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[ijrset@gmail.com](mailto:ijrset@gmail.com)

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# Emergence of Islamic Feminism: A Study of Ismat Chughtai's Selected Short Stories

Zainab Nasir Siddiqui

B.A. hons English, Semester- 6, Amity School of Languages, Amity University, Lucknow, India

This paper talks about the life and experiences of Ismat Chughtai and the emergence of Islamic feminism through her three novels. Firstly, *Lihaaf* (originally known as *The Quilt*), *The Heart Breaks Free* (originally known as “dil ki duniya”) and *The Wild One* (originally known as “Ziddi”). Ismat Chughtai was a renowned Indian Urdu writer and feminist whose works were known for their bold and realistic portrayal of women's issues. Born on August 21, 1915, in Badayun, Uttar Pradesh, India, she grew up in a family of intellectuals and was exposed to literature from a young age. Chughtai began her writing career in the 1930s and quickly gained recognition for her short stories and novels, which challenged social norms and portrayed the lives of women in a realistic and relatable way. She was a prominent member of the Progressive Writers' Movement, which aimed to use literature as a tool for social change and promote the rights of marginalized communities. The writings were firmly based on her personal experiences as a female living in a patriarchal culture. She believed that old social and cultural conventions had marginalised and stifled women's voices and viewpoints, thus she used her writings to elevate these voices and to question these norms. Her writings frequently touch on gender and sexually related topics, including as women's rights, sexual liberation and the difficulties experienced by women in patriarchal society. She frequently emphasised in her writings how society norms and traditional gender roles disadvantaged and marginalised women. Dr. Archana Gupta has also worked on her autobiography *A Life in Words: Memoirs* which is also a remarkable piece of non-fiction. She has thrown light on the concept of “selfhood” in her autobiography that becomes the crux of Dr. Gupta's research.

Chughtai's stories can be seen as an emergence of Islamic Feminism because of the way she questions traditional patriarchal ideals and spotlights the problems of Muslim women in India. Chughtai's writing focuses on Muslim women's experiences in a male-dominated society, and she is noted for her candid depiction of women's sexuality and the complexities of their life. In many of her stories, she criticises the Muslim community's patriarchal standards and questions the concept that women are inferior to males. Because it criticises conventional patriarchal beliefs and emphasises the need for greater gender equality in Muslim societies, Chughtai's writing might be considered as a sort of Islamic feminism. It is important to note, however, that Chughtai's feminism is not necessarily founded on Western models, but rather on Islamic traditions and beliefs. Lastly, Ismat Chughtai's stories might be considered as the emergence of Islamic feminism because of the way she opposes traditional patriarchal ideals and spotlights the problems of Muslim women in India. Her literature emphasises the need for greater gender equality in Muslim countries, drawing on Islamic traditions as well as feminist concepts. Writings by Ismat Chughtai are frequently linked to the rise of Islamic feminism in South Asia. Islamic feminism is a feminist movement that aims to harmonise Islamic principles and practises with the objectives of women's empowerment and gender equality. Chughtai's works show a strong commitment to upending patriarchal conventions and advancing women's rights as well as a comprehensive understanding of Islamic principles and traditions. Though she does not expressly write as an Islamic feminist, her work can be seen as a precursor to this movement in the area. Chughtai also questioned conventional gender norms and stereotypes, which are frequently defended by using Islamic teachings. For instance, she questioned conventional ideas of femininity and sexuality by positively presenting a lesbian relationship in her short tale “Lihaaf” (“The Quilt”). Chughtai's literature highlighted how women were oppressed and marginalised in patriarchal civilizations and questioned conventional gender roles and social norms. Her writing amplified the voices and viewpoints of women, and it was also greatly influenced by her personal experiences as a woman in a patriarchal environment. The work of Chughtai challenged preconceived notions about what it means to be a feminist and broadened the scope of feminism in South Asia. With her work, she aimed to give these women a voice by focusing in particular on the stories of those who had been silenced and marginalised by society. Her work also helped to broaden the conversation around feminist issues in South Asia. She was one of the first writers to openly discuss topics such as sexuality, sexual freedom, and gender identity in her work, and her writing paved the way for other feminist writers and activists to explore these issues in their own work. Her work helped to change and expand feminist perspectives in South Asia, and her legacy continues to inspire feminist activists and writers today. Her work remains an important part of the feminist canon in the region, and her commitment to women's rights and empowerment continues to inspire feminists around the world.

Chughtai's feminism was shaped by her personal experiences and perceptions of the harsh patriarchal environment in which she lived. She believed that women's rights and equality were critical to the overall advancement and development of society. She argued that in traditional male-dominated communities, women's opinions and viewpoints were frequently silenced, resulting in a distorted and incomplete perspective on the world. Especially if women lose their counterparts their life becomes miserable. As Prof. Dr. Kumkum Ray writes in the collection of her poems *Shades of Resilience*, "How do I survive partnerless? / A basic instinct, like a tidal wave, drowns" (23).

In 1942, when the short story was published, it was common for people in Victorian England and its colonies to dismiss homosexuality and homosexual people as a disease or addiction, and Ismat was no exception. The heteronormative ideas of colonial India influenced her. As a result, she had no sympathy or consideration for homosexual people while writing the story, which resulted in her disdain for and rejection of Begum Jan and Rabbu's relationship. The story Lihaaf and Ismat Chughtai's personal life are inextricably linked and inseparable from each other. She even stated that the story Lihaaf is a true story and not a fantasy, and that it is based on people she knew and events that occurred in her life. Even her sister-in-law recognised the characters in the story when she read it to her before publishing it in the journal. Ismat Chughtai and the adult narrator in the story have similar attitudes towards homosexuals as we can see these similarities throughout the story. The relationship of Begum Jan and Rabbu is continuously viewed through the eyes of a now-adult narrator who disavows and despised the relationship throughout the story, whereas Ismat Chughtai once stated that she considers the relationship of Begum Jan and Rabbu to be a disease and even wished that a man should come into Begum Jan's life and rescue her from Rabbu's clutches.

I always thought of choosing the best title for a literary work is a matter of interpretation and subjective judgement. However, based on the themes and content of the story, "Lihaaf," a suitable title could be "The Quilt" or "The Coverlet." This title refers to the central object in the story, which is the quilt that covers Begum Jan while she sleeps. Begum Jan is protected from the cold and darkness by the quilt, which acts as a physical barrier between her and the outside world. At the same time, the quilt represents the hidden emotions and passions that lurk beneath society's surface. The quilt is used as a symbol in the novel to represent the complicated power relations and sexual tensions that exist between men and women in a patriarchal society. As a result, the title "The Quilt" or "The Coverlet" is a perfect title for the narrative, since it reflects the story's major object and metaphor while also hinting at the deeper themes and meanings that lay inside the text.

Ismat Chughtai assisted women in a number of ways, one of which was through writing about their problems and experiences. She wrote a number of short tales and novels that examined the experiences of Indian women, especially those from disadvantaged groups as seen in this story "The heart breaks free". For their candid and honest portrayal of women's life and the problems they encountered, including as sexual desire, oppression, and gender-based violence, her stories frequently sparked controversy. Qudisia Aapa is shown as a devoted Muslim woman who observes all of her religion's conventions and traditions at the beginning of the novel. She is an abandoned wife. Although Bua's unusual lifestyle contradicts her deeply entrenched ideas and ideals, she is secretly captivated by it. Qudisia Aapa starts to doubt the constricting gender conventions and expectations put on women in her community as she spends more time with books. Qudisia Aapa is adamant about embracing her newfound independence and individuality and escaping the confines of her traditional life. Ismat Chughtai frequently portrayed strong, independent female characters in her work who went against social norms and opposed patriarchy. Her tales praised women's tenacity and fortitude while also emphasising the injustices they endured. Ismat Chughtai contributed to increasing awareness of the demand for by giving voice to women's viewpoints and experiences. Ismat Chughtai emphasises the difficulty that many women have in trying to balance their goals and aspirations with the social standards and expectations that are imposed on them through the character of Qudisia Aapa. She also demonstrates the power of female interactions to inspire change and transform lives. Finally, Qudisia Aapa's transformation into a rebel is a potent allegory about the value of uniqueness, freedom, and choice as well as the necessity of opposing society's repressive gender conventions and limitations.

The Wild One centres on the improbable and ultimately fatal love affair between Asha, a maid of service, and Puran, a young man from a regal family. Puran is initially rebellious, vivacious, endearing, and crazy. His family dissuades him from marrying Asha when he declares his intention to do so and pressures him to wed someone from his own social class. Asha was sent away several times by Puran's family so they do not get to live together. Puran being the strong one in the story, as he tries to make Asha realise that if they fight they will get to live together. But Asha, on the other side, believed everyone that tried to pull them away. She was influenced several times. Firstly, Puran's family sent her away then later too when Puran met her and they tried to run away, she was influenced and she again ran away from him. In the novel she keeps on running from him. We see the pressure that society holds that can lead to life destruction. At the conclusion, when Asha sees him again, he passes away tragically in a fire, and Asha then sets



herself on fire. The novella implies that although there are class differences, families are what sustain and care for those differences, and that the pull of familial bonds is what prevents one from escaping those differences. It deals with inter class romance and challenge social codes.

As Chughtai's career developed, she started to be identified with the Islamic feminism movement, which aims to harmonise feminist ideals with Islamic beliefs. Chughtai's Islamic feminism was founded on her conviction that the Quran upholds women's rights and gender equality, and she frequently drew on Islamic allusions and teachings to oppose patriarchal views of women in Muslim societies. Later texts by Chughtai explored feminist topics further, and she rose to prominence in the Indian feminist movement. Her work continues to motivate feminists and authors today. She was a founding member of the All-India Women's Conference, a group that promotes women's rights and empowerment. Chughtai frequently portrayed powerful female characters who questioned conventional gender roles and prejudices in his works. In her writing, she challenged fundamentalist interpretations of Islam that supported gender inequity and made the case for women's rights based on Islamic principles. She also brought attention to the struggles and discrimination faced specifically by Muslim women in Indian society. Some academics argue that Chughtai's literature successfully promoted Islamic feminism. As an illustration of how Islamic feminism may be used to promote women's rights and gender equality within Muslim communities, they point to her utilisation of Islamic allusions and teachings to support feminist objectives. She is regarded as a pioneering voice in South Asian feminist literature, and her work continues to influence feminist organisations in India and elsewhere. Others, on the other hand, would counter that Chughtai's ideas might not be shared by all Muslim feminists and that the idea of Islamic feminism is debatable. Islamic feminism is a varied movement that embraces a variety of viewpoints, and there is ongoing discussion regarding its objectives and tactics. In conclusion, even though Ismat Chughtai addressed Islamic feminism and gender equality in her writing, the degree to which she succeeded in advancing this movement is debatable and open to interpretation.

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