

RESEARCH ARTICLE



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## PROJECTION OF WOMEN AS “OTHER” IN THE SELECT SHORT STORIES OF ISMAT CHUGHTAI

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### ABSTRACT

From the very beginning, the world has been divided into two stereotypical groups namely the male and the female. This distinction is made on the basis of biological and social difference. Patriarchy, the dominance of male over the female, defines female identity where the female are considered to be logically, morally and culturally inferior to the male. In a patriarchal society, women are considered as “other”. They are treated as object of sexual pleasure, destined to give birth to child and engage themselves with household chores only. Patriarchy belittles the world of women by creating the four walls and advocates the notion that in a society there is only one entity, the male, that wields power, and it is this power which determines its relation to the “other”. It is “sexual politics” that defines the women to be passive, meek and humble. Feminism questions male-defined world of the women. It protests the deprivation of women of political, economical, educational and social opportunities, and at the same time advocates for the equal rights of women in every sphere of life.

This paper will deal with the notion of otherness of the female in the backdrop of a patriarchal society in the short stories by the bold and controversial Urdu writer, Ismat Chughtai. There will be a close observation of the following short stories: “The Quilt”, “The Homemaker”, “Touch-me-not” and “Tiny’s Granny”. The approach in this paper will be through the lens of Simone de Beauvoir and Kate Millet to show the position of female identity and its relation to the male-dominated world.

**Keywords:** Distinction, Patriarchy, Dominance, Male, Female, Sexual, Pleasure, Power, Feminism, Identity

From the very beginning, the world has been divided into two stereotypical groups namely the male and the female. The male enjoy supremacy in the society, whereas, the female are marginalized. In patriarchal society, women are considered intellectually, morally, culturally inferior to men. Women are deprived of educational, economical, political opportunities available in the society. They are treated as object of sexual pleasure and their body is commodified by the male community. In patriarchal society, they are only child bearers and

their world is confined to the four walls. They are prevented from practicing any intellectual activity as they are treated as intellectually inferior to men. It is “sexual politics” that defines the identity of women as meek, submissive, and passive. Patriarchy considers women to be subordinate to men. Men are at the centre of the power of the society and it is the women who are required to abide by the command of men. Women are not a minority in our society but their “lives, experiences and values have been treated as marginal” (Sherry 6). Patriarchy

considers that there is only one entity in the society that is the male who are supposed to practice dominance over women. In patriarchy, women suffer from the identity crisis as their identity is defined by the male-dominated world. Women are treated as objects of exchange between men, a transaction which keeps them deprived of subjectivity. Women are "commodified as sexual creatures to serve male desire" (Lim 817). Simone de Beauvoir used the term "Subject" and "Other" to show the real position of women in a male-dominated world. The "Subject" refers to the man who controls and rules over the woman and the "Other" refers to the woman who is supposed to have no identity of her own. She is not considered as an "autonomous being" and "appears essentially to the male as a sexual being" (Beauvoir 16). In patriarchy, women are required to render sexual service to men, but their sexual freedom is given no heed. Their sexual desires are often repressed by the male-dominated society.

Ismat Chughtai, the bold and controversial Urdu writer, challenged the then patriarchal society and dared to talk about women's cause. She deals with female identity rather than women's emancipation and female sexuality to a certain extent which is largely considered as a taboo. Ismat Chughtai not only brings the exploitation of woman's body for man's gratification to light but she also dares to delineate woman's sexual desire – a theme or subject considered forbidden in a patriarchal society.

"The Quilt" is a landmark short story where we find how a woman has been exposed to patriarchal oppression or repression. It delineates female sexuality and the desolation of a woman who longs for her husband's love and affection. Here Begum is a frustrated housewife as Nawab, her husband, pays no attention to her. As she does not get sexual gratification from her husband, she wants to have it from the maid servant. When lesbianism was considered as a taboo, Ismat Chughtai found the courage to talk about it.

The projection of oppression and suppression of women by patriarchy is amply discernible in the revolutionary story "The Quilt". It is probably because of her beauty that Begum finds

a place at the house of Nawab. But she remains deprived of conjugal pleasure. She does not get the right that a wife should get from her husband. Feminine sensibility does not get any place at the house of the Nawab. She is the wife of the Nawab, but he behaves with her in such a manner that she is merely a commodity and needs to be kept in a shelf. After marrying her "he tucked her away in the house with his other possessions and promptly forgot her" (14). Wife is the life partner of a man and she should be given the same respect and dignity that a human being deserves.

Marriage brings something new to life with the fulfillment of sexual desires. Many romantic ideas remain associated with the institution called marriage. Begum also thought of sexual gratification after marriage but her romantic notion associated with marriage gets shattered as she avails inhuman treatment from her husband. Nawab is totally devoid of the idea that his wife has some due from him and he has to meet it. Instead of spending time with his wife, he passes time with "young, fair, slender-waisted boys" whom he is actually interested in. Here Begum has been a subject to patriarchal apathy. Her emotion and passion are not valued in the male-dominated world.

Begum wants the warm company of her husband but her husband does not pay any heed to her. She suffers from utter loneliness and desolation. She starts reading "romantic novels and sentimental verse" (14) to get pleasure from them but the more she reads these things, the more her sexual depression increases as she remains devoid of sexual gratification that she should have availed from her husband. She begins to "spend sleepless nights" (14) because of sexual frustration. She waits for a golden day when her husband will come to her and quench her sexual thirst. Whereas her husband finds pleasure in spending time with the boys who are in "gossamer shirts" (14).

Her husband's apathy towards her compels her to turn to abnormal sexual behavior. She starts getting sexual pleasure from her maid Rabba. Being victimized in the hand of patriarchy, she finds an alternative way to fulfill her sexual desire. Her sexual thirst gets quenched to some extent when her body is massaged by her maid. Massaging is so important

to her that "the massage was one of the basic necessities of life. Rather, more important than life's necessities"(15). Physical relation between man and woman is considered normal, and gives the ultimate pleasure. In this story, there is an implication that Begum involves herself in lesbianism. It is implied in the narrator's statement: "Begum Jaan's quilt was shaking vigorously, as though an elephant was struggling inside"(17). As patriarchy forces her to practice abnormal sexual activities, she remains deprived of normal way of sexual gratification. Although she gets sexual pleasure from Rabbu, she feels a persistent itch in her body. Doctors are called to check up Begum's illness, but they fail as her illness is not related to her body but to her passion and emotion. She feels persistent itches in her body as she does not get the sexual pleasure that a wife should have from her husband. Here Chughtai very finely delineates the suppression and oppression of women in the hand of patriarchy. Patriarchy's consideration of women as "other" finds a fine projection in this story. Here it is also found how the emotion, passion and sexual desire of women are brutally suppressed by the male-dominated society.

The theme of female identity and sexuality finds a discernible position in the story "The Homemaker". Lajo, the maid, is portrayed as a character who is "a stranger to bashfulness or the sense of shame"(79). In patriarchy, female body is an object of sexual pleasure. Lajo also gets the same treatment when it is said that "her body proved to be her only asset"(79). In the male-dominated society, Lajo has been merely a plaything and a commodity of commercial transaction. Female dignity gets destroyed when Lajo is referred to as a gift, and will be handed over to Mirza for his sexual gratification. When Lajo goes to Mirza's shop with lunch, his shop gets crowded. The men come to his shop not only with the purpose of purchasing things but also enjoy the body of Lajo.

Lajo has been a victim of patriarchal society. Her dignity has been sacrificed for the enjoyment of the male community in the society. She has been the mistress of many men, and quenching their sexual thirst since then when she had come to know that her body was the only asset. She is an object of pleasure to the men and "each of

them had already offered to make her his mistress" (86). Kate Millet says that patriarchy wants women to be submissive and passive and here we find Lajo as a character who has been submissive to the male dominated society and above all to the sexual gratification of the male. Throughout the story, it is noticed that she does not get the dignity that a human being should have. At first she is the maid at the house of Mirza then she becomes his wife. After spending some days with her, he divorces her and keeps her as his maid at his house. Here Ismat Chughtai questions female identity through her mouthpiece Lajo. In patriarchy, women do not have the identity of their own. It is the male who define female identity and the course of their life.

The position of the women in the society is questioned in the story "Touch-me- not". Patriarchy's consideration of women as objects of sexual pleasure has been aptly dealt with in it. The fact that in patriarchy women are meant to render sexual pleasure to men finds a fine expression when the narrator says: "she came to adorn Bhaijan's bed" (95). Bhabijaan is a human being and she deserves human like treatment. But she cannot have it as she has been unable to give birth to any child. Her dignity and honour depend on giving birth to child as the narrator says: "if she failed in this one conjugal duty, she would have to forgo all bridal comforts" (97). In patriarchy, women's life is considered to be centred on child birth and sexual gratification. Women suffer from identity crisis as their identity is defined and regulated by male-dominated society. As Bhabijan has been unable to give her husband what he wants, he thinks of disposing her of. Here Ismat Chughtai tries to show, in patriarchy, how women are treated as plaything, and considered to be subordinate to men.

Women's sexual exploitation by the patriarchy is aptly delineated in the story "Tiny's Granny". Tiny may belong to the lower strata of life but as she is a human being and above all a female, she must have some dignity and respect in the society. Her dignity and fate get smashed in the hand of patriarchy as her virginity is destroyed by the deputy. This is how Ismat Chughtai delineates it in the story: "Tiny, who was supposed to be pulling the rope of the ceiling fan, was dozing with the rope

in her hand. The fan stopped moving, the lord and master woke up, his sexual appetite was whetted, and Tiny's fate was sealed" (148). Tiny's fate gets shattered as she possesses a horrifying experience. She does not undergo normal and gradual growth of life "but at one leap became a woman, and not a fully-fashioned woman moulded by nature's skilled and practiced hands"(149). She now possesses womanly experience as her chastity gets lost in the hand of the deputy. In patriarchal society, as said by Simone de Beauvoir, women are "other". They are minority in the society and the power of the society is regulated by men. Kate Millet says that patriarchy wants women to play a role of submissiveness and passiveness. Here Tiny has been a victim of patriarchal oppression.

Ismat Chughtai very aptly projects the oppression and suppression of the female by the male in all these short stories. All her stories possess a patriarchal set up where the woman is repressed economically, socially and sexually. By projecting the oppression and suppression of women, Ismat Chughtai actually questions the position (otherness) of women in the male-dominated society.

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