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## Female Subjectivity and Sensibility in Ismat Chughtai's *All for a Husband*

Priya. P.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6813-0524>

\*Corresponding Author: Priya. P., Assistant Professor of English at Meenakshi College for Women, Kodambakkam, Chennai 600024, India, [priyababu23@gmail.com](mailto:priyababu23@gmail.com)

### Research Paper

### Abstract

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**Aims:** The paper entitled "Female Subjectivity and Sensibility in Ismat Chughtai's *All for a Husband*" brings out the challenges faced by woman in terms of space and self. The motive behind this research venture is to discuss issues of gender inequality and its effect on women from social, cultural, biological, psychological and emotional perspective. The stereo typical mind set of individuals and society are highlighted. As a forethought, measures to get rid of gender exploitation and genuine grievances are also addressed.

**Methodology and Approaches:** The research design adopted for this study is qualitative philosophical and exploratory. The short story is meticulously examined through the lens of feminism. Case study was under taken in order to determine facts in the existing scenario. The findings of this study raised serious issues of gender inequality and its effects on the various arena that woman encounter in her every day to day life.

**Outcome:** The paper provides a new approach on woman centric issues that has to be viewed and weighed under 'new' lens. The series of questions raised during the analysis help individuals to self- interrogate and contribute towards self-realization.

**Conclusion and Suggestions:** The scope and intensity of the problem has been explored in the light of primary data and with the theme involved. Some of the questions governing my enquiry are: How and why do we say that woman has got freedom when we see apparently her self-acknowledged losses? Why does she stay ineffective in spite of organizing programs like Women's Movement in India? A strong teleology in determining the need for economic security to stay as 'dominant' and not as 'dormant' individual is enforced towards the culmination.

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The fact that men look down on women and mistreatment accorded to her is not a new issue to debate. The naked reality being women continue suffering exploitations at various levels since time immemorial. Women are marginalized, oppressed and subjugated down the ages. She is dehumanized in every aspect of her life in spite of several ongoing woman centric movements. The purpose of writing this paper is to discuss what type of psychological problems they undergo when they are manipulated by men and at times by the same gender of the society.

Ismat Chughtai's works are woman centric. More predominantly she dives into the psyche of Indian Woman whose life revolve around family, marriage and stereotype. Ismat chooses Urdu while conveying words e.g. 'Sasural' 'Maika' despite having knowledge of English language. She unravels female psyche with a forthright sense that reminds Krishan Chander's praise on Ismat's ability in understanding the female psyche. He observes in his essay "*Foreword to Chotein*"-*Ismat Her Life Her Times* "I find, these stories represent the essence of a woman and her personality." (173). Ismat wished society to see woman as a normal human being and not to see her entangled into the traditional trepidation. The cognizance of distinctive female psyche is well portrayed in her short stories. Her heroines keenly reflect the struggle that women face against the oppressive institutions of the time. This clear cut approach is done with a touch of sensitivity that gave her a paramount place amongst all Urdu fiction writers. She boldly sees through the emotional bareness of the life of her heroines whose feelings remain suppressed. She openly rejects against all patriarchal social structures and subvert set conventions. The new woman voices according to Charu Sheel Singh in *Women about Women in Indian Literature in English*, "She [the new woman] is developing a new sensibility and consciousness which will no longer tolerate the suffocating familial, institutional, political and cultural norms which place her in a humiliating subject status." (50) Thus her stories more than humanity form convey an outright rejection to dominant social structures. Ismat Chughtai (1911-1991) and Saadat Hasan Manto (1912-1955) are the two authors of Urdu social

realist literature whose themes largely concern human emotions and its reflections.

Her short story collections are *Lifting the Veil*, *My Friend, My Enemy*, *The Quilt*, *Amar Bel* translated as *The Eternal Vine*, *Crooked Line* [translated work] *Heart Breaks Free* and *The Wild One*. They are rooted to socio cultural and ethnographic aspects of day to day struggle of woman in terms of marriage and social constraints. Ismat stood up for the silenced group of the middle class Muslims and their culture. Manto in his essay “*On Ismat*” observes, “had Ismat not been a woman through and through, we would never have got to tread tender and sensitive stories like “*The Mole*”, “*The Quilt*” and “*Gainda*”. These stories present women in varied expressions-neat, transparent, unsullied by artifice.”(160). Her concern is aimed at women worldwide, “You have to make a male and female monkey (Hero and Heroine) dance to the beat of kettledrum in order to attract the attention of the public. If you stand up to deliver a sermon and embark on a narration of world events it’s obvious on one will pay any attention to you.” (My Friend My Enemy, 25). She strongly sees woman’s idealization ‘portrayal’ as ‘monument of sacrifice’. The ‘real woman’ in her is completely lost. The cultural mandates of roles assigned by the society challenges her position invariably.

The paper examines the reasons behind the silent voice of every woman in particular, Muslim woman. It focusses on how Ismat sees marriage and its effect on the life of woman in her short story “*All for a Husband*” (*Ek Shauhar ki Khatir*). In this process, many questions arise in the mind of the reader. Is marriage a compulsory act? Does a woman lose her identity or identity bounded by marriage? Is marriage an act of convenience for woman or both? In that case why does the struggle that she undergo remain as woman specific domain alone? Is she willing to undertake the journey of being and becoming an emblem of sacrifice? In this story, marriage is portrayed as a necessary act by all her fellow train travelers. Marriage being a common thread like any of her other stories. The story is dealt in a sarcastic vein and of gentle reprobation unlike *Amar Bel*. The

lighter vein add to the writer's deft touch. She reproves at her fellow co passengers (woman) who discusses always about their husbands, marital status and child birth. The first woman in the compartment curiously enquires Chughtai as where she is setting out for. She enquires whether she travels to her 'Maika's' or Sasural's home. Her other passengers wanted to know more about her children. In spite of her deft reply, they ignorantly rattle her with all questions related to domestic specific. She remains silent for some time but inevitably understands that she has to travel all the way with the. She decides to keep herself amused. At the same time, she is thoroughly annoyed at their ignorance. This irritates her further. She sees their meek obliging nature as per the societal required norms and they eventually succumb to domestic pressures without realizing them.

Ismat severely condemns at society's construct and the family constriction over women's sexuality and serfdom. To her woman, assumes various roles with or without knowing. The subjugation element in the story is seen when one of the co passengers feels proud and pleased as a duty-bound wife. She sounds as though she has willingly imposed self – made rules on herself. The author feels that violence against woman need not be physical. In the sense, preventing girl child from education is totally considered as an act of condemnation. Their gentle prodding and repetitive questions to Ismat who travels alone reflect their own helpless situation and circumstance. They couldn't control their curiosity and continuously raise series of questions, "Are you going to your *maika*? "Oh, then you must be going to your *in-laws*, isn't it?" (39) Once can see how women stay compromising altogether. They are obliged to marry and perform household duties without any refusal. Her fellow traveler suggests few methods of 'catching' a good husband. Another lady who overhears their conversation sympathizes, "She is not married, poor thing." (40) It sounds as though woman has forgotten her very purpose of existence. She is labelled as somebody's 'daughter' 'wife' and 'mother' throughout her living. She is portrayed as belonging to somebody hence undergoes a sense of 'lost' belongingness. She doesn't carry or prefer to hold on to an image of her own. It seems that she secretly wishes to stay that way.

At the same time, one cannot fail to notice the hypocritical stand and the enforced boundaries fixed towards her identity bearing.

Questions like, “Why don’t you get married then?” “When will you marry, if you don’t marry now?” “Since you have decided, why delay the auspicious moment?”(41) shows how women are obsessed with their own or with somebody else’s husband all the time. They are desperate enough and eagerly await to get into the wedlock. The anguished state of mind is reflected in the line “My parents got me married, why would I have got myself married?”(40) Nevertheless the line showcases society’s construct that doesn’t contribute to strengthening woman’s identity. Instead it fails to shape her.

Various feminist theories and evolving practices states what feminism is today and what it can become in mere future. Brown in *Feminist Criticism* (1995) observes feminism as a struggle to correct laws and practices that prevent woman from achieving full equality with men in all aspects of domestic and public life. It is a fact that women are treated as second class or other. The base of feminism is about the freedom of women. She must have choices like how men make and the society in this regard, should stay ‘pluralistic’. Unfortunately it doesn’t look so. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* states the purpose of writing the text:

This text continues then, as an effort to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, to make gender trouble, not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through.....those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusion of identity. (44)

It is worth mentioning the amount of protestation raised in Ismat’s family in educating their daughters. To them ‘educating girls was worse than prostituting them’ (19) indicate silent suppression done to women on their lot. The purdah doesn’t merely distances themselves physically but acts as the emblem of “purdah of the mind” (19).

My understanding is the constitutive categorization of gender in terms of man, woman should remain as 'mere' identity markers alone. They should not override in the garb of established structures. The speaker in the story dared to challenge these societal structures. She strongly feels the need to think and make them live the way they should.

As every one of us know post-colonial feminist theory focuses on gender difference in the colonial and anti-colonial period. Women suffer from 'double colonization' according to Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford. The term 'double' refers to oppression of colonialism and patriarchy. Ismat was influenced by Sigmund Freud's open discussion on human sexuality. Freud points out at the unconscious thoughts that remains dormant and refrain from freely associating to the realm of conscious element. He further states, the silent resistance yield to "unwitting compromise formation between the wish and the defense". The fantasy wish in woman at later stages become the main root of later conflicts. The repressed dream in woman desires proving her ability by confronting and contending against the patriarchal, set structures of the society. Sometimes oppression is not only made from male side it is also from the female side. It is sad to know that woman in general prefer wallowing within the comfort zone. She takes marriage as an umbrage that satisfies her need and keeps her happy. It is very important to understand that each culture has its own custom and tradition. In general, western woman have gained a position of 'near' equality in many healthy social practices. Whereas such implementation seems to be little remote to the eastern society.

Some of my research questions in understanding the reason of female subjugation in social and psychological domain has been made pertaining to the story taken. Methodological Framework taken to understand the reason cited, being subjective, qualitative and explorative. Also observation was made with the help of systematic data collection tool. The data was collected in natural occurring situations that may help in identifying the problem in depth. To get a proper frame work of analysis, content, definite words, qualitative data were taken for study.

The content analysis can quantify and relationship of certain words, techniques through feministic perspective say psychological, social restrains and causes may be added to one's understanding level .The methodology includes philosophical perspective of looking at the concept of "post-truth" and "post-human" analysis. Post-truth women have open forum to communicate their thoughts. They can stand up for themselves and asset their rights. The story "*All for a Husband*" is analyzed in this Framework of Analysis only. Her other works "*Sacred Duty*" and "*The Eternal Vine*" also fall in the same connect.

The writer deconstructs using marriage as metaphor and unravel the psyche of man and woman. The archetype of woman characters in literature authenticates the same. She further states how identities are merged and in turn submerged into traditional confines of chance and circumstance. Secondary data was taken from web articles and text codified through feminism. It is clearly understood that a woman is programmed from the very beginning to stay calm and clean. Sometimes oppression takes place from female side who wish to redefine her role in family. She is bound to satisfy man and still to remain as silent sufferer. Psychological problems occur due to anxiety, harassment and the feeling of inferior position. The customary patriarchal behaviour and privileges destined on man become the cause of mental and physical disturbance in woman.

The story clearly reveals that if a woman talks loud or express her thoughts louder, she is not considered as a good woman. Though women's contributions have become significant in recent times, there seems to be a continuous male thrust that keeps woman in a vantage point. In spite of the glorified illustrations on the virtues of woman, those doesn't encompass or represent the entirety of women. Ismat clearly pins the ignorance as the gullible aspect in woman. She need not confine herself for the sake of family pressure anymore. Because she is instrumental in what she takes part. She need not stay mute. Respect and stay together on mutual understanding should become the call of the day. The need to embrace with all complexities of both sexes and with a thorough understanding of strength & weakness in individuals should be taken as

a bold step in achieving justice and equality. It is my understanding after collecting the data's, that agency of male largely controls woman. This happens because of the general acceptance of the 'marginalized' position of women in general. Her complaisance in giving way to 'functional' pressure of the inbuilt society practices remain as 'patriarchy' opinionated. Padma Anagol rightly underpins the lower status accorded to woman thereby, reinforcing the changes that need to be carried out with a firm conviction in *The Emergence of Feminism in India, 1850-1920*. "A significant concern in women's literature was the institution of marriage and how and why this structure maintained absurd customs" (228). Further the author concentrates on usurping the neglected women's voice thereby skewing on the need to vilify female place and position into mainstream society.

To conclude, the rigid definitions and notions of feminine and masculine need to be altered. Instead it has to be looked as 'mere' categories for self-evaluation and for self-development process. The study has pointed to the role of woman to identify and redefine her stand as strong agents of the society. On a broad spectrum, the questions that still remains is why society still accord conservative image of woman. My observation lies in the fact that almost every girl child raised in the conservative atmosphere barely makes her understand her own rights. This ignorance is simply passed over to the second stage i.e. getting married where the domestic chores restrict her flow further. They add nothing but to a state of ambiguity that limits her position altogether. Instead she should stay resolute. This 'new' voice would definitely challenge and change the existing presupposed and predefined position of woman. Ambiguity in a way helps woman to gain solidarity and to approach problems with a better understanding to new avenues hitherto unvisited.



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### Priya P.

Dr. Priya P. is Assistant Professor at Meenakshi College for Women, Chennai-24. She did her Ph.D. from the University of Madras. Her doctoral thesis explores the way in which identity and possible changes can contribute to human relations and to better understanding. Her research interests are Post-Colonial studies, Feminism with a focus on Asia, American Literature, Poetry and Creative writing.

She is a research supervisor and her research interest include prospects of English language and language in education. She had been a resource person for Faculty Development Programs conducted by Human Resource Development Centre, University of Madras.

