

## Voicing the Choice: Metaphor in Ismat Chughtai's Short Story – "The Quilt"

Shantanu Das\*

### Abstract

*Ismat Chughtai is a well-known feminist author in twentieth-century Urdu literature. She is given a special place in South-Asian Feminist Studies because of the way she interweaves the discourse of female sexuality with certain stylistic patterns. In her short story, "The Quilt," the voiceless woman character, Begum Jaan, holds on to her choice regarding her sexuality despite living in a time and a society immersed in patriarchy. The unconventional and 'unladylike' choice of homosexuality would not be well-received if openly expressed. Chughtai still writes about this choice in a very suggestive manner through the powerful metaphor of the quilt in "The Quilt". The metaphor speaks louder than the protagonist herself, thus becoming a means to voice the choice of the woman in the story. This also attributes the metaphor with the quality of a living character in Chughtai's narrative technique. Through this technique, Chughtai has contributed to the discourse of female sexuality in the Urdu literary subculture of her time. Taking the twentieth-century definitions of metaphor and a theoretical frame of Simone de Beauvoir's discussion on female sexuality, this paper takes into account this short story, "The Quilt," to examine, in a qualitative approach, the nature of the choice made by the female protagonist Begum Jaan and how the metaphor is used to voice her choice in the story.*

**Keywords:** Voice, choice, metaphor, female sexuality.

Ismat Chughtai (1911-1991) is a pioneering writer in creating the discourse of female sexuality in Urdu literature. Her short stories are great examples of how she recognizes the female body as an essential and active catalyst in sexual politics. Before Chughtai, this was hitherto not recognized as such in the world of Urdu fiction by women writers. Chughtai's way of presenting female sexuality is unique in the sense that she incorporates sensitive subjects with a subtle rhetorical style in her narratives. Krishan Chander's remark on Chughtai's style is notable here: "Metaphors, similes, and proverbs fit

---

\*Shantanu Das  
Assistant Professor  
Department of English Language and Literature (DELL), Premier University  
Email: shantanu.dell.puc@gmail.com

appropriately into the larger structure and embellish her style” (Chander, 2012, p. 177). Her metaphors quite interestingly bring out the very essence of her female characters who come from a strictly patriarchal society in which they are always treated as voiceless creatures. However, Chughtai, as a member of the Progressive Writers’ Association, shows that these women, despite being unable to enjoy the right to have their voices, do have their own choices regarding their sexual lives which would be considered quite unladylike in society. In the story, “The Quilt,” the female protagonist Begum Jaan gives preference to her sexuality and makes a certain unconventional choice like homosexuality to free herself from a hypocritical marital status. Without saying much about it directly, Chughtai uses brilliant metaphors for the choice to make it voiced loudly in the narrative.

Since its introduction by Aristotle in the 4th BCE, the word ‘metaphor’ has been defined and refined in multiple ways. The traditional definition, the “similarity view” as mentioned by Abrams in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, takes metaphor as “an implicit comparison between two disparate things” (Abrams, 2004, p. 155). In the twentieth century, some more views like “the interaction view” “the pragmatic view,” and “the cognitive view,” were developed regarding the function of metaphors (pp. 155-157). Out of these, the interaction view is the one that matches perfectly with Chughtai’s approach to the metaphors in her stories. To explain this view, Abrams discussed how I. A. Richards opined that “metaphor cannot be viewed simply as a rhetorical or poetic departure from ordinary usage, in that it permeates all language and affects the ways we perceive and conceive the world” (p. 155). Richards used the term “*vehicle* for the metaphorical word” and “*tenor* for the subject to which the metaphorical word is applied” (p. 155). While discussing Max Black’s expansion of Richards’ idea, Abrams said:

When we understand a metaphor, the system of commonplaces associated with the “subsidiary subject” (equivalent to I. A. Richards’ “vehicle”) interacts with the system associated with the “principal subject” (Richards’ “tenor”) so as to “filter” or “screen” that system, and thus effects a new way of perceiving and conceiving the principal subject. (pp. 155-156)

Black called this process a “distinctly *intellectual* operation”, and said that, rather than just upholding the general similarity, “the metaphor *creates* the

similarity” between the two subjects (as cited in Abrams, 2004, p. 156). From this framework, it can be seen that both Richards and Black attributed the metaphor with the quality of creating a new meaning or a new dimension of thoughts. This attribution posits the metaphor as a living agent in the world of fiction, capable of interacting with the reader with a perspective that is different from the pre-existing concept(s) of the subject matter. Now, if Chughtai’s approach is put into this parameter, one cannot miss the nuance with which she handles her metaphors to speak all the unspoken words of her women regarding the choices they make in their lives. Begum Jaan’s homosexuality in “The Quilt” (the tenor or the principal subject) gets voiced through the metaphor of Begum Jaan’s quilt (the vehicle or the subsidiary subject), thus denoting the metaphor’s ability to be taken as a living agent in the story. Also, Sadique’s comment on Chughtai’s art is notable here:

Ismat Chughtai is remarkably adept in the representation of detail and minute particulars without using too many words. ...This ability to focus on small details gives her stories vibrancy enabling her to establish connections between the characters and their social milieu and to present a picture of life in its true context. (Sadique, 2012, p. 228)

This capacity of connecting the characters with their social milieu is well-executed by Chughtai in terms of voicing the woman character’s choice through the metaphor in the story. In the subsequent discussion, the paper shows how the metaphor voices the choice in the story, and what the nature of this choice is like.

The paper will begin with the concept of female sexuality. Female sexuality has long been considered a taboo and an impossible element in the understanding of what a woman is. Freud’s disregard of the feminine libidinal force as it being something original to female sexuality has been refuted multiple times by the feminist scholars of the twentieth century. The reason behind such feminist retorts is that Freudian psychoanalysis leaves an obscuring impact on the social and cultural contexts in which women are treated as ‘the Other’. In their reactions to the Freudian analysis of female sexuality, Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949), Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and Germaine Greer in *The Female Eunuch* (1970) showed that libido is as real in female sexuality as it is in male sexuality. According to Beauvoir, the psychoanalysts seemed to have ignored “the fundamental ambivalence of the

attraction exerted on the female by the male” (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 81). Betty Friedan named traditional housewifery and stay-at-home motherhood as “the feminine mystique” and identified it to have “derived its power from Freudian thought” (Friedan, 2010, p. 79). She argued that the Freudian theory of female sexuality “led women, and those who studied them, to misinterpret...their own emotions and possible choices in life” (p. 79). On a similar note, Greer emphasized that “...we will have to reinstate our libido in its rightful function” (Greer, 2008, p. 111). Their arguments created a new discourse of female sexuality which expands itself to the concepts of body autonomy and homosexuality as well. This has paved the way for the perception of female sexuality to be treated not as an impossible thing anymore, rather as an important element of sexual freedom for women.

Among the above-mentioned feminist critics, Simone de Beauvoir’s take on the subject is the pioneering one and more applicable to the subject of this paper. In her book *The Second Sex*, she discussed the nature of female sexuality from different perspectives. She also deconstructed myths about female sexuality in the book. While her focus in Book One is on the politics between the sexes from the Subject-Other dichotomy, in Book Two (entitled “Woman’s Life Today”), she discussed the whole range of woman’s sexuality starting from childhood to being an independent woman. In the Introduction, she stated: “Reared by women within a feminine world, their normal destiny is marriage, which still means practically subordination to man; for masculine prestige is far from extinction, resting still upon solid economic and social foundations” (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 31). The very first chapter, “Childhood,” begins with this statement of Beauvoir: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman....it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine” (p. 295). In the four parts of Book Two, she focused mainly on a woman’s destiny which is determined by her surroundings, and yet how she can still vouchsafe different modes of escape for her. The chapters, “The Young Girl” and “The Married Woman,” substantiate the idea of confinement and escape for a married woman as well. As a married woman, Ismat Chughtai’s Begum Jaan is posited in a similar scenario that Beauvoir’s discussion is based on in these chapters.

“The Quilt” is the most controversial of Chughtai’s story for which she faced an obscenity trial in 1945. The protagonist is a middle-aged married woman, Begum Jaan. Trapped in a sexually frustrating marriage with Nawab Saheb,

“the frail, beautiful Begum” is “wasted away in anguished loneliness,” and she spends “sleepless nights, yearning for a love that had never been” (Chughtai, 2009, p. 14). The question of choice does not apply to her marriage as it was not Begum Jaan’s decision to marry Nawab Saheb; rather it was her destiny to be married off to whoever was chosen for her by her parents. In the chapter “The Young Girl” of her book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir showed that the initial stage of a woman’s psyche getting prepared for marriage begins from the adolescent phase. She described the adolescent phase in a girl’s life as a phase of waiting for the “Prince Charming” as “she has always been convinced of male superiority; this male prestige is not a childish mirage; it has economic and social foundations; ...” (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 352). Beauvoir also held her view of marriage as “an honourable career and one less tiring than many others” which “alone permits a woman to keep her social dignity intact and at the same time to find sexual fulfilment as loved one and mother” (p. 352). If Beauvoir’s idea is observed through the Indian lens, it can be stated that Begum Jaan’s only destination in life has been marriage. In Begum Jaan’s society, women are trained to be brides throughout their childhood. As R. K. Gupta mentioned in his essay, “Feminism and Modern Indian Literature,” they come from a time, “when Sita and Savitri were supposed to represent ideal Indian womanhood, when unquestioning allegiance to her husband was believed to be the hallmark of a virtuous Indian woman, ...” (Gupta, 1993, p. 179). So, the ‘waiting-for-the-Prince-Charming’ episode takes up a significant portion of their psyche. In this connection, Zoya Hasan and Ritu Menon’s observation of marriage in the Muslim Women’s Survey (MWS) in the year 2000, where both Hindu and Muslim women were interviewed, is notable. Conducted about sixty years after the publication of “The Quilt,” the survey shows how little women’s condition has changed in all these years. According to them:

...it is generally accepted that the question of choice with regard to marriage is practically non-existent for the vast majority of women. Decisions on when, to whom, at what age, and in what manner to get married are seldom in their control. In such a social and cultural context, where marriage and motherhood are seen to be the primary objectives of a woman’s life—her ‘career’, ...—it is almost inconceivable that she will oppose either the option itself, the partner chosen for her, or the circumstances in which her marriage takes place. (Hasan & Menon, 2006, p. 88)

This statement also supports Beauvoir's point of marriage as 'an honourable career' in the context of the society in which Chughtai wrote. So, when the marriage is not consummated and Begum Jaan is ignored by Nawab Saheb, she cannot find the 'Prince Charming' she has been waiting for in her husband. Though her 'social dignity' is not hampered, she does not find the 'sexual fulfillment as loved one and mother' as Beauvoir's theory shows. From here begins her frustration which serves as the backdrop of her choice of homosexuality.

Begum Jaan's choice of lesbian sexuality—the principal subject or tenor in "The Quilt"—is a direct result of the sexual frustration in her marriage. Neither the "night-long readings from the Quran" nor the "romantic novels and sentimental verse" have helped her end the frustration (Chughtai, 2009, p. 14). Her frustration as a married woman is contrasted with her personality of "a veritable maharani" (p. 15). This queen-like Begum Jaan ultimately decides to end this misery by choosing to embark on a homosexual relationship with Rabbu, one of her maids. The principal metaphor in the story is Begum Jaan's quilt which is employed by Chughtai to stand for Begum Jaan's choice of homosexuality. Chughtai uses the quilt to set the tone of this scenario which has prompted Begum Jaan to choose an unconventional way to find her happiness. Chughtai writes:

Relatives...would come for visits and stay on for months while she remained a prisoner in the house. ...They helped themselves to rich food and got warm clothes made for themselves while she stiffened with cold despite the new cotton stuffed in her quilt. As she tossed and turned, her quilt made newer shapes on the wall, but none of them held any promise of life for her. Then why must one live? Particularly, such a life as hers ... But then, Begum Jaan started living, and lived her life to the full. (pp. 14-15)

The word 'prisoner' tells much of Begum Jaan's sense of suffocation in the marriage, and the quilt's 'newer shapes on the wall' without 'any promise of life' brings out her shadowy conjugality without any substance in it. Also, the association of the quilt with the cold, but not with the warmth that it is supposed to provide, indicates the coldness in her sexual life. All these highlight the tension that has been building up in Begum Jaan's married life for so long. This tension is only relieved when Rabbu comes into her life and a new

prospect of living “her life to the full” opens up before her (p. 15). Rabbu’s “special oil massage” finally puts an end to Begum Jaan’s “persistent itch” on her body (pp. 15, 16). Chughtai uses the itch as an expression of Begum Jaan’s sexual frustration and Rabbu’s oil massage as a remedial service to that frustration. Both the itch and the oil massage heighten the suggestiveness in the narrative. To elaborate this further, Beauvoir’s opinion from the chapter “The Married Woman” in her book *The Second Sex* is applicable. According to her:

Whereas woman is confined within the conjugal sphere; it is for her to change that prison into a realm. Her attitude towards her home is dictated by the same dialectic that defines her situation in general: she takes by becoming prey, she finds freedom by giving it up: by renouncing the world she aims to conquer a world. (Beauvoir, 1997, p. 469)

Following this, it can be discerned that Begum Jaan’s choice to a great extent summarizes her yearning for a healthy sexual life and the way she chooses to fulfil that yearning. By ‘becoming a prey’ of the sexless marriage, and yet by giving up the wait for her husband, she finds freedom in a relationship with Rabbu in the prison called marriage, and eventually makes that very prison her realm. Gopal calls this an “intricately layered sexual politics of the domestic sphere and the complicated emotional lives of its denizens” (Gopal, 2005, p. 66). Thus, the homosexual episode in her life acts both as an act of revenge and an escape.

The metaphor of the quilt presents the readers with Black’s ‘distinctly intellectual operation’ mentioned earlier in the paper by allowing them to perceive and conceive Begum Jaan’s choice effectively. This way of ‘perceiving and conceiving the principal subject’ centers the discussion on her choice—the principal subject or tenor in the story. The quilt covers her homosexual act at night in an attempt to hide it from everyone else. The narrator, who is the young self of Chughtai, reminisces the memory of Begum Jaan (“an adopted sister” of her mother) and her quilt in this story (Chughtai, 2009, p. 13). During her stay at Begum Jaan’s place, she sleeps on a separate bed in Begum Jaan’s room. One night she wakes up and experiences an uncanny sight of Begum Jaan’s quilt: “I woke up at night and was scared. It was pitch dark and Begum Jaan’s quilt was shaking vigorously, as though an elephant was struggling inside” (p. 17). As a small girl, she cannot figure out the meaning of it and is genuinely scared. The comparison of the shaking quilt with the struggle of an elephant inside it is the

best explanation that can appear in the mind of a child at that moment of fear. When both Begum Jaan and Rabbu, as Rabbu too sleeps in the same room, tell her that nothing is wrong, she goes back to sleep. This episode does not give any direct hint of their homosexual act but suggests that the relationship between Begum Jaan and Rabbu is not the usual one between a master and a servant. This unusual master-servant relationship is also pointed out by Chughtai in the description of the massage Rabbu gives to Begum Jaan:

Perched on the couch she was always massaging some part or the other of Begum Jaan's body. At times I could hardly bear it—the sight of Rabbu massaging or rubbing at all hours. Speaking for myself, if anyone were to touch my body so often, I would certainly rot to death. (p. 16)

This stated abnormality of the massage and the nocturnal episode of the quilt together appeal as nothing more than a fearful sight in the child narrator's mind. For her, the quilt, which looks "perfectly innocent in the morning," becomes a menacing figure at night (p. 18). However, to an adult reader of the story, this combination immediately suggests a homosexual relationship between Begum Jaan and Rabbu. This suggestion is also strengthened by Begum Jaan's pedophilic approach "like a person possessed" to the narrator herself when Rabbu is away for some days to see her son (p. 20). In this line of discussion, it is important to note that Chughtai creates a suggested ambience of queer narrative in her time, when queer theory itself was not popularized yet, without even mentioning the term homosexual or lesbian for a single time in the story. More importantly, since Chughtai has not been specific in detailing the sexual politics between Begum Jaan and Rabbu, the nature of homosexuality in Begum Jaan cannot be measured in an exact parameter of Beauvoir's discussion of lesbianism in the chapter "The Lesbian" of her book *The Second Sex*. Since they already have an existing power politics between themselves as the master (the Subject) and the servant (the Other), an ardent reader can naturally guess that in their sexual politics too, the master, Begum Jaan holds the Subject position and the servant, Rabbu holds the Other position. However, this pattern cannot be implied with certainty in critically analyzing Begum Jaan's choice of homosexuality as Chughtai has only been suggestive about it. To establish this suggestive pattern, Chughtai associates the visual impact of the quilt as its taking "grotesque shapes" with some auditory elements as "the sound of someone smacking her lips, as though savouring a tasty pickle" (p. 22). This heightens the metaphoric stature of the quilt by letting



it appear as a living agent with both kinetic and verbal skills, thus supporting Black's idea of creating the similarity between the quilt and the choice of homosexuality in the story. Concerning this, Manto's comment on Chughtai's sensory perceptions to "work in their specific contexts as and when required" (Manto, 2012, p. 169) is worth mentioning. Varis Alavi, too, came out with a similar opinion:

The creation of tactile word pictures is the mark of an exceptional genius and Ismat excels at these. This exceptional attribute of Ismat's style, in creating a sensory ambience, is something the realists normally avoid for they are apprehensive of indulging in romanticism or lyricism. (Alavi, 2012, p. 214)

So, the metaphor as a living agent not only voices homosexuality in "The Quilt" but also makes it more vivid with a sensory effect of audibility and agility.

The first-person narrative technique in the story works most effectively to support Chughtai's suggestiveness of the choice of the protagonist. In "The Quilt", the author recalls the memory of a Begum as perceived by her younger self. The narration involves a sense of innocence and inexperience in the description of mature events of love-making between Begum Jaan and Rabbu. This feature of the narration permeates the suggestive pattern of the story and strengthens the metaphor of the quilt. For example, the narrator has always perceived the inflated quilt to be hiding an elephant inside it (Chughtai, 2009, p. 17). The most interesting point in the narration, the last line of the story—"Good God! I gasped and sank deeper into my bed."—is a reaction to what the narrator has seen inside the quilt as it has risen by a foot when she switches on the light at one night (p. 22). No further mention is made on what she has seen. Taking cues from the young narrator's perspective throughout the story, the readers can understand the choice of homosexuality; however, when the moment of truth comes, Chughtai ends the story not by saying anything with certainty, rather by leaving it to the young narrator's perplexed reaction and making it an open-ended story. Though Manto, Chughtai's contemporary and life-long friend, initially objected to this last line for its being a "pointless sentence," it eventually gives the suggestive pattern of the story the very boost it has needed to intensify the metaphor of the quilt (Manto, 2012, p. 159). With this line, Chughtai reaches the point of keeping the curiosity of the reader alive very much like the way Rabindranath Tagore has

done in his short stories using his technique of “Not ending at the end, / But leaving the heart uneasy” as William Radice has translated it (Tagore, 2005, p. 271).

One may run the risk of taking Begum Jaan as a lesbian who has come out of the closet. In clarifying this, the male character of the story—Nawab Saheb—is to be discussed though he is kept on the periphery of the narrative. In the case of Begum Jaan, her choice of homosexuality has served in the story both as an act of revenge and an escape as discussed earlier. It is clearly stated in the story that Begum Jaan has waited for her husband and yearned for his love, but he has “tucked her away in the house with his other possessions and promptly forgot her” (Chughtai, 2009, p. 14). She has tried “amulets, talismans, black magic and other ways of retaining the love of her straying husband” but they are of no help, and she has realized that “one cannot draw blood from a stone” (p. 14). Such negligence by Nawab Saheb is hinted out in his “strange hobby” of keeping students who are “young, fair, slender-waisted boys” and “whose expenses were borne by him,” which suggests the fact that it is not the Begum, rather Nawab Saheb who is the life-long homosexual in the story (pp. 13, 14). This suggestion is also supported by his remaining unmarried for a long time and the virtuous image he holds in society as no one has “ever seen a nautch girl or prostitute in his house” (p. 13). So, the woman-less life that Nawab Saheb has led is not because of his virtue, but because of his sexual orientation. Begum Jaan’s options are to accept a sexless marriage and to go for a substitute in the given circumstances. She chooses the latter. Haider, in his essay “The Essential Women of Ismat,” opined that Ismat’s women “are privy to all the desires and instincts which are easily accessible to men but generally and conventionally not accessible to women—because the natural and spontaneous desires of women are thwarted and not accepted easily in a male world” (Muhafiz, 2012, p. 218). It is important to note that “The Quilt” is based on true events, and the real Begum Jaan was not a lesbian in her entire life. Chughtai’s account of meeting her in person years after the publication of the story holds some credibility to this. In the meeting filled with “excitement and joy,” the Begum told her: “Do you know, I divorced the Nawab and married a second time? I have a pearl of a son, by God’s grace” (Chughtai, 2013, p. 40). Given that “The Quilt” is written in the form of Chughtai’s reminiscence of the Begum, the fact cannot be altogether stripped off from the fiction. This factual detail also establishes Begum Jaan’s choice of lesbianism as a substitute to end her conjugal crisis in the story.

The concept of 'choice' as a key element in the discourse of feminism is a modern development. The very slogan, "My Body, My Choice," became popular in the Indian media in 2015 with the short film *My Choice*—directed by Homi Adajania, starred by Deepika Padukone, and made under the banner of *Vogue India* to initiate social awareness (*Vogue India*, 2015). Though it has been trolled on social media by many (one mentionable criticism came from Gunjeet Sra for its being "not empowering" but "hypocritical"), it has at least been able to start a conversation on bodily autonomy and freedom of choice in the twenty-first century popular culture of India and its neighbouring countries (Sra, 2015). However, in the 1940s in India, it was not a recurrent issue in the feminist narratives of that time. In support of this, an event can be cited from Chughtai's personal life. Her own choice of education over marriage was considered unacceptable; hence, it was adamantly voiced by her in front of her parents: "I have no interest in housekeeping. I want to study" (Chughtai, 2013, p. 115). In the context of the time she was writing this story, the nature of the Urdu literary subculture of feminist writing in India should be discussed. The founding of women's magazines in Urdu, especially *Tahzib un-Niswan* (1898), *Khatun* (1904), and *Ismat* (1908), launched the much needed gynocentric platform for "breaking down women's mental isolation rather than glorifying their separate sphere" by starting discussions on education, the nationalist movement in the country, and the emerging issues of legal rights and suffrage (Minault, 2009, pp. 86-87). Such a platform generated gynocentric tendencies in Urdu creative writing. The publication of the short story collection, *Angare* (Embers) in 1932 marks the beginning of such a subculture, and Chughtai is considered "as the spiritual descendent" of this *Angare* group (Sajjad Haider, Ahmed Ali, Rashid Jahan, and Mahmuduzzafar—the four writers who contributed to the collection) (Asaduddin, 1993, p. 77). As the choice of Begum Jaan in "The Quilt" is closely connected with bodily autonomy, it is evident here that Chughtai played a significant role in contributing to the creation of the subculture of feminist writing in India by advocating such agenda like choice and female sexuality which were much ahead of her time.

Even after the suggestiveness and rhetorical precision through metaphors, Chughtai could not escape the lawsuit against "The Quilt." As Gail Minault wrote: "The lesbian theme was too much even for progressive public opinion at the time,..." (Minault, 1996, p. 99). This is evident in the articles her contemporary male writers and critics wrote against her. For example, Patrus Bukhari wrote about "The Quilt" that: "...the reader finds himself unwittingly

among those spectators, who sit on their haunches along the roadside to witness the spectacle of animals mating" (Bukhari, 2012, p. 187). Ahmed felt her stories to have "an abnormal sexual interest" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 229). When Chughtai was dealing with such sexist comments on her style, Virginia Woolf, in a different country to a different audience, pointed out that "the consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions..." is one of the obstacles a woman writer faces (Woolf, 2001, p. 79). Chughtai called herself a "spoilt brat" who "would get thrashed often for telling the truth" (Chughtai, 2013, p. 39). As a writer, she stuck to this childish habit of telling the truth while portraying her women characters in varied ranges of their sexuality. To do that she developed a suggestive style and was never direct in terms of diction; so, it can be said that she could battle with 'the consciousness of what men will say' while writing her stories. However, the lawsuit invited an acute self-critical phase in her career along with all the negative and sexist criticisms, filthy letters, and threats of divorce from her husband. Manto, who too was tried for obscenity charges against his story "Odour," encouraged her by saying: "Come on, it's the only great story you've written" (p. 25). Though "The Quilt" could not be proved obscene in the court, the lawsuit was never forgotten by her male critics and the stigma of obscenity remained with their approaches in critiquing Chughtai's work as she wrote in her autobiography later: "Since then I have been branded an obscene writer. No one bothered about what I had written before or after 'Lihaaf' ('The Quilt')" (p. 39).

Hence, it can be said that in Chughtai's time, the critique of "The Quilt" was highly misogynist and sexist, which projected more on the subject matter and not on the artistic presentation of it in its suggestive narration and rich rhetorical quality. Despite the uproar after its publication, "The Quilt" is the pioneering story to initiate a discourse on homosexuality and, as a consequence of the lawsuit, a discussion on the question of obscenity in Urdu literature as well. Chughtai portrays Begum Jaan with the essential ability to use the very reason for her husband's indifference to her as the very key to unlocking the treasure of fulfillment in her life. She, in her fruitless marriage, is posited as a voiceless woman who chooses her way out. Her husband's failure to become the 'Prince Charming' in Begum Jaan's life rather allows her to become the queen of her own story. Whereas the quilt covers Begum Jaan's unconventional choice of homosexuality in the narrative, the metaphoric expression of it rather hides less and says more about her choice to the reader. Thus, the metaphor becomes an instrument to voice Begum Jaan's choice regarding her sexuality.

## References

- Abrams, M. H. (2004). Theories of Metaphor. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (pp. 154-158). Singapore: Thomson Asia.
- Ahmed, A. (2012). Some Comments (M. Prasad & S. Hashmi, Trans.). In S. P. Kumar & Sadique (Eds.), *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times* (pp. 229-231). New Delhi, India: Katha.
- Alavi, V. (2012). Some Aspects of Ismat's Art (N. Zafir, Trans.). In S. P. Kumar & Sadique (Eds.), *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times* (pp. 209-216). New Delhi, India: Katha.
- Asaduddin, M. (1993). Alone on Slippery Terrain: Ismat Chughtai and Her Fiction. *Accent of Women's Writing*, 36(5), 76-89. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23339708>
- Beauvoir, S. d. (1997). Introduction. In H. M. Parshley (Trans.), *The Second Sex* (pp. 13-31). London, UK: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1949)
- Beauvoir, S. d. (1997). Childhood. In H. M. Parshley (Trans.), *The Second Sex* (pp. 295-351). London, UK: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1949)
- Beauvoir, S. d. (1997). The Young Girl. In H. M. Parshley (Trans.), *The Second Sex* (pp. 351-392). London, UK: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1949)
- Beauvoir, S. d. (1997). The Married Woman. In H. M. Parshley (Trans.), *The Second Sex* (pp. 445-501). London, UK: Vintage Books. (Original work published 1949)
- Bukhari, P. (2012). Something about Ismat Chughtai (U. Nagpal, Trans.). In S. P. Kumar & Sadique (Eds.), *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times* (pp. 179-187). New Delhi, India: Katha.
- Chander, K. (2012). Foreword to Chotein (M. Chaturvedi, Trans.). In S. P. Kumar & Sadique (Eds.), *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times* (pp. 173-177). New Delhi, India: Katha.
- Chughtai, I. (2009). The Quilt. In M. Asaduddin (Trans.), *Lifting the Veil* (pp. 13-22). Haryana, India: Penguin Random House. (Original work published 1942)
- Chughtai, I. (2013). In the Name of Those Married Women.... In M. Asaduddin (Trans.), *A Life in Words: Memoirs* (pp. 21-42). Haryana, India: Penguin Random House. (Original work published 1994)
- Chughtai, I. (2013). Chewing on Iron. In M. Asaduddin (Trans.), *A Life in Words: Memoirs* (pp. 113- 135). Haryana, India: Penguin Random House. (Original work published 1994)
- Friedan, B. (2010). The Sexual Solipsism of Sigmund Freud. In *The Feminine Mystique* (pp. 79-98). England: Penguin Books.
- Gopal, P. (2005). Habitations of Womanhood: Ismat Chughtai's Secret History of Modernity. In *Literary Radicalism in India: Gender, Nation and the Transition to Independence* (pp. 65-88). USA & Canada: Routledge.
- Greer, G. (2008). The Psychological Sell. In *The Female Eunuch* (pp. 103-112). New York: HarperCollins.
- Gupta, R. K. (1993). Feminism and Modern Indian Literature. *Accent of Women's Writing*, 36(5), 179- 189. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23339720>
- Haider, M. (2012). The Essential Women of Ismat (P. Puri, Trans.). In S. P. Kumar & Sadique (Eds.), *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times* (pp. 217-219). New Delhi, India: Katha.

Hasan, Z., & Menon, R. (Eds.). (2006). Marriage. In *Unequal Citizens: A Study of Muslim Women in India* (pp. 76-99). New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press.

Manto, S. H. (2012). On Ismat (S. Bhattacharji, Trans.). In S. P. Kumar & Sadique (Eds.), *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times* (pp. 156-172). New Delhi, India: Katha.

Minault, G. (1996). Coming Out: Decisions to Leave Purdah. *India International Centre Quarterly*, 23(3/4), 93-105. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23004613>

Minault, G. (2009). Muslim Social History from Urdu Women's Magazines. In *Gender, Language, and Learning: Essays in Indo-Muslim Cultural History* (pp. 84-100). Ranikhet, India: Permanent Black.

Sadique. (2012). Ismat Chughtai's Art of Fiction (N. Malik, Trans.). In S. P. Kumar & Sadique (Eds.), *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times* (pp. 221-222). New Delhi, India: Katha.

Sra, G. (2015). Deepika Padukone's video for Vogue is not empowering—it's hypocritical. Retrieved from <https://qz.com/india/372373/deepika-padukones-video-for-vogue-is-not-empowering-its-hypocritical/>

Tagore, R. (2005). *Rabindranath Tagore: Selected Short Stories* (W. Radice, Trans.). London, UK: Penguin.

Vogue India. (2015, March 28). *My Choice* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KtPv7IEhWRA>

Woolf, V. (2001). Professions for Women. In M. Eagleton (Ed.), *Feminist Literary Theory: A Reader* (pp. 78-82). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers. (Original work published 1942)