



Ismat Chughtai and Her Feminine World

DR. Meenu Dubey

Associate Professor- Dept. Of English Raja Mohan Girls P.G. College Faizabad (U.P.), India

Received- 02.11.2018, Revised- 10.11.2018, Accepted- 15.11.2018 E-mail: aaryart2013@gmail.com

Abstract: *Ismat Chughtai is one of the most prominent and debated writers of Urdu Literature/. Unlike her eminent contemporaries Saadat Hasan Manto, Krishen Chander and Rajinder Singh Bedi, she chose to explore the areas that were taboos in Indian Muslim Society. She had the mind of a rebel, a tongue of a woman and the sensibility of an artist. (Narang. 133) She, as an active member of Progressive Writers Association, wrote much a head of her times. As an eminent Urdu Writer, Chughtai is chiefly known for her indomitable spirit and a fierce feminist ideology. Her works became an epitome for revolutionary aspect of feminisms. She explored feminine sexuality along with middle class gentility. She became a crusader, who sowed the seed of feminism with depth of psychological insight in the world of women.*

Key Words: Indomitable Spirit, Feminist ideology, Middle class gentility, Domesticity, Chauvinist world view.

This paper shall explore and interpret some of the selected short stories and other works of Ismat Chughtai, which bear themes of marriage, subjugation and confinement of women in the name of domesticity. Through this paper, I wish to focus upon various facts of gender discrimination, which are prevalent even in the current hi-tech society, as she highlighted the pitiable condition of women in domestic circumstances exploitation of women through marriage institution became relevant issue in the works of Ismat Chughtai. In the name of marriage, a women live life of endless drudgery and this subjugation became the endless pain of the works of this leading and prominent Urdu writer, who is rebellions, intellectual, fearless, outspoken and above all a feminist by her soul, who examined the inequitable distribution of political social and economic power between the male female world, she bears hesitation, when she disclaims marriage as a social obligation meant for security and becomes ultimate destiny for women. She emphasized for women that they have to realised that they are also sharing the right of liberated soul, who can break the right of liberated soul, who can break the shackles of an oppressive corrupt infra-structure of marriage bond and add the new meaning to the relationships and the responsibilities of women with male world.

Corresponding Author

In her works Chughtai explained the Indian Muslim females space and sexuality within male Chauvinist world view. She created bold female protagonist from her voiced personal experiences and tried to portray their particular resistance against the male counter parts. Chughtai concerns in a milieu that could never allow female sexuality and female stance to find room in conservative society. She is primarily concerned with the struggle of women to find out the person hood and identity in oppressive scenario of patriarchal set up of society and culture. A major factor in suppressing the identity of women is their confinement to the domestic space and their assigned duty of nurturing the whole family. "The situation of women is that she a free and autonomous being like all creatures never the less finds herself living in a world, where men compel her to assume the status of the other." (Beauvair, P. 29)

In her The Rock Chughtai employs a narrator, a young sister of Bhaiya, who narrates the story of her brother's many marriages. This story depicts the life of young ladies, who are warmly welcomed in their husbands house leaving behind their maternal comfort, where they loose their independence, identity and respect. This work justifies Chughtai's awareness towards the unequal status of women. But noticeable feature is that her



protagonists do not become complacent with the situation and revolt within the space that they have. Unlike Ibsen's Nora of Doll's House, they don't slam door on their husband's face but choose to fight silently.

In *The Rock*, the narrator sometimes becomes the child narrator and sometimes adult narrator, when she narrates the story as a child she took the side of her brother but she realised the misogynist behavior of her brother, as an adult narrator.

Ismat Chughtai brilliantly brings out the gender discrimination prevalent in our society and woman's pitiable condition in it. While she gives poignant portrayals of women victims in the patriarchal set-up, she also projects the complexities involved in the oppression and exploitation of women in marriage. The men certainly have all the freedom to live life as they wish even after marriage, with no social or moral restrictions cast on them, whereas women virtually get imprisoned in the name of marriage with complete denial of their being, their self, their basic humanity. All the stories discussed above reveal, how marriage confines women to endless drudgery and subjugation and yet even women think that marriage is the only destiny for women, and women themselves, as mothers, mothers-in-law or sisters-in-law, become agents of suppression of other women. The ingrained mental attitude of society needs to be changed. Regarding marriage as an important social obligation and only a means of security and convenience needs to be reassessed and the internalisation of social taboos of marriage being the ultimate destiny for women needs to be done away with. The woman, who too has internalised these societal obligations, has to dispel her illusions and emerge as a New Woman, a liberated soul, who breaks the shackles of an oppressive power structure of society and understands the truth of her own real self, her own existence.

Post-colonial Indian women authors, had not only exhorted an exposition of the patriarchal

ideologies and their oppressive tendencies towards feminist growth and expression, but had also envisioned ways of counteracting those attitudes. Varying ideal of feminist emancipation in relation to the roles that communities play in adding or in obstructing feminist freedom.

Therefore this paper contributes culturally and historically grounded Indian feminism.

Ismat Chughtai envisions outside's communities that rejects hierarchized gendered ideologies. These communities are created and sustained by men and women, who embrace mutually inter dependent andocentric identities that render them complete and whole.

Chughtai's women embrace mutually inter dependent andocentric identities that render her complete and whole thus they access to freedom, not in an opposition to men but to the internalized patriarchs attitudes in both men and women. It is through the un-demanding male-female relations that do not force servitude on women as a patriarchal society.

In *The Heart Breaks*, free, the youthful vital, and exuberant Bua is destroyed, body and spirit, when she submits to the so-called reforming control of the traditional family.

In contrast, the rebellious Qudsia and Shabir by isolating themselves from the traditional community are able to find a new, fulfilling life that also pave the way to prevent the depths of women like Bua. But Chughtai's vision of feminist utopia, although, it preserves the identity and happiness of the oppressed subjects, is not conspicuously transformative as far as, the patriarchs structure is concerned. What Shabir and Qudsia are able to achieve, is a blissful separatist retreat from the world, an individually stic and subjective feminist utopia that does not offer any synthesis of socially and individually within the normative community.

The single image that emerges of the women character depicted in the story of Ismat Chughtai *The Silent Women*, derided abused, denied of her individual aspirations and the callously



neglected, whatever her predicament, she is a victim of a social order in which she is expected to be a model of virtues while being kept firmly under the male control.

Her weapon of resistance, is the passive shield of silence. It is noteworthy, that subtlety, is the hallmark of protest, seems to be their creative outlet.

Though, Ismat Chughtai is one of the major writers of the progressive writers association, but her story *Lihaaf* (The Quilt) is controversial. The Story "Chouthi Ka Jora, (The Wedding Shroud) translated with original Urdu title by Safiya Siddiqui, is a far more poignant depiction of the plight of the unnamed girl for whom in a conservative milieu finding a suitable bridegroom, is a matter of destiny. Kubra is the unmarried girl in the story whose mother Bi-Amma is a seamstress. It's a powerful story, which is a critique of marriage dowry and other patriarchal nations of society. The title itself is very significant. It suggests the ultimate end of Kubra, the protagonist who observes and desires to get married, fails to materialize and she dies undernourished underfed and disappointed. Kubra, elder daughter of the family, holds the pivotal position in the story. The family, consisting of the mother and two daughters with sad demise of father, can barely make both ends meet. Her mother is a skillful seamstress, who stitches wedding suits and shrouds, whose single concern is marriage of Kubra. She stitches wedding suits for Kubra with expected arrival of wedding of Kubra:

Every afternoon after lunch, Amabi settles down on the couch in the *sehdari*, opens her sewing box and scatters about her a colourful assay of shippets. When Amabi lifts tiny gilded flowerets from the sewing box with her small, soft - skinned hands, her drooping face suddenly lights up with a strange Luminescence (93)

Bi-Amma painstakingly cuts and sews the *jora* or dress that symbolizes the consummation of a marriage but the irony is that her own daughter is growing old without any offer of marriage.

Women world is always expected

to "make sacrifices, adjust and accommodate claims of religion" and "morality" and "suppress their personal claims" (Jain 9) As for as, their personal agenda is concerned, they had been pushed to the margins of social set up. Male world is regarded as the norm he holds the central position, from which women world is mere a departure. "Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; She is not regarded as an autonomous being (Beauvoir, 16) Society and culture both set women as secondary gender and whole series of feminine characteristics such as sweetness, modesty, subservience, humility have been developed and all women are socially and culturally conditioned into conforming to these characteristics. As one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (Beauvoir, 295) Domestic drudgery of women in their married life recorded by Chughtai with great sensitivity. She took all precautions for the delineation of female resistance for her search of identity in male modulated society. Unlike her contemporaries, she chose to portray themes and ideas that were never extempore ever. She handled them that befitted the unfortunate women, who were either wives or mothers.

"Patriarchal Suppression" imposes "certain social standards of femininity on all biological women" in order to prove that these "Standards for Femininity" are natural. As a result a woman who does not conform to the prescribed standards is considered "unfeminine" and therefore "unnatural" to convince women believe that there is such a thing as "essence of femaleness called femininity". Serves the interests of Patriarchy (Moi 209) Potential pen of Chughtai questioned fearlessly the norms of patriarchal society." The Grandame of Urdu fiction, has made it possible for a large number of people to relish the favour of his writings which provide food for thought and lead the women on a remarkable journey of self-awareness (Naqui XXVII), her *prima facie*, is to highlight the reality of the highly orthodox and dogmatic society that dehumanized women and assigns for her a marginal position in the patriarchal



set up of society.

REFERENCES

1. Chughtai, Ismat : The Quilt and other Stories Trans. Tahira Naqui and Syeda S. Hameed. New York: Sheep Nadow, 1994.
2. Flemmings, Leslie A Qut of the Tenana: New Translations of Ismat Chughtai's Works <http://www.understudies.com/pdf/1022zenanapdf> (web 15 July 2014)
3. Kotoria Megha, "Woman and Sexuality: Gender Class Interface in Selected Short Stories of Ismat Chughtai" <http://www.thecriterion.com/V2/n4Negha.pdf> (Web 15 July 2014)
4. Narang. Gopi Chand, Major Trends in Urdu Short Story, "Urdu Language and Literature: Critical Perspectives, New Delhi, Sterling 1991, 127-47 (Statement of AI-e-Ahmad Quoted on Pg. 133.)
5. Naqvi Tahira, Intioduction A Chughtai Collection by Ismat Chughtai Translation and editing VII-XXII, The Quit and The Other Stories. The Heart Breaks Free and The wild one, 1990-1993.
6. Asoduddin Mohammad, "Short stories and sketches" Ismat Chughtai: Monograph in the Makers of Indian Literature Series. New Delhi: Sahitya Academi 1999, 75-113. Print.
7. Beauvoir, Simone De The Second Sex. Tram and ed. H.M. Parshley. 1994. Harmonds worth: Penguin 1982 Print (Pg. 16.)
8. Chughtai Ismat, A Chughtai Collection, Tans. Tahira Naqvi and Syeda S. Hameed New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2004. Print Rpt. Of the Quilt and other Stories The Heart Breaks Free and The wild one, 1990, 1993.
9. Moi, Toril "Feminist Literary Criticism, "Modern Literary Theory: A Comprative Introduction Ed. Ann Jefferson and David Robey. 1982 London : B. T. Batsferd 1986 2041-221 Print.
10. Jain, Jasbir. Preface, Indian Feminisms, Ed. Jasbir Jain and Avdhesh Kumar Singh New Delhi: Creative 2001. 9-11 Print.
