



## Quest for Love and Obsession: A Thematic Analysis of Ismat Chughtai's *The Quilt* and Shobha De's *Strange Obsession*

Shajar Uddin\*

ORCID 0000-0002-7381-0384

Department of English, Shri Varshney College, Aligarh 226024 UP, India

**\*Corresponding Author:** Dr. Shajar Uddin, [shsdsn@gmail.com](mailto:shsdsn@gmail.com)  
Assistant Professor, Department of English, Shri Varshney College, Aligarh,  
226024 UP, India

### Abstract

**Aim:** *The paper brings out the importance of love and emotional and physical love in the lives of human beings. Without love, humans, whether male or female, feel unsatisfied and incomplete. The paper indicates the quest for love through the characters of Begum Jaan in "The Quilt" and Minakshi in Strange Obsession. Ismat Chughtai is popular among lovers of Urdu literature for her notorious and famous work 'Lihaaf' which is translated with the title 'The Quilt' in English. Her realistic style and startling themes made her a famous novelist of Urdu literature. She was a short story writer, a novelist, a children's story writer, and a playwright. Her 'The Quilt' was published in 1942 in Adab-e- Latin, originally in Urdu, and translated into English in 1999.*

**Methodology and Approach:** *The study is based on the story of Ismat Chughtai's 'The Quilt' (2009) and the novel Shobha De's 'Strange Obsession' (1992). The content analysis method has been used to compare the needs of Begum Jaan and Minakshi in the paper.*

**Outcome:** *"The Quilt" is a story of Nawab and Begum Jaan, his wife, and their quest for love on their terms. Though Begum Jaan was Nawab Sahab's wife, he was more interested in the young student for his physical needs than her. Their Union never consummated because Nawab had homosexual tendencies. This made Begum Jaan lesbian to satisfy her quest for love. The story shows Nawab's fear to be eliminated from society if his secret is disclosed and Begum Jaan's female subordination which forces her to remain as his wife though she fulfills her need from Rabbu. 'Strange Obsession', published in 1992, is the third novel of renowned and prolific author Shobha De. She deals with the themes of marriage institutions and the family life of upper society. She wrote the erotic and enthralling novels 'Strange Obsession' which revolves around the life of a young beautiful girl from Delhi, Amrita Agarwal who came to Mumbai to become a model. A mysterious woman named Minakshi, who is called Minx in the novel, trapped her and she had an unwanted and unnatural relationship with Minakshi. Meenakshi helped Amrita in making a successful career, but she developed an obsession with Amrita. Amrita was tired of her love and left Meenakshi for Sheila. Meenakshi kidnapped Rakesh, the husband of Amrita in her obsession with love for Amrita. Amrita was free from the obsession with Meenakshi and Meenakshi was mortally wounded in combat with Rakesh while kidnapping him.*

**Conclusion and Suggestions:** *The novel 'Strange Obsession' exposes the institution of marriage which is the way for women to protect themselves from unconventional relationships, especially in metro cities. On the other hand, it shows the obsession of a neurotic and obsessed woman Minakshi. The novel*

*breaks all the conventional norms of traditional society. Shobha De strongly favored the institution of marriage and human ties in a relationship. In 'The Quilt', Chughtai represents the deprived woman and she boldly speaks about the bodily needs and claims for their fulfillment. Begum Jaan's refusal to be subordinate and her way to find herself in Rabbu is the theme of the story. The story is a real representation of the postmodern world.*

**Keywords:** Obsession, Love, Homosexual, Lesbian, Patriarchal, OCD, LGBT, Neurotics.

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“The Quilt” brought a revolution of feminist literature in Urdu and the English language. It challenged the patriarchal Indian Muslim society and presented Begum Jaan as a living woman who explored her own life’s happiness despite her husband's indifferent attitude. The theme of the story is Begum Jaan’s longing for love. She lived in a big house with Rabbu. The narrator’s mother sent her to live with Begum Jaan and she had the terrible experience of sexual abuse from her. Begum Jaan learned sexual experience through the cracks in her husband's room where Nawab Sahab used to remain busy with young students for satisfying his physical hunger. These scenes arose an increasing desire for love and sex in Begum Jaan. Her husband’s patriarchal domination over her did not allow her to

have a relationship with a man, so she found her desire in Rabbu. She turned into an obsessive-compulsive woman of sexuality.

Rabbu used to massage Begum Jaan and gave her oral satisfaction. Her body blossomed. Ismat Chughtai described it as ‘Scissor sex’ and ‘an elephant’ going on a rampage. The narrator called the shadow on Begum Jaan's room wall, ‘the elephant’. The shadow created by Begum Jaan’s winter quilt is not synonymous with romanticism but shame and hypocrisy. Begum Jaan’s loneliness had not been filled up if sexually starved women like a Rabbu would not have been in her life. When Rabbi went to see her son and no one was there to scratch and minister to Begum. Begum Jaan seeks opportunity and relishes the idea of her sexual intention. She undressed when the narrator scratched her back. This divergence from Rabbu to narrator brought a sour effect on the relationship between Rabbu and Begum Jaan. The story ends with an exclamation from the narrator when one night she peeped into Begum Jaan's quilt and found Rabbu and Begum Jaan in oral enjoyment.

Ismat caught was clever enough to choose the title ‘Lihaaf’ in Urdu. In English also the title ‘The Quilt’ is appropriate and suggestive. The story raised an issue of the domination of male society over women. It also exposes the idea of arranged marriages where two people who do not love each other, are forced to live a lonely and loveless life and try to carry this loneliness their whole life. Characters like Begum Jaan and Rabbu, break all the boundaries and notions of the patriarchal world and they choose to follow their norms of life. The story raised a burning question to society that we dislike Begum Jaan for her unnatural deeds whereas we hid the act of Nawab Sahib being dominated and respected male. The issue of LGBT community is also given place in the story. This is the 20th-century story in a true sense.

Ismat Chughtai in 'The Quilt' unfolded the female desire without hesitation and she wanted to know the people about these inner voices. She used the language very carefully. 'The Quilt' is suggestive and euphuistic and nothing is said openly. Chughtai gained a reputation as a feminist writer through this story and faced a trial for writing it. Ismat Chughtai did not create a character that remained in households. They are independent and go beyond the boundaries of social norms and customs. Ismat Chughtai presented strong female characters like Rani Rukhsana, Samman Baji, and Begum Jaan in 'Till', 'Amar BEL', 'Bhool Bhulaiya', and others. These characters played bold roles like prostitutes, heroines, and victims of pre-marital relationships.

Close observation of characters and keen reading of the story tell us about the woman who is the narrator of the story. Her childhood experience with Begum Jaan's fiery impulses perhaps kindle her feminist desire, now in womanhood, the narrator's mother's approach that she should separate the narrator from her brothers might be for avoiding young girls, the feeling of having male partners. Ismat Chughtai presented themes of gender, lesbianism, homosexuality, and unfulfilled desires together in this story.

Ismat Chughtai's presentation of sexual deprivation of Begum Jaan compensated when Begum Jaan freely play with Rabbu. Begum's self-realization and same-sex politics boldly spoke about the sexual need of women Like Helen Cixous, she spoke about the female body and her claim for pleasure and fulfillment. The story spoke of the pre-existing motion of subverted and disposable women when Begum Jaan refused to bow down to Nawaab's rejection and restore herself in love with Rabbu. Begum Jaan finds a medium for keeping herself away from depressed feelings.

In Shobha De's novels, love is an important aspect of life. The expression of love by women has been portrayed in her novels in detail. we see the sexual

satisfaction of Malika in the novel 'Sisters', 'And Arpana's care and intimacy in 'Snapshots', Shobha De displayed the pressure in workplaces in the metros cities and its bad effect on the married life of young couples. Love for her is not one-sided but from both sides men and women. Women should take care of every possibility to win the heart of their husbands. The needs of women for which they try to find comfort are sub-themes of Shobha De's novels.

Men like bold women because they want sex, but women need the warm care and understanding of their husbands. All these inner problems of a couple are the main concern of Shobha De's novels. Shobha De is very much clear that little hugs and loving kisses are enough to clear any misunderstanding in a couple's life. 'Strange Obsession' is not a story of love but it is a story of pleasure. An obsessed love of a woman for another woman. Minakshi, who is called Minx in the novel, tried her best to get Amrita. It shows that a woman can get satisfaction from another woman. Shobha De pointed out the independence of women regarding sexual pleasure. She is not dependent on men for sex but has an alternative to have pleasure because of her economical independence.

'Strange Obsession', revolves around the subject of lesbianism. Meenakshi Iyengar has an unwanted interest in Amrita, a model whose career flourishes because of Meenakshi. Despite warning from her friends, Amrita is trapped in the net of Meenakshi. Meenakshi tightened her grip on Amrita and enjoyed sexual encounters with her. By telling her story, Minakshi wins the sympathy of Amrita and exploits her. Minakshi is tyrannical and it is harder to get free from her. Meenakshi's lust increased and she reached the level of abnormality. Her lustful attitude made Amrita helpless and she felt suffocated. Amrita tried everything to get herself free from the emotive love of Meenakshi.

Minakshi's childhood incident with her father is the key reason for her insane obsessive and lustful love for Amrita. Since her father told her in

childhood that maintaining the secret in life is a good and normal thing, she developed a fanciful world of her own in which she wanted Amrita as her secret Partner. Through the character of Meenakshi, Shobha De advised parents to play a positive role in the life of their children.

Shobha De's intention in the novel is that marriage is the way for women to remain away from unconventional relationships, especially for women who go to metro cities in search of their own identity. 'Strange Obsession', is the portrayal of a neurotic and obsessed woman. The strange case in the novel is that the victimizer and victim both are women. It is shocking for society that Shobha De breaks the conventional norms of it. Meenakshi's sexual and obsessed love for Amrita is the result of her father's exploitation which led her to her sexual behavior. Minakshi suffered when she fulfilled her desire with Amrita. Amrita felt guilty after sharing a bed with Meenakshi. Meenakshi was so much in love with Amrita that she wanted to get rid of her breast to have a manly look so that she might become their husband of Amrita.

Minakshi tried to justify her obsession to hide her guilt. First Amrita was disturbed by the homosexual behavior of Meenakshi, later she enjoyed it because she did not think to lead a normal life with a man. Minakshi continued to brainwash her mind for any man to come into her life. Meenakshi's eccentric behavior reached its height when she saw Rakesh in Amrita's life. The force was so irresistible that Minakshi felt Rakesh on Amrita's body, for Amrita is the medium for Meenakshi to be loved. She is afraid of Rakesh's intrusion into the realm of her safe love. He was a male figure of her father Meenakshi who repeatedly raped her. Meenakshi's obsession with Amrita brought a fatal end to her life. Shobha De peeped into the real problems of women and tried to find a firm solution to their problems. She strongly advocated the institution of marriage. She also suggested human ties in a relationship.

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**Dr. Shajar Uddin**

Dr. Shajar Uddin is currently working in Shri Varshney College, Aligarh as Assistant Professor of English. He has worked in Bahjoi PG College, Bahjoi, Sambhal UP, Hashmi Girls P.G. College, Amroha and Mohammad Ali Jauhar University Rampur. He is Ph.D. and UGC NET in English.