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## Resistance and Identity: A Postcolonial Feminist Study of Ismat Chughtai's Fiction

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### Abstract:

Postcolonial feminism has streamed out from the mainstream feminism in the latter half of the 20th century. It is a critique too and the reaction against the mainstream feminism. Postcolonial feminism deals with the social, political and economic marginalization of the third world women which has been overlooked and subsided by the European or mainstream Feminism. It disseminates the struggles and resistance of the “doubly marginalized” woman of the colonized nations. The postcolonial female writer believes that the feminist (mainstream) narratives have

failed to bring the overall issues of third world women in their discourse. The woman, according to them does not share the common identity globally and there is a deep sense of dissatisfaction among them with patriarchy, colonization, and also with the mainstream feministic narratives. Postcolonial feminism seeks to address colonial oppression and turns down the idea of ‘global sisterhood’ as propagated by Western feminism. Whenever one talks about the feminism or post colonialism, they restrict themselves either to the unfair treatment of patriarchal forces in the western and the oppression of the imperial powers. Further they never paid attention to the ground realities of race, ethnicity, coercion, and intimidation of postcolonial cum patriarchal culture of downtrodden and less educated women of underdeveloped nations. The major concern of this paper is to look into Ismat Chughati’s works in the lens postcolonial feminist. And an attempt to deconstruct the patriarchal culture by looking the socio- political and economic conditions of the women and by reconstructing the lost identity of third world women in her work.

**Keywords:** Postcolonial feminism, marginalization, mainstream feminism, colonial oppression, patriarchy, grand narrative, reconstruction.

Ismat Chughtai emerged one of the dominant and recognized literary figures in the Indian sub-continent. Her oeuvre has brought a new vision and created a new dimension not only in Indian literature but the world literature as well. Her art is the art of life’s sake wherein she attempts to revolutionise the Indian society in general and the women’s world in particular. Hegemony, resistance, revolt, identity and marginalisation are some predominant ideas and themes which Chughtai debates in her writing. Born in British India, Chughtai raises the voice of doubly marginalised women in the sub-continent who is not only suppressed by her own people but also by the colonial powers. Chughtai through her narratives demonstrate how the women in general and Muslim women in particular have been hegemonized by the patriarchal and colonial forces. Identity which is very diverse and complex creation in the social and political discourse has been come under question by the author. She through her characters attempt to show the resistance under the colonial regime against the male-dominated society. In her story *The Crooked Line* (1948), she portrays the highly disturbing experience of the marginalised masses. The character Shamman who symbolises Chughtai’s own life and, in this way, author uses Shaman as her own mouthpiece. She revolts, resists and hits back to the colonial patriarchal system which has taken everything under their control. She is an innocent child who

turns to be rebellious and hyperactive when she is being ignored and marginalized. She never succumbs to the lies of other because “Shaman felt as if she had been orphaned. She was feeded by wet-nurse Unna and was taken care by Badi Aapa” (Kesharwani 43).

Portraying the character of Shaman, Chughtai indirectly slams the mainstream feminists who has been side-lining the third world women and overlook their marginality and suppression which is harsher and crueller than the oppression which the western woman face. The following lines show the male-dominated oppression and the colonised women’s resistance when the narrator says:

Manjhu cursed and scolded her...Shamman had been experiencing a desire to hit people. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, she was beset with this urge to hit someone, to knock and crush somebody with her chubby fists...She felt the urge to strike her doll. First she gave it a few mild cautionary slaps, but then she lost control and began pummelling and kicking the doll with her hands and feet. Soon she was shredding it with her teeth and nails, behaving as though she were face to face with a menacing adversary. (11)

The double marginalization can be seen when Shamman is being treated as other and ignored. She feels emotional crisis and mental trauma because the worst experiences which she gets from her surroundings. She feels all the time isolated and dejected. It is the reason she turns out to be rebellious against this male oppression and feels that “she would be seized with a desire to strike somebody” (9). The author in her stories portrays the character of the doubly oppressed Indian women who fears like Shaman and does find any way to express herself. The door of women liberation of the West seems also closed for such voices because they are not being heard there. Like Shaman who “wanted to wipe out this frightful mark and its place new line, a neat and calm line” (249). A sense of uncertainty frequently permeates an Indian woman's identity. This is due to the fact that she is denied roots, even within her own family, in patrilocal, patriarchal society like ours. Much of India considers daughters to be paraya dhan, an alien’s wealth and excluded from full membership and their fatal families after marriage. Even in her marital home, her rights are precarious. She might be easily evicted from that house in the event of a marital breakup.

In her another novel *Masooma* which published in 1961 portrays the causes and consequences of social set up and the interrelation between the different members of society with each other. The economic cause is one of the major causes shown by the author during the time of colonial rule and how the woman becomes the victim and turns into a harlot. Chughtai exposes the male hypocrisy and the grand narrative which has portrayed woman a dangerous creature and the blot in the society. It is not woman's choice that she would chose the profession of prostitution but it is the male-dominated society which has compelled her to turn into this profession. The narrator says "Rent for four months, salaries for servants... amount owed to the shopkeeper Electricity bill... The bill from the washer man... School fees for your children... Water rises above my head, drowning me. I float up and take a look. My sixteen-year-old daughter... skipping rope with her friends." (1).

The above passage indicates the different issues and matters the woman has to face and her responsibility in the colonised male dominated society. The darkest narrative of the novel reflects the colonised oppression of the woman's trading women's body and gender inequality, according to the author, was at the pinnacle during the time of colonial era. The woman in the *Masooma* experiences double and sometimes triple marginalization. The author portrays the darkest and cruellest side of colonial rule and the iron-fisted commandments of the patriarchy. The hard-core association between colonialism and patriarchy has kept the woman under their thumb and she is deprived of her basic freedom. Chughtai vehemently slams the patriarchal nature of the society. One of the author remarks: "In fact, patriarchy has the potential to dehumanise the other half of history... Patriarchy operates not only at the personal but also at the political levels; there is a serious interaction between private matters and the various power structures that coexist in society (qtd in Rathore 121)."

Masooma as beautiful and young girls bears the grunts of patriarchy and its unbearable treatment which is delineated in a great detail in this narrative. She is silenced and oppressed by the colonial patriarchal forces which are wholly and solely responsible for her marginalization. Her life takes a worst turn when she is being sold off and then she passes from one person to another, and was christened Nelofar "whose Bismillah was celebrated when she was four... who when she read the Sallam made listeners weep that same Nilofar was now beginning worse than the washer-women in uttering filthy oath" (70). Woman who always especially in the colonial period became the worst victims of the male subjectivity failed to

raise their voice. Chughtai narrates the tale of a woman who defines her terms in relation to the male needs in the society. Her social role and position in society is also assigned by male-dominated society. Woman is not being looked as an autonomous being which is free an autonomous but is and was dependent on other beings. Agarwal remarks “During her childhood, a woman must rely on her father; during her youth, she must rely on her husband's near kinsmen in default; if she has no paternal kinsmen, she must rely on the sovereign.” (Qtd. in Aggarwal, 196).

Not only *Masooma* but Chughtai's every narrative reveals the inner consciousness of the women characters whose lives revolve round their dreams and aspirations and they dependent on them. She emphasises the violence created by colonialists and patriarchs and reveals a concern with the theme of anxiety, predicament, and anguish caused by threats to individual identity, and in relation to reality, her characters find this real world too insensitive, unpleasant, and complex. There are intense issues regarding the protagonist's and their state of predicament which they are experiencing in their daily routine. The women characters of Chughtai's fiction aspire for freedom and self-identity from the male hegemony and colonial oppression

All women characters of Chughtai need freedom and justice to her personality and to her individuality which the existing patriarchal setup with its uneven power division does not grant her. They were as Feroza Jussawalla puts in her poem “Fractured”:

None will hold women

Broken and fragmented

Afraid to touch

Cracked glass,

Like shards of crystal glassware

Dropped in the deliberate abandonment

Of betrayals, wrought by callous men.

x

x

x

Grief is painful to contemplate

In purple pensiveness.” (182)

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