

Marriage as Social Status of Women in the Selected Short Stories of Ismat Chughtai

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Abstract: *The writings of Ismat Chughtai are always fearless. She is the writer par excellence. For her writing is always a medium to challenge and question the social issues which are prevalent in Indian society. She always raised voice against the orthodox norms of the society. She boldly talks about the issues which are hushed by the society. In her writings she always highlighted the problems faced by women in patriarchal society. Her works highlight how a woman is marginalised in society. There is always an unequal distribution of power at various levels whether social, political and economic. In her story Chauthi ka Jora (The Wedding Shroud) she has highlighted about marriage, dowry and other patriarchal notions. She describes that in patriarchal society marriage is the ultimate destiny for woman in society. The Veil (Ghoonghat) is another story which tells about how the patriarchal notions are deeply rooted in the society that it is very difficult for a woman to escape from it. Even women do not have their own identity and they are always utilized to fulfil the desires of others.*

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As far as the Urdu writing is concerned Ismat Chughtai is a leading writer. Her writing is fearless. She was a writer par excellence and much ahead of her times, who used her pen as a weapon to question the patriarchal norms of the society. She wrote about the subjects, which are hushed by the society. In her writings she brought the real face of the orthodox society, about the condition of the women and their social status. It is the society which gives them a marginal status. In the present paper i will focus on sort stories of Ismat Chughtai that bring forth the themes of marriage, subjugation and oppression.

Her stories discuss how there is unequal distribution of social, political and economic power between the sexes. She attacks patriarchal system which denies independent identity of women and keeps them subjugated in every sphere of life. In the words of Sushita Singh: "We cannot rely on existing ideologies as they are all products of a male supremacist culture." The main cause of women oppression in Indian Society is primarily based upon the traditional position in the family.

Women have been often pushed to the margins of the social set-up, as far as their personal fulfilment is concerned. In both society and culture men held central position and women are on the periphery. As Simone de Beauvoir expresses in *The Second Sex* (1949): "thus humanity is male and man defines not in herself, but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being..." all characteristics of female like sweetness, modesty and subservience are attributed by the patriarchal society and women are conditioned in these roles. As Simone de Beauvoir says, "one is not born rather becomes a woman." if a woman is not fitted in these roles she is considered as "unfeminine" and therefore "unnatural" this patriarchal system suppress the independence and identity of a woman in order to confine them to domestic spaces and assigned duty of nurturing the whole family. Ismat Chughtai faithfully records all these notions with great sensitivity in her stories.

Chauthi Ka Jora (The Wedding Shroud) is a very poignant story which is a critique of marriage, dowry and other patriarchal notions of society. The story moves around Kubra, the eldest daughter of the family. The father is already dead. In the family there is mother and two daughters, they are living a hard life. Kubra's mother is a skilful seamstress who stitches wedding suits and shrouds. Her only worry is to get Kubra married. In hope of the marriage, she stitches wedding suits for Kubra.

The mother starts stitching a new dress for her daughter's marriage, when she feels that the previous dress stitched has become old. Every time the old dress replaced by new one. In such a miserable she continues to stitch wedding suits, which she could give her as dowry. The mother is observed to her daughter getting married. Marriage is indeed the ultimate destiny for woman in a patriarchal society.

One day Amabi gets the news of Rahat, coming there in connection with his job in the police. She sees him as prospective son-in-law. She sells her earrings to buy a crepe *dupatta* for Kubra. By this situation we can clearly understand that in Indian society unmarried girl is a burden on family. We spend too much money on marriage than the education of a girl. Kubra's hope also strives and she whitewashes the sitting room with her own hands. Arrival of Rahat, and Amabi sells her jewellery, one by one, to entertain the new guest, and to impress him by providing him delicious food. "Eating humble fare themselves the women cooked sumptuous *paranths*, fried meatballs and *biryani* for Rahat; while Amabi herself subsisted on bread and water, she fed the best cuts of meat to her son-in-law to be." (98)

Kubra gets up early every morning and "starts working like machine." (99). If it were possible, Kubra, "would take some of fat from her own body and knead into the dough she used to make *paranths* for Rahat." (99). In the hope of having a happy life with Rahat, Kubra washes his foul smelling and stinking clothes and socks. Rahat on the other hand enjoys all the food and services without a word of appreciation to

anyone. He is not interested in Kubra. Even then he is served like a master. Thus it is very evident that men are always given secondary position family as well as society.

Rahat begins to flirt with Hameeda, Kubra's younger sister. Hameeda complains about this indecent behaviour but everybody ignores her words and takes them as jokes which are permissible between would be brother-in-law and sister-in-law. Hameeda feels: "Rahat's filthy looks plunged into my heart like arrows" (102). Kubra's idea of marriage is merely—"not as desire but as question of food and clothing. She is the widow's burden and the burden has to be removed" (107). This is the true face of society about marriage that marriage is not for love, but for shelter and clothing. No real fulfilment of female self.

Rahat outrages Hameeda's modesty and then leaves for his home as his marriage is fixed elsewhere. Hameeda is sacrificed. Kubra passes away after the departure of Rahat. The institution of marriage is severely criticized in the story "who knows how many innocent brides have mingled their blood with its redness and how many unfortunate virgins have sunk the despair of their lost hopes in its whiteness" (109). The story becomes all the more tragic as women themselves have internalized patriarchal values and are willing to be exploited in the name of marriage. In this story both mother and daughter are desperate about marriage and ready to do anything for this. Rahat exploits this wish and make a full advantage of this situation.

The Veil (*Ghunghat*) is another touching story by Chughtai. This story tells about the patriarchal norms of the society and the loneliness of a woman. These patriarchal notions are so deeply rooted in the social system that it is very difficult to escape from it. Kale Mian could not tolerate people praising the fair complexion of his wife because his complexion was dark. His ego is hurt at the beauty of his wife so much that he never lifts the veil of Goribi after marriage. Due to this very reason he initially refuses to marry Goribi. People made explanation to make him agree. "She would say 'day' if he wanted her to, 'night' if he wished thus; she would sit wherever he made her sit, and stand up if he ordered her to do so" (2). This is the main attitude of society about a woman's identity. Her life is not her but to fulfil the wishes of others (men).

In the patriarchal society, the man becomes the controller and women become the controlled. Finally Kale Maian agrees to marry Goribi, but due to his ego, he does not lift her veil and asks her to lift her veil. Goribi was very shy so she did not lift the veil. Kale Mian never lifted the veil and spends his life with prostitutes and homosexuals. In society we can see there are certain feminine characters like chastity, modesty, and sacrifice are imposed by the society. Any women, who is unable to fit in these in roles is labelled as immodest and selfish. Goribi conforms these roles. Everybody in the family persuades Goribi to lift her veil herself if her husband desires. Everyone reasoned with Goribi:

Now, girl, this is going to affect your whole life. Set your modesty aside, stir up some courage, and raise your veil yourself. There is nothing indecent about this – he is your

husband, your earthy God. It's your duty to obey him. Your freedom lies doing as he says. (4-5).

These lines clearly show how the society has set up standards for the women in marriage as she is to fulfil every wish of her husband. The society denies the identity of a woman and her freedom lies obeying her husband. This time also Goribi is unable to lift the veil as she thinks that it is the duty of her husband. Kale Mian deserts her. She spends her life longing for her husband's love and company but it is only on his dying day that she is by his side and instead of the bridal veil, she "pulled the white veil of widowhood over her head" (6). Kale Mian enjoyed his life, but due to indulgences he caught with disease. At this time he calls his wife, who was waiting for him throughout her life. Even her own parents dejected her. They were mere spectators who did nothing against this injustice. She did not have any identity but her identity lies in her husband.

References

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