" (Naqvi 39).

In 1942 she got married to Shahid Lateef, whom she had met in Aligarh. She says, "I explained to Shahid that I am a troublesome woman. That I have broken all the chains in my life and I would never be able to stay bound in them. To be an obedient blameless wife was a role not suited to me" (Negi 24).

Chughtai stated in a letter that she disliked the word "marriage" and that the phrase "husband-wife" made her uneasy. Since they were on an equal footing, she preferred to think of Shahid and herself as friends. Chughtai probably responded and felt that, because "husband-wife" in a patriarchal system does not sound like an equal relationship; rather, it's a binary

opposition where men have superior status. Contrary to popular belief, Chughtai did not despise the institution of marriage.

Ismat's steadfast friend Saadat Hasan Manto describes her as a stubborn woman. He speculates that stubbornness might have been her preferred strategy to initially deny, question, and eventually accept things.

It was in 1936 that the [Progressive Writers'] Association was formed at Lucknow, with the renowned Hindi writer, Premchand, inaugurating it. This event was significant in a number of ways. With it, a new dimension was added to the socially oriented writing which had made its appearance in the second half of the 19th century and which had been gaining momentum as the years passed. (Sahni 178)

Rashid Jahan's influence led Ismat to join this movement and continue writing in Urdu. She attended the first meeting, and this drastically changed her writings for the years to come. This marked the beginning of a new period of bold writing. According to Chughtai, she had an emotional connection to the Progressive Movement and writers, in addition to their intellectual appeal.

Ismat Chughtai's stories all exuded a freshness that was devoid of any traditional viewpoints and orthodox philosophies regarding contemporary society. She was an avantgarde author who wrote on taboo subjects in contemporary society and Urdu language. With its focus on the sensual intricacies of daily life, "Lihaf" one of Chughtai's best known works, has since been widely anthologized. This marks the beginning of the literary style that would become uniquely her own.

Critics question the subject matter in Ismat's writings that are confined to women issues and household, to which Tahira Naqvi writes that Ismat portrays these characters in their bone

and flesh due to her familiarity with them. She further remarks about Ismat that “she knew these characters well and she portrayed them in their milieu with vivid and masterful realism” (Naqvi 41).

The writer, who found herself amid several controversies during her life, had to face one more controversy even after her death, as despite being a Muslim; she was according to her last wishes cremated instead of being buried. Her works fitted on no preconceived narratives, her bold narratives stood out from the ordinary, her outspoken approach jolted regressive minds and her rebellious themes raised many eyebrows. She remains till date amongst the most iconic writers of all time.

Objective

My work aims to explore the different facets of the story to bring out the social issues highlighted in the work and present a feminist reading of the text. The research work also focuses on the importance of women narratives that have become the need of the day to liberate women throughout the world. In addition, it answers how a society shapes an individual to follow set patterns, and it also explores the realms of female spaces inside the gendered boundaries.

The objective of my work is to analyze the gender norms, feminine space and social issues in Ismat Chughtai's short stories, and observe the need of feminist writings in contemporary world.

Research Methodology

The research work is qualitative in nature and analyzes the importance of writings by female authors to bring a change in the patriarchal discourse. In order to discuss the issues of gender stereotyping, domestic violence, objectification of women and exploitation, I have taken “Gainda” (The Marigold), “Lihaaf” (The Quilt), “Touch-me-not”, “Roots”, and “Sacred Duty” authored by Ismat Chughtai.

The research work is divided into three sections. Chapter 1 covers the introduction of Ismat Chughtai, and how her life events play a major role in shaping her stories and mould the protagonists. Chapter 2 of the paper analyses Ismat Chughtai’s “Gainda” (The Marigold), “Lihaaf” (The Quilt), “Touch-me-not”, “Sacred Duty”, and “Roots”, and offers an insight into the dual oppression that women go through throughout their lives. It also explores the social concerns that the texts raise with respect to child marriage, oppressive domesticity, early widowhood, female exploitation and inequality. Chapter 3 is the final chapter of the paper that highlights the importance of female writers in dismantling patriarchal stereotypes.

Works Cited

1. Chughtai, Ismat. “Mahfil Interviews ISMAT CHUGHTAI.” *Mahfil*, vol. 8, no. 2/3, 1972, pp. 169–88.
2. Naqvi, Tahira. *Ismat Chughtai—A Tribute*. 1993. pp. 37-42.
3. Negi, Manjulaa. *Ismat Chughtai: A Fearless Voice (Rupa Charitavali S.)*. Rupa Publications India, 2003.
4. Sahni, Bhisham. “The Progressive Writers’ Movement.” *Indian Literature*, vol. 29, no. 6, 1986, pp. 178–83.

Chapter II

Analysis

This chapter deals with the reading of Ismat Chughtai's "Gainda" (The Marigold), "Lihaaf" (The Quilt), "Touch-me-not", "Sacred Duty", and "Roots". Bringing out the social issues, it involves a thorough reading of the texts. Ismat Chughtai uses her protagonists to critique the stereotypes of the patriarchal world. Similar is the case with Gainda, Bhabi Jan, Samina, Amma and Begum Jan who open different perspectives of looking at life. This segment also discusses the stories with respect to the feminine spaces, gender norms, oppressive domesticity, child marriage, child bearing, early widowhood, female exploitation, dual suppression and female sexuality.

"Gainda" was first published in a widely known Urdu magazine named Saqi in 1938. The story starts with the child play of Gainda, the eponymous protagonist of the story, and the narrator who is a small girl, around the same age as Gainda, who acts as a companion to her. Gainda is a maid in the narrator's house. Being a woman and a widow, she is doubly suppressed in the household where her body is objectified and used by the male members of the family like Bhaiya. The story brings out the plight of women like Gainda who is a young widow. She is beaten and starved when the news of her pregnancy shocks the family members. Bhaiya is sent off to Delhi and Gainda is held responsible for everything. Bahu exploits her, and embarrasses her whenever she gets a chance. Gainda gives birth to her son, Lallu, even after facing the wrath of the society that she lives in. The story acts as a commentary on the society where male counterparts do not face any consequences of their actions. On the other hand, women like Gainda, are suppressed and mistreated for the actions of others.

Published in 1942, "Lihaaf" (The Quilt) talks about female sexuality and represents it in a way that has never been attempted in contemporary Indian literature. In "The Quilt", the narrator reminisces about the time when she was left at Begum Jan's house. Nawab was a reputed man but he had a "strange hobby". He bore the expenses of young boys. Begum Jan was forgotten soon after marriage. She turned to books when he had no time to spare for her. Soon after Rabbu, the masseur came into her life, Begum Jan started to blossom. Rabbu's only work was to massage Begum. The story highlights the feminine space that Begum Jan and Rabbu share. Had it not been for the Nawab's negligence, Begum Jan would not have confided in Rabbu.

In "The Quilt" Ismat Chughtai uses the young narrator's experience for the purpose of storytelling. Similar to Ismat, the narrator is also a rebel in her household. She plays and fights with her brothers and other boys. It is only in stories like "The Quilt" and "Sacred Duty" where one finds women taking some initiative to put an end to their grievances. In the "Sacred Duty", a love story unfolds where Samina and Tushar are from different religions. They elope and marry each other without telling their families. As the story moves forward, they are accepted. In the process of meeting their families they are converted and reconverted. The story ends with a beautiful letter to their parents that shatters all religious bias. They accept each other as individuals instead of viewing each other as an entity of a single religion.

Sadia Khan talks about this story, as a primary comment on the arranged marriage system. It also celebrates Samina's defiant spirit which did not succumb even to her parents' wishes. She is "bold and determined and through her Chughtai questions the sanctity of institutions like Marriage and Religion" (Khan 97). Apart from these two stories, it is seemingly difficult to think of a woman character who espouses the feminist spirit that Chughtai stood for. Chughtai was evidently critical of men and that gets very well articulated in her stories.

Siddiqi Sahib accepts the marriage and brings the couple back only to convert them back to Islam. Faith on both sides seems to be in danger and God in wrath. The title, again, is ironic as the sacred duty of a religious scholar is reduced to merely conversion of a person from another religion to his religion. Religion, whether it is Islam, Hinduism or Christianity, is reduced to a few rituals observed at certain occasions to win publicity or to be considered honorable. Through the work, Ismat proposes the idea of religious hypocrisy. She highlights the individuals instead of segregating them in groups based on religion or gender.

“Touch-me-not” is again a story that highlights societal stereotypes. The women are expected to bear sons. Their marriage depends on bearing children. It also highlights women as the “other”. They can be easily replaced in the family if the husband marries another woman. It also incorporates the idea that the weaker section of the society gets destroyed while the dominant people thrive. Bhabi Jan, a woman enchained in social bonds and norms, crushed under pressure of social expectations is set against a woman from the gutter, living her life without a care in the world. Bhabi Jan’s place in the family is dependent on her child. She knows that another miscarriage would lead her husband to marry again for a child. She is a dependent who is afforded only if she gives what her husband and in-laws want; otherwise she is doomed. Third time she conceives, it is arranged to send her to Aligarh to avoid a miscarriage. On the train, a woman boards, who is helpless with labor pains. Holding the handle of the bathroom door she delivers a child and becomes as normal as before, while Bhabi Jan, not bearing the sight of delivery, has another miscarriage. The pain of a woman is highlighted in the story by Ismat. It also shows how education helps women to accept these situations and prepare them for childbirth. Bhabi Jan would have been mentally prepared to face the situation.

The story of partition, “Roots” describes the events of partition and what it meant for the general public. People had to leave their houses and countries, and move across borders. It

mourns over the loss of an old mother, whose children decide to leave for Pakistan leaving her alone in India. It also depicts the relationship of Hindu and Muslim neighbors, and how it changes over time. Roopchandji's family is in close relation with their Muslim neighbors. As partition approaches, people get divided. Hindus lost their lives on their way to India and Muslims on their way to Pakistan. Amma could not leave her house where she spent her life giving birth to her ten children and bringing them up. She felt afraid if her saplings would be able to gain roots in the new land. She sits in a corner and remembers all the moments she spent in that house. The house contains her entire life. The story highlights the idea of "home" and the identity associated with it.

Ismat Chughtai remains a writer who has prospered in providing the idea of liberation to women through self-discovery in the protagonists of her stories. It brings out the deep rooted patriarchy that sets inside the mind of women through everyday instances. The relation between family members and the treatment of women becomes a major concern in such narratives. Behind such narratives, lies a world that is still unexplored, where women face issues daily and their mistreatment goes unheard. Ismat uncovers a miniscule of these instances and questions them through her unscathed pen and striking storyline.

Ismat lived her life without fearing anyone. She fought for her education and plunged into reading and gaining knowledge, as much as she could accumulate. As a child she was bold enough to stand for herself, and as an adult she was bold enough to stand for others as well. Through her works she brings out the battle that women fight everyday and provides them not only awareness, but also a kind of reassurance that it is important to stand for self. In the story, it becomes evident that the major conflict arises not outside, but inside a household with stereotypical views on how a person should live and conduct, whereas it becomes ironical when it remains bound only to the females while the male members are free to prosper without set rules, and even breaking them do not lead to any strict actions, or any action at all. Ismat

Chughtai questions this space altogether, a space that is biased to females, and the very household that allows this hypocrisy.

The Issue of Child Marriage and Contemporary World

Early marriage has become a worldwide concern. It is driven by societal expectations, instability, illiteracy, gender discrimination, and economic hardship, and it has disastrous repercussions everywhere. The idea that the male counterparts are superior, furthers this issue. Other factors including societal pressure, burden of many girl children and dowry system make it even worse. It has various drivers in different places, and it has different appearances everywhere. Marrying a child before eighteen years of age is an exploitation of their right. The consequences of early marriage are a turning point for a child who is not ready for such responsibilities. It deprives them of learning and takes away their liberty. Furthermore it risks the life of a young mother as well as a baby when the body is not mature enough to sustain another inside it, thereby increasing maternal and infant mortality rates. Not just that, but child marriage may also lead to marital violence and assault due to their lack of authority and inexperience.

Ismat Chughtai dismantles the preconceived notions and brings to light the issues faced by such women. The story brings out the issues of exploitation faced by the female members in a family like Gainda who is a servant and considered a lower caste. Chughtai portrays the character of a young girl who is at the age where she is inclined to play childish games with the narrator. She has no idea about life yet, only the tip of the iceberg, and that too, vague. Not only does this early marriage change the course of their life, but it also forces them into understanding life early, when they are not ready. Their cruel treatment and familial pressure to bear a son leads to frequent pregnancies and even death of these young mothers. Gainda is a

widow and the story shows how she was married at a tender age. She does not get any liberty in the house where she lives, and needs to constantly be on her toes to help Bahu or complete chores. She cannot complain about her situation and even if she does, no one would pay heed to it. Gainda accepts her fate and in her childishness, lives her life without a thought for tomorrow. She plays the game of bride with the narrator and flaunts her vermilion made of brick powder: "Gainda's face flushed a deep red, and she hid her face shyly in her dupatta" (Chughtai 12).

The deep seated gender behaviour finds an outlet in these instances where young girls such as Gainda and the narrator act along the lines of societal expectations of a woman: Soon we had completed our make-up. Sindoor in our partings, bindis on our forehead and dupattas drawn over our faces we sat demurely in a corner. We stole glances at each other's face and were struck by our own beauty. This made us all the more bashful. (Chughtai 12)

It is evident what being a bride means to them and how the years of patriarchal authority forced these ideas to such an extent that women imbibe them as natural measures. Acting shy, sitting demurely and looking pretty is expected from brides while these young women are married to old men. This further leads to early widowhood and once again the woman is left at the mercy of family members and mistreated. The cycle goes on until the youngster becomes an adult and these ideas get ingrained in her. Later, she advances, considering them as a natural course of action. The narrator envies Gainda for the kind of attention she gets. She is anxious that being of the same age, she is treated differently from her.

"My heart sank. Gainda always slighted me. I could not compete with her in anything. She had been married off in the month of Baisakh the year before. All dressed up in red garments, she became the sole owner of a set of glittering silver jewellery" ("Gainda" 11). The lines bring out the kind of materialism that a child attains in what she thinks of a marriage. She is only concerned about her fine garments and jewellery, but has no idea about the consequences

of an early marriage. Her priority is expressed through her wish of possessions and getting attention from her family.

Chughtai brings out the psychological working of a child's brain through these lines, showing how naive these young women are, and what marriage means to them. She critiques the idea of child marriage where girls at this age get married, when they do not know what it means, or what it would bring about. The difficulties that a young bride faces is evident by the fact that Gaiinda, at such a young age when she should have been playing and learning things, needs to work and come to terms with the hardships. The narrator reminisces, "I counted her bangles, tied up her anklets or ran solicitously to lift her tinsel-trimmed dupatta when it touched the ground" ("Gaiinda" 11).

She further says, "granted that I was younger than Gaiinda, but I wasn't too young to be a bride. I was ready to spend my whole life with the bride's veil over my face without complaint" ("Gaiinda" 12). It makes the reader become aware about the narrator's willingness to marry for the sake of adornment and attention.

Gender Norms and Stereotypes

According to cultural beliefs and stereotypes, gender norms are activities, emotions and behaviours that society deems proper or improper for a male and a female. Gender rules set limits on how a person based on their gender, should express and conduct publicly. Women and girls frequently have to limit their responsibilities to those of caregivers in the form of mothers or wives. This causes gender bias in the division of work. In a household setting, their movement is highly restricted, forcing them to stay at home. Even on similar grounds, they are

given different situations and props to tackle a problem in a completely different manner. Girls experience a dual task obligation where they need to work both on a job and domestic duties.

Parents frequently make decisions to retain the female child at home for domestic tasks under the impact of gender stereotypes about their roles and expectations. In contrast, the male child is urged to enrol and earn a degree in order to stay successful, support his family, and make ends meet. Chughtai uses these narratives to point out the problems in the society that wishes to cover these things. The set gender norms are highlighted through Gaiinda where a bride is expected to be gentle, shy, beautiful, and obedient. On the other hand, boys are taught to be strong, daring and fearless. A girl is expected to show emotions while a boy is told off when he "cries like a girl".

The set rules bound children into different moulds that shape their coming years into making them "fit" for society. Girls getting dolls to play, while boys getting sport accessories, shows how situations are shaped to enhance different capabilities in children of the same age group. This leads to a change of personality with a different psychological effect in the mind of a girl and a boy. At a very young age the girl is taught to take care of a doll that furthers her maternal instinct of caring towards a child. She is expected to help her mother in the household chores while if a boy helps, he is seen as a miracle.

In the story, Ismat Chughtai highlights the boundaries inside which a woman is kept. She is at the mercy of her husband, and later her family members. Like many other women, Gaiinda loses her individuality and becomes a mere widow where these words come from the society she lives in. She is a widow and a woman, and society does not let her forget this even for a passing second where she is constantly retold about her place in the household.

“When a girl’s husband is dead, who will she deck herself up for?” Gaiinda said stoically. ‘A wife wears sindoor or bangles for her husband only’ (“Gaiinda” 12). Words like

such come from her with utmost sincerity. She imbibes what she is told and what she hears, which becomes natural for her. Chughtai brings irony in the story through the narrator's voice where she says, "She mouthed the cliché as though she believed in it firmly" ("Gainda" 12).

Chughtai makes the reader aware of the world where a woman exists only for her husband. She adorns her for the sole purpose of looking beautiful to her husband, and covers her face with a veil for the outside world.

After a brief tête-à-tête we began to play our favourite game – dulhan-dulhan. Gainda drew her smelly red dupatta over her face and sat huddled like a real bride. I lifted the veil gently and had a glimpse of her. Gainda's round face turned crimson as a fresh wave of blood coursed through her veins. Her eyelids fluttered uncontrollably, and she could barely stop herself from bursting into laughter. ("Gainda" 10)

The games that these youngsters play, carries a lot of stereotypical concepts mixed together in their understanding of life. Playing the game of brides and acting accordingly says a lot about the gendered roles that society fixes inside the mind of each and everyone. A bride is expected to blush and shy away, and both Gainda and the narrator replicate the expected emotions. Although it sounds like a child play with no consequences, it seems like a result of the age old stereotypes finding an outlet. Another instance of attributing behaviours to people based on gender becomes visible in the following lines: "It was a miracle that I did not faint from the shock. Slap Bhaiya! Bhaiya, who was feared by everyone in the house. How did she dare to slap him? I was ready to bolt as I thought Bhaiya would now strangle her to death" (Chughtai 15).

The narrator is out of her wits when she sees Gainda slapping Bhaiya out of passion. According to her, it would have been the end if someone else would have done it, but it did not

provoke Bhaiya when he was leaning in towards Gainda, and on the contrary, he kissed her. The act was incomprehensible for the narrator.

It exhibits the well established roots of conventional norms that make the viewer puzzled. Had it been a woman getting slapped, it wouldn't have mattered much for the same viewer. So normalized is domestic violence that people start viewing them as ordinary. There seems nothing new when a woman faces domestic violence, but when tables are turned, it becomes a matter of concern. A man getting beaten by a woman raises eyebrows, but if it is the other way round, it is seen as a common occurrence.

Gender norms view Nawab as the head of the family who is expected to marry and bear a child in Ismat's story "The Quilt". He accepts the norms of society and marries Begum. Due to his indifference, he shows no care to her. The later part of the story breaks away from these stereotypical views. "One did not know when Begum Jan's life began – whether it was when she committed the mistake of being born or when she came to the Nawab's house as his bride, climbed the four-poster bed and started counting her days" ("The Quilt" 21). Begum Jan finds her liberation and will to live. She blossoms like a young flower. Rabbu and Begum Jan change the course of their lives. Rabbu is loyal to her master, and Begum is dependent on Rabbu. Ismat goes past the conservative boundaries to uncover the matters hidden inside the quilt. The idea of hiding behind the veil is revisited. The narrator in "The Quilt" is a young girl who is not allowed to play with boys. She is asked to play with dolls as Begum Jan offers it to her as a gift. Chughtai shows her pubescent narrator capable of experiencing sexuality and sexual desire. The narrator responds if Begum Jan still thought that she was a child.

In "Touch-me-not", Bhabi Jan is solely concerned with the duty of bearing a child. Her life in the house depends on her child. Even her marriage would not last if it is not a son. The

gender norms view women as child bearers and treat them accordingly. She is only expected to bear children, do household chores and look pretty. "Finding his beautiful, dolllike bride turning into a permanently sick woman, Bhaijan began to lose interest in her"

("Touch-me-not" 90). Amma in "Roots" had ten children, which says a lot about the family size in the time when Ismat wrote this story. Women are only concerned with child bearing and considered inferior to men.

Simone de Beauvoir explores the treatment of female subjects in her works where it is evident that they are considered impractical thus, not taken seriously. On the contrary the male subjects are given importance and asked for advice. Chughtai symbolically implores the society to make changes using such narratives. She serves her best when it comes to providing humour and wit in subject matters, as serious as this.

Female Exploitation

The exploitation that Gainda faces is two-fold. Firstly she is oppressed as a woman in the household and secondly she is oppressed as a widow, without a social standing. She is a servant who is treated with utmost disrespect by the members of the family. Bahu humiliates her and keeps an eye on her, whenever she goes out to play with the narrator: "what are you doing here? Go, warm the iron,' she growled. Gainda tried to slink away quietly, but Bahu leapt and caught her" ("Gainda" 13).

When the narrator asks Gainda about the happenings with Bhaiya, Gainda gives her the details, but due to her tender age, the narrator is unable to make a head or a toe out of it. She says, "Gainda was a treasure-trove of such events" and explains that it is not just the first time that

something like this has happened. She knows life more than the narrator, and even after facing situations like such, she is not afraid of loving and taking care of others.

"She was beaten to a pulp and abandoned without food. She survived somehow" (Chughtai 13). After Gainda gives birth to a child, she is mistreated and left to starve. She is abandoned whereas, no fingers are pointed at Bhaiya who is left off the hook and sent to Delhi. She is maltreated to such an extent that when she hears people approaching, fear sets in her eyes. A young mother who was once a playful child is transformed into a docile worker filled with terror of approaching footsteps. The narrator remarks, "Gainda was busy with some chores. Startled by my footsteps, she quickly covered herself and looked at me with fear in her eyes" ("Gainda" 17).

The psychological effect of all the beatings turns her into a distrustful person who is unwilling to confide. She is not ready to trust the narrator who used to be her playmate, and instead waits to find compassion in her eyes before trusting her child to her. Chughtai portrays the social stereotypes that let Bhaiya leave, and turn towards Gainda for all the answers. It is evident that he faces no consequences, even after exploiting a young woman. She criticizes the society that continues to permit men to claim and misuse their power over females. Chughtai brings to light the matters of major concern related to women and the exploitation in different spheres of life that she faces.

It is not just the men in the family, but women also exploit Gainda. Bahu treats her badly and even humiliates her in front of others. She does not allow Gainda a minute of peace. She knows that Gainda is a child but she does not cut her any slack. She beats Gainda when she gets pregnant even after knowing the pain of giving birth.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar highlight in their work that the narratives by male writers are considered to be superior. They are considered as the leaders of the human race who

provide their meaningful insights into the lives of women and about female individuality through their writings. (Gilbert and Gubar)

“Having married Begum Jan, he tucked her away in the house with his other possessions and promptly forgot her” (“The Quilt” 21). Nawab brings Begum in his life and hides her away inside the walls of his house. She is seen as a possession and objectified.

It becomes an important call for women to come forth and dismantle these prejudices. Ismat Chughtai is one such writer who uses her undaunted pen to break free from these shackles. Gaiya shows her unconditional love for Bhaiya and keeping aside the stereotypes of society; she bears a child and treats it with utmost sincerity even when her own family is against it.

Child Bearing and Associated Stereotypes

The conventional image of a woman in a society is defined by her male preservers. She is a daughter, a sister, a wife or a mother. The major responsibility of a woman is seen as a nurturer. She is set on a pedestal from where she conducts sacrifices. She needs to bear children and if possible, a son. Her treatment in her in-laws' house depends on the gender of the child she bears. Without a son, she is considered useless. Chughtai reveals the truths of life through her narratives that are usually silenced behind norms considering them natural. "When Bahu had had that coal-black baby who died a few days after birth, how they had sung and danced! Tons of ghee and jaggery had been forced down her gullet" (Chughtai 18). For society, a widow bearing a child is unnatural. They see her as an identity which is associated with a man. Without him, she loses her individuality. Her sexuality is oppressed and she is made to live a life of a saint.

Gainda breaks free from this oppressive boulder and finds her passion in Bhaiya. She gives her heart and soul to their relationship, but Bhaiya, on the contrary, leaves. Gainda is maltreated again and again, but against all odds, she gives birth to a child. "Then, this tiny Lallu was born. He had just two shirts to beat the severe cold with, and cried all night long. Bahu cursed him, saying, 'Why didn't he die and leave them in peace.'" ("Gainda" 18).

Society and her family does not accept Gainda and her child, he is seen as a child born due to mistake in part of Gainda, even when Bhaiya was equally responsible for it. Even after so many struggles and considering that Gainda was immature to bear a child, she gives birth. The young mother feeds her baby and cares for him, even when the whole world stands against it. She loves it unconditionally and accepts her fate. Her maternal instincts grow bigger than her own and she becomes the epitome of motherly love.

Similar is the case with Bhabi Jan who needs to bear a child so that she can have a place in the household. According to the narrator, "Giving birth is as easy a job for women as getting on or off the train is for Bhaijan. After all, this is not something to be ashamed of" ("Touch-me-not" 93).

At the end of the novel we become aware of Bhabi Jan's impending doom: "The unborn child got cold feet and wilted away before its entry into the world. My flower-like Bhabijan felt so unnerved after witnessing the bizarre delivery in the train that she had a miscarriage once again" ("Touch-me-not" 94). It is her third miscarriage that decides her future and Ismat highlights this foundation fixed for women throughout the world.

Female Sexuality

Ismat Chughtai talks about female sexuality without mincing words. Her fearless and strong works highlight the female heroines who fight their daily battles and shape their lives according to them. They do not go down without putting up a fight, and in their fierce course of action, provide a critique and a lesson to the struggling females around the world. She uses the storyline

in such a manner that it can be perceived without giving out every detail of an incident. The suggestive manner in which she writes is commendable.

Ismat Chughtai writes about sexuality from its early phase of awakening to adulthood where it achieves maturity. She touches upon the topic of fundamental urges through the story's protagonist Gainda. She is a young girl, married early and knows about sexuality and urges. She says "I tried to be coy like her. For hours together we would talk about marriage and feel bashful" (Chughtai 13).

She and the narrator talk about strange happenings at length and Gainda describes her events that the narrator is unable to understand. "How did Gainda walk? With a supple gait as though she had not a bone in her body", both the narrator and Gainda are aware of self. The narrator wishes to walk and act like Gainda. The way she blushes, acts coy and gets treated appeals to the narrator.

Manto writes about Gainda that the protagonist shows the different sides of a woman. She is "purged of all artifice" and her actions become the epitome of the "tender nature of a woman" (Manto 205).

In "Lihaaf" (The Quilt), the idea of female sexuality has been highlighted. Begum Jan is a 'new woman' who is liberated from the idea of marriage. She is seen as a woman who knows her needs and acts accordingly. She is not stuck on Nawab and accepts her life. She does what she could, to get her life on track. Although the story makes no direct references to female relationships, it is suggestive in nature. It also depicts the lesbian relationship between

Begum Jan and Rabbu. Begum Jan's "persistent itch" acts as the symbol of sexual needs that Begum Jan wishes to fulfill.

Feminine Space

“Gainda” starts with a reclamation of gender spaces that is fixed for women:

‘This is our shack,’ Gainda and I told ourselves as we crawled into the dense shrubbery. Sitting on our haunches, we began to tidy up the ground with both hands. In a little while we were squatting on the smooth floor of the shack without a care in the world. (“Gainda” 10)

A world of their own, where they can share beliefs, emotions, and feelings. A space they can call their own, when no other is available to them. These spaces act as an expressive zone where deepest feelings are acknowledged and revealed. The narrator and Gainda create a bond in this space away from societal differences. No matter how impartial the world seems, this space merges them into understanding each other better. The narrator says, “Gainda peered into my eyes searching for something. She seemed reassured; as though she had found whatever she was looking for” (“Gainda” 18).

The bond between Gainda and the narrator is a deep one, but after the narrator returns, she sees how the picture has changed. Gainda was brutally beaten and starved for days, which led her to view anyone approaching as a threat. As she hears the footsteps of the narrator her countenance changes completely. It is visible that she trusts no one. As the narrator continues to talk to her and show her sympathies towards Lallu, Gainda’s child, her passion returns. She looks at the narrator’s eyes and finds her long lost friend in her. She regains her trust and inside their feminine space, both are once again intermingled in a kind of understanding that no outsider could enter or break.

She peers into the eyes of the narrator in search of acceptance. She wishes to be accepted and in the narrator she finds it. She finds a person to go to, a person to share her feelings with, a person to call her own, in her space. She wanted to see her kind and comforting eyes for

solace and familiarity, the warmth that she was deprived of, for almost two years. The women's spaces are not limited to that of the protagonist, but they also extend towards minor characters like Bahu and Shaikhani who share their own feminine space.

Amma in "Roots" reclaims her space when she decides to stay. Her family leaves for Pakistan, and although she does not want them to leave, she does not stop them from making their own decisions. She remembers all the happy and sad moments of her life inside that house. "As she turned to the room in front, her heart came to her mouth. It was here that the ghunghat was lifted from the moon-like face of the young and timorous bride who had surrendered her life to her husband. In the room on the other side, her eldest daughter had been born, whose memory pierced through her heart like lightning" ("Roots" 184).

Samina is another important figure who reclaims her space away from religious boundaries. She knows what she wants, and fights for it. She goes against her family to marry a Hindu boy who she loves. She writes in the letter to her parents: "we don't have any religion. All religions are gifts from that Supreme Being who is called Bhagwan or God. You know him only as Khuda, but we know of his thousand other names" ("Sacred Duty" 130).

Elaine Showalter in her work describes the need for feminist writings, where the focus not only remains on her writing about the female body, but also extends to the psychological realms (Showalter 194). The focus further shifts into developing a language that is woman centric so as to create a space inside the androcentric discourse and reshape it. Ismat Chughtai touches upon these matters and portrays the different characters in her work so as to explore such spaces and create new ones in the mind of her readers.

Dual Suppression and Mistreatment

The treatment that Gainda faces is something that millions of women face throughout the world every day. It is not just a single incident, but it extends worldwide. Even after suffering at the hands of Bhaiya and Bahu, it is Gainda who becomes the container of their abuses.

Biwi says, “I sent him off to Delhi immediately. A studious boy ... these low-caste bitches!

Trap ... the nobles” (Chughtai 17).

When the narrator meets Gainda after two years, they discuss the happenings and both being gullible to the hypocrisy, are unable to perceive them. Narrator questions Bhaiya being sent off, whereas Gainda is still fixated on her dreams of Bhaiya’s return.

I sat on the gunny sack with the baby in my lap as Gainda recounted a hundred thousand ‘strange’ happenings. How she was beaten up for months together! Gainda, hardly fourteen or fifteen, did not herself understand many things.

How could she explain them to me? We stopped invariably with, ‘How?’, ‘Why?’, ‘How strange!’. (Chughtai 18)

No matter what comes, Gainda faces all kinds of exploitations for her child. Ismat questions the society for its victim blaming mentality where a woman is raped, beaten and left despondent. She is neither asked anything, nor given a chance to tell her side of the story. She is given the stamp of a wretched woman without confirming the course of events that led to it.

“Having married Begum Jan, he tucked her away in the house with his other possessions and promptly forgot her” (“The Quilt” 21). Nawab acts as the patriarchal head of the family. Even when he is uninterested in marriage, he does it for the sake of his social standing. He shows no interest in the beautiful Begum. He keeps her inside the house while he goes around having a good time with young boys. She yearns for his love and feels neglected.

Early Widowhood and Belief System

Since women are not given education, and married early, they become dependent on others. Thus, when the old husband after a child marriage dies, early widowhood sets in. Early widowhood leads a woman to live her life on the mercy of others. Gainda is one such case of a child widow who works as a maid in the narrator's house. Although she does not understand the depth of relationships like marriage, she is bound to act like a widow, even when she had minor meaningful interactions with her late husband. The narrator says, "Gainda's husband had died during the rainy season. The whole household was drowned in lamentations. Gainda's glass bangles were smashed and she cried her heart out" ("Gainda" 12).

Despite the fact that Gainda was a widow, she was still a child who was gullible. She accepts what she is told even if she does not believe it. It becomes her reality and belief system, but since she is too young; she is unable to make firm decisions. She lives a simple life and acts like she is told, "'who should a widow dress herself for?' Gainda asked philosophically" ("Gainda" 11). She further wishes to dress and adorn herself even if she has to go against what she has been told. "Like a widow longing for sindoor, Gainda gazed at it wistfully" ("Gainda" 12).

In a way, Gainda explores her identity without the foundations that society sets for her. Even as a game, she holds on to her desires, knowing that she would be reprimanded if caught. "Bahu leapt and caught her by her plaits. 'And how dare you braid your hair and make the parting?'" ("Gainda" 13).

Bahu is fixated on the social norms that do not allow a widow to make a parting in the hair, or adorn herself. She is not worried by Gainda's childhood, while her only concern remains what would the society say if they happen to see Gainda, a widow in such a state.

Universality of Ismat's Themes

Ismat Chughtai writes in a manner that every person can understand what it means. She writes tales of everyday life highlighting specific instances. Her works show a major concern for women and issues related to them. But, as one may think, these ideas are not limited to women, but they are universal. The cause and effect are both merged inside a single tale that only needs to be entangled and looked upon.

Ismat Chughtai, through the story, also reveals what goes on inside the head of a child who is deprived of familial love and attention. She is unable to confide in an adult or discuss her feelings, conveying the life of a household when children feel lonely and lack a guide in life. They cannot talk to their parents due to a fear of being scolded. They confide in their friends of the same age which might further lead to a misunderstanding or passing on of wrong information.

I sat there lost in thought – first with eyes closed and then, with eyes wide open. But I could not make head or tail of it. Why didn't I understand such a lot of things? In the desolate, hot afternoon I waged a weary struggle to unravel strange riddles but could not. My eyes brimmed over with tears as though someone had beaten me severely. (Chughtai 15)

The narrator says, "who was there to share my hurt? Bhaiya never spared a thought for me, Amma never cuddled me. The result – I became very obstinate. Because of this sense of deprivation, I made everyone my enemy" ("Gainda" 15). The feelings that the narrator goes through seem normal on the surface, but on understanding them on a deeper level, one can

understand her deprivation. Instead of dismissing her questions, no one bothers to make her understand or even give her direction. She is led astray and learns life the hard way.

“The little mother took care of him, though rather clumsily” (“Gainda” 19). Chughtai writes with a heartfelt emotion that makes the tale true to life. We pity her state but notice the young mother’s gaze fixed on the horizon. Her eyes still sparkle, she still laughs and smiles after all that she has endured. She does not understand it, but she hopes for the best. She does not make any promises and lives her reality.

She does not hate anyone and neither does she feel cheated. On the other hand, she still yearns for the man that left her. She is simple and does not understand the reasons just like the narrator. All she does is wait and hope that maybe one day Bhaiya would return with a red vest for Lallu and accept their love.

The importance of home and family is a recurring theme in “Roots”. Amma wishes to keep her family together. The loss of identity and confusion that revolves around the characters is evident. Bhabi Jan shows the section of women who are suppressed in their households and only treated better when they get pregnant, and that too, only for a male child. Ismat Chughtai covers countless social issues in a single story. These issues come together to solidify stereotypes inside a social setting. It becomes important to address these issues that many women throughout the globe face on a daily basis.

Works Cited

1. Chughtai, Ismat. “Gainda.” *Lifting the Veil*. Translated by M. Asaduddin, introduction by Kamila Shamsie, Penguin Books, 2018, pp. 10-19.
2. Chughtai, Ismat. “Mahfil Interviews ISMAT CHUGHTAI.” *Mahfil*, vol. 8, 1972, pp. 169–88.
3. Chughtai, Ismat. “Roots.” *Lifting the Veil*. Translated by M. Asaduddin, introduction by Kamila Shamsie, Penguin Books, 2018, pp. 177-186.

4. Chughtai, Ismat. "Sacred Duty." *Lifting the Veil*. Translated by M. Asaduddin, introduction by Kamila Shamsie, Penguin Books, 2018, pp. 119-130.
5. Chughtai, Ismat. "The Quilt." *Lifting the Veil*. Translated by M. Asaduddin, introduction by Kamila Shamsie, Penguin Books, 2018, pp. 20-28.
6. Chughtai, Ismat. "Touch-me-not." *Lifting the Veil*. Translated by M. Asaduddin, introduction by Kamila Shamsie, Penguin Books, 2018, pp. 90-94.
7. Chughtai, Ismat. *Lifting the Veil*. Translated by M. Asaduddin, introduction by Kamila Shamsie, Penguin Books, 2018.
8. Gilbert, Sandra, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. First Edition, Yale University Press, 1979.
9. Khan, Sadia "The 'Woman' Question: Representation of Women in Ismat Chughtai's Select Short Stories." *An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2016, pp. 89-100.
10. Manto, Saadat Hasan. "Ismat Chughtai." *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, 2001, pp. 201-215.
11. Naqvi, Tahira. *Ismat Chughtai—A Tribute*. 1993, pp. 37-42.
12. Negi, Manjulaa. *Ismat Chughtai: A Fearless Voice (Rupa Charitavali S.)*. Rupa Publications India, 2003.

Chapter III

Conclusion

Instead of keeping women on the pedestal of a mother who is expected to sacrifice her happiness for that of her family and others, she should be seen as an individual with her own set of desires and expectations. Even after the upheaval of feminist movements throughout the world, there still remain the fragments of conventional ideas stuck inside the minds of people.

Female sexuality is still talked about in hushed tones in many areas of the world. Hiding these issues in the underbelly does not remove these differences. It thus becomes important for female writers to come forward and bring these issues to light.

Elaine Showalter, the influential American feminist talks about modes of examination of feminist works. She calls for feminist writings and feminist readings, to liberate women from the patriarchal discourse that renders them a secondary position. Gynocriticism provides them the opportunity to write their own narratives, about their bodies, about their feelings, about their lives and most importantly about experiences that are shared inside these spaces that inspire and persuade women to achieve their liberation, be it physical or psychological.

She talks about the wilderness that feminist writers are exploring like Virginia Woolf and Adrienne Rich. She also emphasizes the idea of making this wilderness a home for the female writers, a space that was originally phallogocentric. (Showalter 180)

Showalter further implores the writers of the day to create a world that provides equality to the females who have been suffering over these decades. She also wishes to reach a destination where these differences are rejected and a common ground is formed.

Simone de Beauvoir, the French feminist icon who wrote “The Second Sex” addresses the issues of females through her work. She argues about the role of women, and the expectations attached to their existence. She uses her narrative to question why women accept it as a natural course of life. Through her work she encourages women to stand up for themselves and open their eyes to the possibilities of the world.

Ismat Chughtai explores the vistas of lives of women who suffer regularly. The issues of oppressive domesticity, patriarchal domination, gendered prejudices, and exploitation stand prominent and call attention to the problems in the contemporary world. Just because the work is from the twentieth century does not mean that the problems are recent, on the contrary, it

indicates how long it took the female writers to bring such matters to the foreground. Ismat Chughtai critiques the society in which she lives after observing the patterns that constantly considers women as the second sex.

She gives a voice to the females who have been muted through societal restraints. She takes the tales from her own household and the society that she lives in, which can be seen as a microscopic narrative of the major occurrences. She crafts women in such a manner that their actions critique the prejudices and questions the hypocrisy of patriarchal moulds that allow men to be at liberty to employ their power over women and shackle them in familial responsibilities. The realism that she brings in her writings acts as a commentary on the contemporary world. The writings by Ismat Chughtai, thus act as mirror to society and her objective storytelling highlights the core problems. It becomes important for such narratives to be read with a broad mind instead of confining it as a feminist text. These issues directly or indirectly have an effect on everyone and that is why they need to be rectified by us together.

Through “Gainda” the writer liberates Gainda in the face of defeat even when her last thread of hope is taken away from her. In “Lihaaf” we see the liberation of a woman in her feminine space, away from all stereotypes. “Sacred Duty” shows us how a single instance has a backdrop of a millennium long societal structures that went on from its tiniest miniscule into being deeply enrooting for the times to come. In “Roots”, reclamation of space occurs and identity questions are highlighted by Chughtai, whereas in “Touch-me-not”, these spaces suppress women into following fixed patterns.

We see the playfulness of childhood questioning the hypocrisy of adults. It is visible how certain changes take place simultaneously as a person grows and how finely engrained these structures seem that tend to mould the person to act civilly. He learns to hide behind the walls to commit acts of violence, passion or play pretend. It becomes the veil that keeps these

secrets hidden, that Ismat Chughtai tries to uncover. No wonder this veil seems so heavy to lift, as she faced trial on charges of obscenity in her attempt to reveal what might be called the profanities of a civil life.

Department of English(Doon University)

Works Cited

1. Beauvoir, Simone de. *Extracts From: The Second Sex*. Vintage Feminism Short Edition, Vintage, 2022.
2. Showalter, Elaine. "Feminist criticism in the wilderness." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1981, pp. 179-205.

Department of English (Doon University)

Bibliography

Primary Source

1. Chughtai, Ismat. *Lifting the Veil*. Translated by M. Asaduddin, introduction by Kamila Shamsie, Penguin Books, 2018.

Secondary Sources

1. Akhtar, Javed, and Humayun Zafar Zaidi. "Progressive Writers' Movement in Urdu Literature." *Indian Literature*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2006, pp. 62-140.
2. Batra, Kanika. "The Home, the Veil and the World: Reading Ismat Chughtai towards a 'progressive' History of the Indian Women's Movement." *Feminist Review*, no. 95, 2010, pp. 27-44.
3. Beauvoir, Simone de. *Extracts From: The Second Sex*. Vintage Feminism Short Edition, Vintage, 2022.
4. Chughtai, Ismat. "Mahfil Interviews ISMAT CHUGHTAI." *Mahfil*, vol. 8, 1972, pp. 169-88.
5. Gilbert, Sandra, and Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic*. First Edition, Yale University Press, 1979.
6. Grace, Daphne. "Subversion, Seduction and Shame: India." *The Woman in the Muslim Mask: Veiling and Identity in Postcolonial Literature*, Pluto Press, 2004, pp. 160-201.
7. Khan, Sadia "The 'Woman' Question: Representation of Women in Ismat Chughtai's Select Short Stories." *An International Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in English*, vol. 1, no. 3, 2016, pp. 89-100.

8. Kiran, Sobia. "An Analysis of Lifting the Veil (A Collection of Short Stories) By Ismat Chughtai." *Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2016, pp. 51-60.
9. Latif, Khalid. "ISMAT CHUGHTAI." *Mahfil*, vol. 8, no. 2/3, 1972, pp. 94-189.
10. Manto, Saadat Hasan. "Ismat Chughtai." *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, 2001, pp. 201-215.
11. Naqvi, Tahira. *Ismat Chughtai—A Tribute*. 1993, pp. 37-42.
12. Negi, Manjulaa. *Ismat Chughtai: A Fearless Voice (Rupa Charitavali S.)*. Rupa Publications India, 2003.
13. Patel, Geeta. "An Uncivil Woman: Ismat Chughtai." *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, 2001.
14. Showalter, Elaine. "Feminist criticism in the wilderness." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1981, pp. 179-205.

Department of English(Doon University)