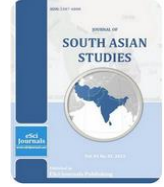




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AN ANALYSIS OF LIFTING THE VEIL (A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES) BY ISMAT CHUGHTAI

Sobia Kiran*

Department of English, Lahore College for Women University, Lahore, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT

The paper aims to trace feminist elements in the short stories of Ismat Chughtai, a great Indian writer. The paper also aims to analyse stories by Ismat Chughtai comparing them in style, content and technique with the works of her contemporary European writers. As she started her literary career as a translator of European writers, the influence is quite evident. The paper will highlight the feminist elements in her stories. There is disagreement within the ranks of feminist writers. Therefore, we find writers like Dorothy Richardson, Jean Rhys and Ismat avoiding to be called feminists. But, the very fact that she was a woman and was writing from the female perspective, discussing social and economic problems faced by women as housewives, maids, working women, beloveds, students or worn out hags, cannot be ignored. As far as raising consciousness, an essential part of the feminist activism is concerned, Ismat's approach is feminist. We find not only the development of female consciousness in her works but also a social critique as she highlights not only the problems faced by women but also explores the socio-economic causes.

Keywords: Female consciousness, Feminist, Lesbian, Modernism, Progressive literature, Urdu literature.

INTRODUCTION

Urdu short story was a product of the influence of Western literature. Before the First World War, except Munshi Prem Chand, there was no noteworthy writer of short stories. Some writers, basically poets, like Niaz Fateh Puri, Sajjad Haider and Latif-u-Din, inspired by Oscar Wilde's Art for art's sake theory jumped into this field (Sarwar, 2002). Though, they displayed maturity of form, yet they could not create interest as far as organization and character delineation was concerned. The situation was soon saved by the positive influence of Prem Chand, revolutions coming about all over the world and enlightenment created by study of Western literature. Various techniques were explored with themes ranging from individual to sociopolitical problems, domestic problems to national and international affairs. Hamid-u-Allah Afsar, Prof. Mujeeb and Ali Abbas wrote short stories. This all provided a suitable background to the progressive writers to contribute to Urdu short story. "The writers of *Angare*

followed Psychoanalysis of Freud, the technique of James Joyce and political theory of Karl Marx." (Sarwar, 2002). Enlightened with modern education and inspired by the Western thought, the progressive writers displayed a tendency to write on bold topics. Under the influence of Marxist and Freudian theories, importance was given to sexual conflicts and to lay bare the conscious and subconscious aspect of the characters. They wrote realistically about the so far hushed, yet very much present desires of their characters. Most important names were Saadat Hassan Manto, M. Hassan Askari and Ismat Chughtai. Ismat was the first Urdu female writer who dared to unravel the psychological and social aspects of a woman's sexual life. Therefore, she holds a unique place in Urdu literature, but in her times, her difference earned her notoriety. Many including Aziz Ahmed and Ehtesham Hussain condemned sexual obsession of Manto and Ismat, almost the same way as critics did of Lawrence in England. Ismat and Manto shared not only a spirit of experimentalism and freethinking with Lawrence, but also the belief that, "the traditional moral scheme into which all characters fit" was outdated (Travers, 2001).

* Corresponding Author:

Email ID: sobiakiran@yahoo.com

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LITERATURE REVIEW

The romantic writers romanticized about women and wrote about intricacies and intrigues involved in love. Despite use of imagination and poetic language, their stories were not lively. Sultan Haider Josh was the first to talk about sociopolitical and cultural issues, but even he could not give up romanticizing woman. Elaine Showalter says in *Towards a Feminist Poetics*, "If we study stereotypes of women, the sexism of male critics, and the limited roles women play in literary history, we are not learning what women have learnt and experienced, but only what men have thought women should be." (Literary theory) Woman is not just a beloved, a toy having physical side alone. Like man, she is a complex human being living simultaneously on physical, spiritual, intellectual and social planes. To know her well and to present her accordingly requires a writer to take into account all these sides of her personality. The credit goes to the progressive writers, especially Ismat Chughtai for breaking away with the tradition. The woman can no longer be portrayed as a romantic sentimental figure. Like man, she has impersonal interests. She displays political and intellectual interests. A woman's writing is more critical of society and works of Ismat, Woolf, Jean Rhys and Dorothy Richardson stand testimony to it. Their novels deal with, using Woolf's words, "social evils and remedies" (Woolf, n.d.).

Ismat Chughtai was the first Urdu female writer to write about lesbianism. Ann Ferguson in her paper, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian existence." suggests a reconstruction of the term lesbian as 'lesbian continuum' that records women's struggle against patriarchal system. She describes heterosexuality as a symbol of male dominance (Ferguson *et al.*, 1982). In Ismat's treatment of lesbianism, we encounter psychological rather than political connotations. In her works like "The Quilt" and *The Crooked Line*, girls feel attracted to their own sex mainly due to absence of male presence from the scene. They accept their strong sexual desires and finding the phallic figure absent, try to find substitutes in their own sex. No doubt, lesbianism in this context is a protest against patriarchy but not in form of heterosexuality rather in form of segregation that is imposed on them. It is a protest against men's exercise of their authority to control women's sexuality. As soon as the phallic figure appears, lesbianism is abandoned for heterosexual life. Lesbian tendencies are viewed as a

perversion, though they work as feminist resistance against a society where male-female relationship is a taboo. Ismat nowhere describes heterosexuality as a coercive force, with exception of few stories like "The Wedding Suit" and "Tiny's Granny", where rape is visualized as a sign of male dominance and exploitation of women. Otherwise, heterosexual relations, if established on mutual understanding and equality, are viewed as respectable by Ismat. Heterosexual relations bring freedom for girls oppressed with segregation and caught in the web of lesbianism. The moment they find the phallic presence and an opportunity to establish heterosexual relations, they celebrate the moment and move forward in life with eligible partners. Ismat, Dorothy and Jean Rhys did not aim at a world free from men or a world exclusively for women. They aimed at a world where women and men should hail in equality, free from exploitation, injustices, oppression and domination of 'a' sex.

MAJOR INFLUENCES

As far as Ismat is concerned, she read Greek tragedies, Shakespeare, Marlowe, Emerson, Dickens, Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge, Emile Zola, Shaw, Ibsen, Maugham, Gorky, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Maupassant, Oscar Wilde, Lawrence and many others. She was a voracious reader who used to read till late at night in the moonlight (Kokab, 2005). Ismat was greatly inspired by Thomas Hardy, whose novels she had translated into Urdu, Bernard Shaw, extracts of whose plays she claims to plagiarize in her stories like *Saanp* and *Mere Bacche* and her play *Fasaadi*. About Chekhov she said, "I believe in Chekhov. I read him to be blessed." (Kokab, 2005) Whenever, she felt it difficult to complete a story, she used to read Chekhov and her work was done.

She read a lot and got inspired by the contemporary European writers to a great extent. She assimilated the influence of European writers from her contemporary Urdu writers as well. In a letter to Prof. Abdul Salam, Ismat wrote; "I have read almost every English writer in detail. I enjoyed reading all of them, but I write without copying anyone of them.... Above all, I have read life, the greatest book of the world to write about and found it very interesting." (Salam, 1973) The writers she was inspired by were also charged for their bold writing. Zola for a short period of time was banned in France and England and so was Anton Chekhov because charges of obscenity were leveled against them. In her collection of essays *My Friend, My Enemy: Essays, Reminiscences*,

Portraits she occasionally echoes views of Shaw, Zola and above all Chekhov. Like Chekhov she believes in “the artist’s duty to describe the world as he or she finds it; the unfeasibility of passing absolute judgment on literary texts; the denial of corrupting influence of literature...” (Chughtai, 2001b).

Ismat and Manto have often been compared to Lawrence in various aspects. Firstly, on account of sexual themes in their work though they differ in style and treatment of themes a lot. Secondly, among English writers Lawrence’s reputation has “undergone vicissitudes, fluctuating wildly and producing extreme reaction of either love or hatred”, in Urdu literature no other writer has generated such mounting controversy as Manto and Ismat. Lawrence’s works in England while theirs in India was banned (1942, Manto’s works were banned even after partition). Rebecca West’s complaint about Lawrence, “They were acknowledged as great but posthumously. They were quite unusual for their times. Anne Ferni Hough writes about Lawrence, “He has been seen as the champion of freedom and individualism in countries with oppressive regimes....” (Anne, 2001) She mentions India too. Similarly, Ismat and Manto, in India are seen as champions of liberalism. Sexual subject in their work is used as a need to seek freedom from ‘social obligations’ and as a means to discover ‘personal authenticity’. (Anne 2001). Humor and wit embedded in her stories and quick succession of dialogues remind us of Shaw and Chekov. Stark realism and use of coincidences remind us of Hardy. Hardy was also attacked for his frank treatment of sex in *Tess* and *Judethe Obscure*. Some critics blamed the latter for preaching free love. Havelock Ellis defended him. Hardy’s novels served as a focus for the discussion of sexuality (Simpson, 1982). Ismat who translated many works of Hardy was definitely influenced by him not only in her treatment of female characters but also in discussing their sexuality. Use of mild irony and psychoanalysis reflects the influence of Maugham and Tolstoy.

ANALYSIS OF HER STORIES

Ismat’s stories are unique as far as their plot, characterization and use of language are concerned. The language used by her is the living language spoken by common people in domestic zone, varying in tone according to various characters belonging to different classes, professions and age groups. Even Muhammad Sadiq, who complains that a few of her short stories are

not stories at all but ‘psychoanalytic pieces’, appreciates her use of language; “In her mastery over the spoken language and dialogue, she has no equal in Urdu.” (Sadiq, 1985) Ismat used a different kind of language from men. Virginia Woolf asserts the need for a different idiom and language, “to carry the reader on easily and naturally from one end of the book to the other” (Woolf n.d). The use of different idiom was essential for female writers to portray the problems and aspirations of women different from the male tradition. This is essential to present the natural shape of their thought without, as Woolf says, ‘crushing or distorting it.’ It is possible only if a woman is well determined and can stand the opposition “to be true to herself” (Woolf. n.d).

Ismat’s stories, indeed, are a reflection of her society. They are a bitter comment on the prevalent decadence and moral deterioration of the society. She focused, especially, on the plight of women in a suffocating and conservative Muslim community and injustice done to them in the name of religion. She has remarkably depicted the social and emotional exploitation and the consequent deprivations of women. Ismat remarkably uses irony and satire to explode the balloon of hypocrisy and to expose the double standards of a so called pious, rigid and superstitious society. To call her a social critic will not be wrong. She holds a unique place because of her boldness and truthfulness.

“The Quilt” is a superb example of her insight into human psyche. Her life as well as the world around her was pacing smoothly, when her story “The Quilt” exploded like a bomb and caused great tumult as no one could expect such blasphemy from a woman. In a society, where the very idea of a woman writing stories was unacceptable, mentioning such subject was nothing less than challenging god. Overnight, she became notorious. She had no female predecessor in Urdu who dared to explore the prohibited area. She had to undergo a trial because of this story.

The critics, reading this story, ignore the excellent psychoanalysis of the characters succumbed to sexual perversion and criticize for the sake of criticism. They cannot accept lesbianism as subject of a story for it can corrupt young minds. They attack what is not at all depicted in it and do not appreciate the irony embedded in the story that highlights a very important social problem. In Urdu literature, the credit goes to Ismat, a woman, who explored such suppressed regions of female psyche.

“The Quilt” is a story of a married woman whose natural instincts and emotions are crushed against her will. They are not allowed to take the natural course and result is perversion.

Ismat looks for the motives of this perversion throughout the story. She tells why Rabbu and Begum Jaan are having this relationship. The former is economically dependent, while the latter is emotionally and sexually frustrated, being married to a person who could not fulfill her physical needs. She is married to an elderly nawab to lead a comfortable life. The nawab “...was very virtuous. No one had ever seen a notch girl or prostitute in his house” (Chughtai, 2001a). But, piety alone is not sufficient. Body, too, has its claims and demands. Ismat points out his ‘strange hobby’ as well. “He kept an open house for students young, fair, slender-waisted boys whose expenses were borne by him” (Chughtai, 2001a). He spends his time with boys and Begum Jaan was forced to live alone. Here, we find a slight reference to Nawab’s homosexuality. Later in the story, we come to know that Rabbu’s son also stayed with Nawab. He was given ‘new clothes and other gifts’ but he left him “and never came back even to see Rabbu...” (Chughtai, 2001a). These ellipses say a lot about him. It is interesting to note that the critics who objected to lesbianism in the story (mainly because it was for the first time explored in Urdu and that also by a woman) ignored the references to sexual perversion of nawab himself.

Begum Jaan loves winter. The quilt is used as a symbol. It works as a cover to hide the secret pleasure of sleeping with Rabbu. The protagonist is a guest at Begum’s house for as long as her mother is out of city. She sleeps in Begum’s room. She is horrified to explain the movement of the quilt in the dark, “...shaking vigorously, as though an elephant was struggling inside” (Chughtai, 2001a). She is unable to understand that it is a monstrous desire that is changing different shapes, stealing dark pleasures banned and denied otherwise. In the morning, the quilt looks ‘perfectly innocent’. Ismat is expert in using powerful images, visual, sensory as well as sound to suggest a lot more in a few words. The visual image of the movement of the quilt is followed, next night, by “the slurping sound of a cat licking a plate” (Chughtai, 2001a).

“In The Name of Those Married Women”, published in another book with a different title, “The Quilt Trial”, is an account of the trial she had to undergo because of her

story “The Quilt”. The trial issued many other problems like public insult and above all disturbed family life. She calls it an ‘ill-fated story’ that became a constant ‘source of torment’ (Chughtai, 2001a). Shahid threatened to divorce her. Newspapers were full of articles against her; heated debates followed in the literary circle; she received letters filled with ‘filth’ against her. A case had been filed against Manto too. He kept his head high, while she felt guilty and embarrassed. Things were different for her because she was a woman, and social pressure on her mounted double. Years later, Ismat met Begum in a party, who knew that “The Quilt” was based on her life. Ismat was extremely happy to know that having divorced nawab. Begum married again and had a son. That was exactly what Ismat had wanted; to free Begum from the clutches of Rabbu and lead a happy married life. This reminds us of D.H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterly’s Lovers*.

No one can deny the truthfulness with which Ismat portrayed socio-economic and sexual exploitation suffered by woman. “The Wedding Suit” depicts the pathetic situation of a widow and problems generated for her and her two daughters because of poverty. Qualities of soul like piety, sincerity, hard work and skillfulness in domestic chores all become insignificant without affordability of good dowry. Kubra’s mother, a seamstress, has spent her life sewing dowries of many young girls. She never disappoints anyone and resolves the problem even if someone runs short of cloth. Her sole dream is the marriage of Kubra, her elder daughter, who is aging. She does not realize that her younger daughter has also grown up. How can she think of her when there is no one to ask for Kubra’s hand? Ismat has successfully used black humor to present a timeless problem. Bi Amma, regardless of the hopelessness, continues sewing clothes for Kubra’s wedding and puts them into a wooden box. Ismat uses the metaphor of ‘heavy coffin like wooden box’ to make it clear that a poor widow cannot expect much for her daughter. (*Lifting the Veil* 25)

Ismat is sarcastic about the social convention that forces a woman to become an obedient servant to man. In her interview, Ismat strongly criticized these taboos and the girls who followed them. She vehemently opposed the submissive role of a girl. She did not believe in compromise and thought it to be a deception. A girl’s self-esteem should not be tamed to compromise with every injustice done to her. In this way, she is rightly

called as the first rebellious woman or the feminist of Urdu literature.

All this service to an ungrateful person like Rahat and traditional training of girls leads to nothing. Their poverty and dependence on would be bread earner in a male dominating society make them an easy prey. Rahat does not propose her. On the contrary, he makes fun of their poverty and low-standard food served to them. Hamida, being the younger sister, is assigned the responsibility to bring Rahat around to propose Kubra. Hamida tries her best but in return, she is stung with his 'filthy eyes' and suggestive remarks. She understands that Rahat is a blind, hollow and lustful man who is not worth Kubra. She feels agony to see Kubra's hands busy in silent service, "...they remain busy like bond slaves, from morning till night, grinding spices, drawing water, chopping onions, laying the bed, cleaning shoes. When will their slavery end? Will there be no buyers for them? Will no one ever kiss them lovingly?" (Chughtai, 2001a). The stark realism of these lines lays bare the bitter fact of a society where an expected son in law is served beyond one's capacity. Having no sweater for herself, she knits a sweater for Rahat. The metaphor of hands is extended. "The hands that knitted it are meant to rock the cradle. Clasp these hands, you ass!" (Chughtai, 2001a). Ismat successfully presents the insensitivity of the society, manifested in the character of Rahat, deaf and blind to the needs of an aging girl and a dying family. The blunt expression of pain is free from sentimentalism though it is heartrending enough to make one cry at the helplessness of the family.

Rahat leaves for home as his marriage is fixed. Having a sexual errand, considered to be an evidence of man's manhood, he never looks back at the spoils. Kubra, suffering from tuberculosis, dies. Unlike her wedding suit, coffin has a different fate. She must wear it and depart for the grave. Ismat has ruthlessly criticized the one-sided and partial laws of the society where nothing helps the poor. They are exploited by the powerful and thrown away. Sons in laws are beyond their affordability in an environment where without heavy dowry no one proposes a girl.

In "Kafir", Ismat has questioned the validity of religious differences. The topic discussed in it is rather more sensitive than the one discussed in "The Quilt". Her use of language serves as a redemptive element and saves her skin. If "The Wedding Suit" is an example of black humour "Kafir" is an example of mild irony and humor,

though nowhere she feels the need to prick the conscience of the readers to change and reform the society. All claims of brotherhood and religious freedom are shattered when it comes to inter religious marriage. Ismat makes fun of the distorted role of religion. Instead of resolving conflicts, it is creating distances, problems and causing bloodshed. The controversial ideas are presented wrapped in the garb of humor and mild irony as to avoid creating controversy in the society. The word Kafir is used in different contexts, with different connotations as an abuse and rebuke, and finally is explained in poetic terms where it means 'beloved'.

Munni and Pushkar, though in love, are conscious of the religious difference. They frequently call each other kafir and threaten each other with hell and angels with iron rods. Their hearts beat together. Munni celebrates Holi and Diwali with him; for that she becomes a Hindu. Pushkar celebrates Eid with her for that he becomes a Muslim. Passion transcends all boundaries and lines drawn by class and religious differences. Ismat shows how religion becomes a plaything in the hands of politicians, so called religious scholars as well as masses to earn their own ends. Their quarrel is compared to 'Hindu-Muslim riots' (Chughtai, 2001a). Ismat has satirized the current scenario in the subcontinent, where Muslims and Hindus have been living together in peace for centuries, but manipulated by politicians and religious scholars become bloodthirsty for one another. The following exchange of dialogues highlights the need for open-mindedness and liberalism to maintain peace and harmony not in the life of individuals alone but in the world.

Pushkar: Do you know in what sense poets have used the word 'kafir'?

Munni: That kafir is different, you Hindu donkey!

Pushkar: Are Hindu donkeys different from Muslim donkeys? And how about Jewish donkeys?

We had great fun debating how to classify donkeys based on religion (Chughtai, 2001a). Ismat makes us question, why a person belonging to one religion should hate or condemn others? Religion, a source of comfort and peace, should not become a source of pain, agony and hatred.

Religion is presented as one sort of social pressure to check one's life. "Pushkar, we are slaves. We've no control over our lives. Society dictates it" (Chughtai, 2001a). It is the right to live their own life that gives

Pushkar and Munni courage to go against the society. There is no other option left for self-fulfillment. The word 'Kafir' finally changes its meaning and takes on the poetic significance in the end.

"The Net" is a remarkable example of the psychoanalysis of the development of female psyche from early childhood to adulthood. She presents how innocent friendship between two friends grows, with changing desires, into rivalry. In a conservative society, where everyone gets conscious about the physical changes, girls become even more conscious and the only safe emotional outlet for them is to read sentimental stories and identify themselves with the heroines. "They would read sentimental stories in the dark room, get worked up on them and fall into each other's arms" (Chughtai, 2001a). This dark room is their external subconscious where they can express their suppressed emotions that are socially banned. Wearing vests makes them envious of their brother moving without his shirt on. Physical growth has different meanings for girls and boys. The former faces restrictions while the latter wins freedom. Death wish becomes extreme as it is looked at as a path for freedom and emancipation.

Virginia Woolf also looks at death as a means to win freedom. In a passage in *A Room of One's own*, the narrator thinks of the possible fate of Shakespeare's could-be sister. Unlike her brother, she would be denied "the varied experience of life that educated her brother" (Delcimer, 2001). Her talent would be wasted in domestic chores. The only path open to her to realize herself would be to commit suicide. Like Ismat, Virginia was extremely conscious of her status as a sister, "having been denied all that was given to her brothers." (Delcimer, 2001).

Ismat, as an expert psychologist, lays bare the fact that sexual consciousness first takes on the form of narcissism. The girls enjoy playing with their bodies and bathroom becomes their retreat. "...Liberation! Liberation from all inhibitions. ... They liked to go on stroking slowly with their fingers and longed for some abrasive object to rub against their body to cure the continuous tickle..." (Chughtai, 2001a). Later, sexual desire transforms into idealizing their teachers. They feel attached to their teachers to the extent of infatuation. Adulthood makes their life miserable. Anonymous desires disturb them, especially as they work as messengers between their elder sisters and their lovers. They feel jealous of their sisters and want to

replace them. Once they secretly open a gift and are embarrassed to find a dress of pink net. This net is a symbolic net in which they are caught. A net of their sexual desires and feelings entangles them. Its sight triggers a chain of strange thoughts and develops a secret rivalry in them. The development of selfhood accomplishes itself at this stage, when both hide their feelings from each other. Like 'snakes' they guard each other. Returning the dress to Apa and mentioning Anwar Bhai betrays their secret feelings. Each wants to wear the dress herself and wants to get rid of the other. Attan is caught trying the dress. Saffiya betrays her to Apa. She is denied the privacy that a growing girl requires to view her body and feel the changes in it.

"The Mole" is a psychological study of the mind of an artist. The mole becomes a symbol of the irresistible attraction between the two sexes, male and female, which despite the great social and intellectual difference and distances between an artist and a girl from the slums supersedes all these distinctions. Piety or moral inhibitions of the artist madden him and make him crazy, when he comes to confront the natural 'obscenities' of a girl free from all inhibitions and morals. Isamt presents a conflict between two life styles; natural life lead by Rani and socially approved life lead by the artist. Rani is a Pan like figure who lives an instinctive life. Choudhry has drawn portraits of many women from other countries, "both in nude as well as dressed up" (Chughtai, 2001a). He never felt as disturbed as drawing a sketch of Rani, who is completely unmanageable. She invites his attention to the mole on her breast and narrates her fling with Ratna and Chunnu, while taking bath with them. Choudhry was dumbfounded at her expertness in obscene talk at such a young age. He could not decide whether to respond to the call of nature or to maintain his composed disposition. He tried to cool himself down in the small pond nearby. To his shock, he found Rani and Ratna enjoying in the pond. Rani looked into his eyes, standing nude, "...mole seemed to strike Choudhry like a bullet" (Chughtai, 2001a). He could not withstand the call of nature and paid the price in form of life-long frustration and sense of deprivation. He lost his source of inspiration with Rani who had disappeared somewhere. His lifetime piety and goodwill paid him nothing. As Rani, caught by police for throwing her illegitimate child, swore in court of his innocence, "Choudhry is impotent" (Chughtai, 2001a). He went insane. "Yes, he wished an accomplice! Imprisonment,

pain, suffering, calamity, public disgrace_ he would have taken it all upon himself smiling. If he had known that he would be acquitted in that manner, he would not have pleaded innocence to God and prayed to Him" (Chughtai, 2001a).

Ismat depicts the unconscious power of 'Eros', when suppressed and thwarted it can drive man to madness and insanity. Choudhry ends with obsessive compulsive psychological disorder of drawing 'long, conical, round lines_ like a signed mark" (Chughtai. 2001a). Later, Bano Qudsia, in her novel *Raja Gidh*, compares Eros to a violent horse, which, if carefully and skillfully handled, is a source of every creative work, and the inspiration required for the purpose. Otherwise, it can destroy everything and hinder one's spiritual growth. D.H. Lawrence too, used Pan as a 'counterforce' to Christ and "as an antidote to a civilization suffering from the ill effects of an ascetic Christian ethos."(Finney xxii) Pan made frequent appearances in his works like *The White Peacock*, *Apocalypse* and *The Overtone*. He celebrates the call of nature against all external checks.

"The Housemaker" raises many questions, especially it calls into question the difference between a respectable man and a girl from the gutter; moreover it questions the validity of marriage itself. Marriage is prone to breed more problems as it makes one possessive and consequently suspicious. It is a name of responsibilities, which spoil the freedom of life. On the other hand, free relationship promises the benefits of marriage like companionship and cooperation without any disadvantages. This story is a strong satire on the double standards of the society. For Ismat a marriage, solely based on economic dependence is not different from prostitution and Krishan Chander shared this belief too.

Ismat laughs at the hypocrisy of a society that draws a line between a debauch man and a whore. A man can remain respectable even if he goes to brothels but an orphan girl, forced to lead a promiscuous life to earn her bread is neither respectable nor acceptable, though, her very presence reminds Mirza of his late mother. Like an honorable woman bound in marriage, she serves the same purpose that of housekeeping. Lajo falls in love with the house out of necessity, for it is the only house where she gets the chance to rule. "Without a mistress, it was as good as hers. A house does not belong to a man. He is more like a guest" (Chughtai. 2001a). Mirza too, having a woman at home, stops going to courtesans. He

and everyone in mohalla seem to go crazy about her. Like a suspicious husband, he becomes jealous of milkman, school teacher and anyone talking to Lajo. People offer her bungalows to serve as mistress. The only path to keep her seems to marry her, but Ismat makes it clear that in this society keeping a mistress is a status symbol but to marry her is a shame. Marriage means the end of romance. Man loves stolen sweets more than the simple food he gets at home. He soon loses his interest in his wife though a mistress can hold everlasting appeal. Marriage and divorce were like nightmares and Lajo was happy that they were over. Being a bastard saved her life; otherwise she would have been killed for the sake of honor. Mirza is happy to see her back as she like his mother sets everything in order. She is his house maker.

"Gainda", like "Bandi", an untranslated story of Ismat, states the bitter reality of a feudal society, where maids are used as dolls to satisfy the needs of growing sons and discarded later. At the same time, Ismat discusses the problems faced by a young widow, her deprivations, her desires that she has to crush in order to live in a society that expects only strict austerity on her part. Parallel runs the theme of the development of a child's consciousness of her surroundings through observation and mimicry. Gainda, a maid and playmate of Bibi, becomes a widow at a very young age. She can no longer play bride as she cannot wear 'sindoor' or bangles anymore. Life's pleasures are banned for her though the flame of life is not extinguished in her. Voicing the social code cannot help and later, not only she accedes to play bride with Bibi but becomes mistress of Bibi's brother. The reality is perceived from the eyes of a child, who tries to behave coyly like Gainda, with an elderly servant Meva Ram, who fortunately paid her no attention. She cannot bear her brother paying attention to Gainda, ignoring her. She suffers from Electra complex. It is strange that Ismat does not focus on developing it as a separate theme in the story.

The incestuous desire and Electra complex is referred to in stories like "Amar Bail", "The Mole", "The Net", "Tiny's Granny" and her novels too. In "The Net", both Attan and Saffiya are attracted towards 'Bhayia', lover of Aapa; in "The Mole", Rani is attracted to Choudhry, much advanced in his age and vice versa; in "Tiny's Granny", it takes on a horrible and satanic form, where Haji Saheb rapes a nine-year-old Nanhi.

"Touch Me Not", once again celebrates Pan like

existence, asserting that those who live close to nature thrive and enjoy themselves, while those who are delicate get destroyed. 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, like Bhabi Jan of "Chataan", an untranslated story of Ismat, is a helpless figure. Her husband loses interest in her as soon as he finds, "his beautiful doll-like bride turning into a permanently sick woman" (Chughtai. 2001a). Her consecutive abortions add to her worries. In a society where a wife is expected to provide man with an heir, her life turns into a misery. Having lost her beauty, bearing no child, she loses rest of the territory as well. The following lines sum up the plight of any married woman living in the same situation. "She knew that another miscarriage would be her husband's ticket to a second marriage. Now Bhai Jan could do anything in the name of progeny... If she failed in this one conjugal duty, she would have to forgo all bridal comforts" (Chughtai. 2001a). 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. Ismat laments the fate of a girl from who complete ignorance and naivety is expected as if it becomes a decent girl. Ismat is of the opinion that a girl must listen to adult talk and learn from experienced women. A girl should observe delivery as it will not destroy her morality but give her strength and stamina. Bhabi Jan would have been mentally prepared and would not get so terrified. She would know, "Giving birth is as easy a job for woman as getting on or off the train is for Bhai Jan" (Chughtai. 2001a).

Ismat's strong female characters like Lajo, Rani and this woman of the roads survive because they can endure pain that is part of life. They accept the natural course of life. They do not suffer from scruples like shame, embarrassment and public opinion. They do not follow the norms of the society and follow their instinct. This freedom and independence, though won at the cost of physical abuse, gives them strength. On the other hand, girls brought up in strict restrictions, leading their life in

traditional passive roles become incapable to continue their existence and finally lose the battle in favor of their male counterpart.

"Sacred Duty" seems to be a development on the theme of "Kafir". Samina, an educated girl from a rich Muslim family, marries secretly her Hindu class fellow, Tushar, son to a Seth. Her father, Siddiqi Sahib, though a liberal and broadminded person, cannot bear this shame. Same is true of Tushar's parents. Being conservative Hindus, they cannot accept a Muslim bride. They convert the bride to Hinduism and perform the marriage according to 'Arya Samaj rituals'. 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 ironical 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.

The young generation loses its faith in any religion as it can see through the flaws of the devout followers who cite Allah, Bhagwan or God to serve their purpose. For Tushar, conversion to Islam makes no difference as he remains the same man. Having prayed in mosque, 'mandir' and church, he finds no difference in them. Samina and Tushar both leave their parents for making them 'dance like monkeys'. They leave a letter to declare: All religions are gifts from that Supreme Being who is called Bhagwan or God...we know of his thousand other names _ He who is powerful and compassionate. (The Quran).

Who is within and without? Who is above and below? Who exists in darkness and in light? In presence as in absences. In negation as in affirmation. (Gita) (ibid 143)

Ismat once again is criticizing the distorted role of religious leaders to generate hatred between various sectors of society instead of bringing people together. The story ends with the hope if golden teachings of religion can be really followed.

"Tiny's Granny" like "The Wedding uit" presents the bleak picture of a poverty stricken old woman. The story is a bitter satire of the society where poverty is a crime and the poor are punished beyond measure. Their fate is doomed for generations. Life long struggle hardly secures them food without any security for old age. Tiny's Granny starts her struggle since early childhood

and continues to do so till she becomes Tiny's Granny. She does various jobs like cooking, cleaning, tale bearing and ends up as a beggar when she is not able to do anything else. She lives in a society where respect is denied to the poor and salary is paid like charity. The only thing she cares about in life is Tinny but her helplessness and poverty impel her to appoint her to do 'odd jobs' at Deputy Sahib's house. Tinny, only nine year old, is raped by Deputy Sahib, "one of the leading men in the mohalla, grandfather of three children, a religious man who regularly said his five prayers..." (Chughtai. 2001a). Tinny's granny, living on the mercy of others cannot do anything against the culprit. Tiny, from a child becomes a woman, "squat, fat, and puffy, like a clay toy which the potter had knelt on before it had hardened" (Chughtai. 2001a). Later, her elopement leaves granny completely distraught, living on stale food and fighting with monkeys who were after her dried bits of food. Facing every sorrow and humiliation in the world she dies all alone.

The last paragraph of the story is a good example of use of imagination in Ismat's stories; "And God, beholding the degradation of humanity, bowed His head in shame and wept tears and those divine tears of blood fell upon Granny's rough grave, and bright red poppies sprang up there..." (Chughtai. 2001a). It also is an example of the anguish, typical of progressive writers, on class distinction and unequal distribution of wealth. Life long struggle pays nothing to the poor except kicks and abuses.

"Vocation" calls into question the strict line drawn between a whore and a respectable woman. The line becomes more obscure when one's seemingly respectable aunts are involved in this business to earn their living at the expense of others' domestic life. The social attitude is to look down upon this marginalized group of society i.e. courtesans. The protagonist voices the conventional social views while expressing her hatred towards her neighbor. At heart, though, she knows that men adding to a prostitute's wealth are no others but her own pious relatives. She encounters a strong conflict raging in her when she compares her vocation of teaching to prostitution. She finds herself in loss. She sells her 'squeezed up brain', while the other sells her body. She looks worn out, while the other looks younger than her age. Above all, she cannot earn in life what the other earns in a day. "Respectability, chastity _ if you kept these eggs warm under your wings would a

peacock hatch out of them? ...I felt like breaking that illusion in a single stroke so that everyone knew about the filth within" (Chughtai. 2001a). Ismat makes fun of the concept of virginity that is used as a trump card by a woman at critical moments. The protagonist, to her amazement, comes to know that the courtesan in her neighbors was no other but her relative. To curse a courtesan is easy but to trace her links in one's own lineage is like looking into oneself and raking the filth that one disgusts in the surroundings. Ismat was true to herself and all her struggle was to express herself and women without pretension. Ismat and Virginia aim at a new order, to change the established values to give importance to what seems insignificant to man.

"Mother in Law" presents stereotypical characters, mother in law and daughter in law, involved in an ageless conflict over the man who tries to maintain balance between the two scales. The characters are not even named except the son, Asghar. Mother in law is jealous of her bahu for using the wile tactics to win her son. She threatens her to bring a second wife for her son. The bahu succeeds in stealing joyous moments with her husband, when her mother in law is asleep. Asghar brings mangoes and bangles for his wife stealthily and rebukes her in his mother's presence to please her. "Kick out the bitch Ammi, let's bring another woman. This one...' said Asghar as he looked at his wife affectionately" (Chughtai. 2001a). This drama invokes her sympathies for bahu, her 'enemy'. The slightest notion of her son's attention to bahu infuriates her and she starts cursing both of them again. Ismat uses mild irony and humor to depict the ambivalent attitude of mother in law towards her bahu.

"Roots" mourns over the loss of an old mother, whose children decide to leave for Pakistan leaving her alone in India. The close relationship between Hindus and Muslims is embodied in the relationship between a Muslim family and Roopchandji's family, a Hindu doctor. The two families lived together always sharing their grief and happiness, but partition divided the two families. There was "a chasm miles wide. Amma would look at its bottomless depth with melancholy eyes and shudder" (Chughtai. 2001a). 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. Roopchandji, cursing the government

and politicians, followed them and brought them back and the house “came back to life” (Chughtai. 2001a). Ismat depicts the chaos caused by partition though she ends the story on a happy note of reunion. In her essay, “We People”, she admits that parents in her stories did not appear as ‘dynamic characters.’ She ignored them as obstacles in the fulfillment of a person’s desires. For the first time, she felt she realized the selfless love of her parents, especially mother. She had her mother as an example to build on the character of mother in “Roots”. Her children too left for Pakistan leaving her mother alone (Chughtai. 2001b). The theme of the story is power of matriarchy.

CONCLUSION

Woolf talks about women’s fiction and its subjects relevant to women, their married life and the number of their children. Ismat’s stories very well illustrate this feminist concern. The critics who object to the narrow range of subjects exploited by Ismat ignore the times. Same justification goes for her that Woolf supplied for the works of Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte and George Eliot. They were excluded from “certain kinds of experiences.” like that of war, business and politics. They observed the characters and realities in their house. (*Women and Fiction* 47) *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature* states: Ismat Chughtai who ranks with the first grade modern short story writers of Urdu_ Manto, Bedi and Krishanchander, is one of those writers who replaced idealism in fiction with reality. She claims that whatever she writes is not the handiwork of her imagination; it is what she herself has experienced, or perceived (Datta. 1989).

She writes against irrational taboos and checks that cause abnormalities and psychological complexes in young people, especially women leading a suffocating life. Ismat observes all these evils and overhears ‘revealing conversation’ of elderly ladies in the house, hiding herself under a cot or behind a curtain, and presents these life-like pictures “in a style that was at once disturbing and fascinating” (Datta, 1989).

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