

MARRIAGE OF THE MIGHT: ARTICULATING THE INDIAN CONDITIONING TOWARDS MARRIAGE THROUGH ISMAT CHUGHTAI'S SHAHUHAR KE KHATIR' AND 'CHAUTHI KA JODA'

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Abstract: The Indian Society has existed for centuries as a socio-sexually patriarchal society where marriage features as one of the major facets of building of the family structure. What functions as the aside to this exchange, is the perpetual subjugation of women in the pretext of providing them a 'respectable' social status. This Paper would take into consideration two stories written by Ismat Chughtai, 'Shahuhar ke Khatir' and 'Chauthi ka Joda' that serve as a stark commentary on the ritual of marriage in India by exposing the multi-layered sexual discrimination, torture and oppression that comes along with it. As the subcontinent's one of the famous feminist writers, Chughtai (1915-1991) wrote with panache and depicted the tyrannies of contemporary society. Through this paper, I intend to raise questions on the Indian tradition of marriage and the sexual commercialization behind it. The stories throw light upon the duplicity of the society and how women are subjected to constant ostracization for failing to match to the standards of the society. By taking into light various ancient Indian cultural treatises on sexuality and marriage, it would like to position the stories and the method in which they develop to discuss marriage as an emblem of the culture of the society.

Keywords: Sexual Commercialization, Duplicity, Procreation, Heteronormativity

Introduction

The pivotal contribution of Ismat Chughtai has been to build an identity of herself around the socio-literary environment that existed during her times. This fact does not cease to locate the writer to belong only to a particular time period but proves that her eminence has remained through generations that have discussed and debated about the lives of women. The short stories that shall be discussed in this research paper explicitly probes into the understanding of 'marriage' in the Indian Society and how it is constantly deemed to be important for the construction of Identity of both Genders-especially women. The Post-Colonial identity of women that was formed revolved around their ability to play their roles of being able to serve the men around them and in their lives. The Story, "Shauhar Ke Khatir" and "Chauthi ka Joda" discuss the importance of the institution of marriage in a woman's life and how its lack can create a redundant image of a woman who doesn't want to necessarily conform to these norms; Also, it takes into consideration the irrational obsession of the society to get their daughters married and relieve themselves of the burden of ordaining them into family life.

In Shauhar Ke Khatir, the story narrates the experience of a person who appears similar to the writer herself, and the experience that she receives from her fellow women passengers who cannot

absolutely fathom that she is a woman who is travelling alone unaccompanied by a male member of her house. The story draws our attention to the fact that according to society, Procreative heterosexual marriage occupies importance for being one of the most socially inevitable practices and for being instrumental in laying the foundation stone for the structure of the family. The idea of the Purushartha which is a key concept of Hinduism describes how the objective of attaining worldly wisdom by ordaining into family life is important. The idea of the Ashrama also mentions the Grihastha Ashrama which is a necessary stage to be achieved. This arrives along with the knowledge about Sexual Desire. It is important to note here that the observance of the norms of Heterosexual marriage is important as Sexual relations outside the prescribed boundary of marriage is considered sinful and unacceptable in the social fabric of India.

As popularized by cultural texts like that of Manu Smiriti or the laws of Manu, there existed eight main forms of Hindu marriages in ancient India namely Brahma Vivah, Daiva Vivah, Arsha Vivah, Prajapatya Vivah, Gandharva Vivah, Asura Vivah, Rakshasa Vivah and Pisaka Vivah. Although not all eight marriages had religious sanction, it is said that in ancient times, all these forms of marriages were performed among various communities of the people. Of these eight different forms of marriage only the first four were approved and encouraged in society. Since Vedic times, Marriage in all communities has been following a cultural system which attempts to uphold caste, class, race and all other parameters that have been put forward by patriarchy. In Contemporary times, often young Indians abstain from engaging in this structural set up, but absolute deviation from this structural observance is rare. This is a culturally bound phenomenon which involves the nuances of patriarchy in itself.

Prominent Sexuality scholar Gayle S. Rubin in her essay titled, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" talks about how marriage has been considered primarily a procreative enterprise. The example that she puts forward of the Western religions shows that this idea has been existing across cultures. She points out:

"Most Christian tradition, following Paul, holds that sex is inherently sinful. It may be redeemed if performed within marriage for procreative purposes and if the pleasurable aspects are not enjoyed too much. In turn, this idea rests on the assumption that the genitalia are an intrinsically inferior part of the body, much lower and less holy than the mind, the 'soul', the 'heart', or even the upper part of the digestive system (the status of the excretory organs is close to that of the genitalia)" (Rubin).

On reading Ismat Chughtai, we realize that she was the kind of writer whose fiction opens within the temporality of the first person, or is introduced with the immediacy of sound, so that one feels that she almost unconsciously dumps you into a present which you as a reader suddenly begin to inhabit. But that does not limit Chughtai, she also raises questions on the transience of human conventions and practices which she often finds derogatory.

Through her stories, she also strikes a note of familiarity which acquaints us with the conditions that society goes through, often making the reader believe that he is also one of the characters in the story. The experiences of the characters in *Shauhar ke Khatir* and *Chauthi ka Joda* and the subjugation they face in becoming prospective brides appears to be a commonplace phenomenon when we read the stories.

Interestingly, the title of both the stories draw our attention towards the patriarchally redundant practices that concern marriage in India. The word 'Shauhar' refers to husband in Urdu and the story revolves around how all the co-passengers of the author do not ask the name or any other detail of the author but build her identity around the fact that she does not have a Shauhar. Our next story talks about the extreme subjugation that girls are put into in Indian society in the name of finding their prospective grooms. The story describes the life of a widow, Bi amma, who lives in almost penury with her two young daughters, Kubra and Hamidah. The story focuses on Bi amma's obsession to get Kubra married off as soon as possible, and the terrible outcome of Bi amma's urgent and desperate attempts to get her married to her brother's son, Rahat.

Ismat Ara in her article titled, "A Feminist Reading of Chauthi Ka Joda by Ismat Chughtai" rightly points out:

Through Bi amma, Chughtai critiques the kind of pressure that builds around a mother's mind, especially if she is a widow, to act according to the society's will, wherein Kubra's marriage became the end solution to her misery. Kubra's growing desire (not for the man, but for marriage – as pointed out by Hamidah in the story) focuses on how women are made to believe that their marital status would solve problems for them, and if the marriage gets delayed, they get hopeless (Ara).

Chughtai's women are strong and liberated in their own ways and this idea can be found to be exemplified in her short stories. Her women characters stand out in the crowd of convention and prove their worth as iconoclasts eventually. Srijeeta Mitra in her research paper titled, "The Politics of Power: A Study of Gender and Sexuality in the Short Stories by Ismat Chughtai" points out about this characteristic trait:

All her stories are set in a patriarchal social construct where the woman is repressed economically, socially and sexually. But Chughtai creates her so-called misbehaving protagonists who through the play of their sexuality escapes the repressive forces and controls the perpetrators of power. Very subtly the oppressed become the powerful and render the paternal phallic authority powerless (Mitra).

In the story *Shauhar Ke Khatir* which revolves around the activities that are set on a train, the narrative does what Chughtai's fiction does at its best. It plays with movement—the necessary temporality that is needed to progress in the novel. Its scenes appear as if they are very calculatedly shaped through language. It performs critique in an almost conventional

fashion. The narrative of both the stories reeks of identification marks that explain the social ostracization process that occur due to marriage, of patriarchal subjugation of the gender that demands domesticity of socialization as a series of repetitions, of social expectations about the proper place of women. In *Shauhar ke Khatir*, a young, unnamed woman is traveling on

a train from Jodhpur to Bombay to interview for a job. She gets into the woman's compartment and finds it empty. The epitome of a secular, modern woman, she soon finds the train get crowded with women from nearby villages and chaotic with children, baggage and noise. Each set of women that gets in the compartment asks the young woman to identify herself, and in each case the terms of identification are concerned with marriage and childbirth.

Chughtai's style adapted for decoding both the stories immediately transport our understanding of the sensuousness that is attached to the characters. In both the stories we come to terms with the subjugated body that is present at the backdrop of the stories, the body that needs to necessarily belong and become a part of the transacted handiwork of the marital ritual. Geeta Patel in her research paper titled, "An Uncivil Woman: Ismat Chughtai" mentions this sensual revocation in the works of the author. She points out:

"When Ismat Chughtai composes, she produces bodies through the sometimes subtle, sometimes brutal sense of the sensual. One feels as one reads that one has immediate access to the bodies of people in her stories and nonfiction" (Patel).

The side of the world that she shows is one where marriage does not involve pleasurable experiences but one full of suffering and impending trauma. Both the stories serve as a corollary to one another and show the consequences that women have before and after they enter the vicious cycle of becoming prospective brides. Patel continues to explain in her work saying:

In this story Chughtai shows up narratives of marriage for what they can be, scripts that are fitted on to hapless women trapped by their absurdity. But she also creates scenes in which performance and repetition are necessary conditions for establishing marriage and domesticity as viable, solidified ways of being in the world. can be scripts that are fitted on to hapless women trapped by their absurdity. But she also creates scenes in which performance and repetition are necessary conditions for establishing marriage and domesticity as

viable, solidified ways of being in the world (Patel).

Sawmya Ray in his project titled, "Marriage and Divorce in India" talks about the age-old convention of complete subservience that is demanded of women in Indian marriages. She is expected to be meek, non-resilient and passive towards the advancements of society. He points out:

To be a good wife, is by definition, to be a good woman. Wives should restrain all their senses and keep their hearts under complete control. They should regard their husbands as veritable gods. For women, neither sacrifice, nor sraddhas (penances), nor fasts are of any efficiency. By serving their husbands only can they win heaven. This is the ideal purveyed over and over again, in numberless myths and legends, through which society moulds the character and personality of its female members (Kakar, p.56; Wadley, 1988, p.32). The wifely role is one of subordination, and of devotion in any circumstances (Wadley, 1988, p.33) (Ray).

The sad turn that marriages have taken today and the deplorable condition that women are eventually subjected to are beautifully portrayed by Chughtai in these stories that without stating the conclusion, serve as a warning towards the suffering that women project themselves to. Kubra's ultimate ostracisation in the story, "Chauthi Ka Joda" draws our attention to so many girls similar to her state who perpetually face such intolerable violence. The term 'Chauthi' which refers to a ritualistic dress worn by Muslim women in India turns into a shroud eventually symbolizing the death like experience undergone by young women in India.

Mr. Bablu Barman in his research paper titled, "Concept of Hindu Marriage in India" talks about the various social structures that drive the cultural tradition of marriages in India. He says:

The union is sacred and indissoluble in life and continues even after the death of the husband. The parents are morally obliged to find mates for their children, and the children

to accept the parental choice. The marriage is considered a union between two joint families rather than between two young people. As such in Hindu marriage there is no room for romantic love as the basis of marital selection. There is no room for courtship, because the young people never see each other before marriage. Romantic love could result from marriage but could not be a cause of it (Barman).

The burden that women tend to become in the household eventually arising from the fact that they are seldom allowed to educate themselves and explore the world around them, cause them to be forced to be initiated in marriages that fail to uphold their psychological and sexual integrity as a woman. They live a life where they are doubly exploited and reduced to absolute penury, sometimes death like that of Kubra. It calls for an immediate academic intervention into the understanding of such deplorable situations experienced by women. Chauthi ka Joda perhaps coerces us to think Marriage becomes death for only women who come from impoverished backgrounds, but Shauhar Ke Khatir gives the reader a befitting reply, explaining that even though women strive to build an identity of their own, the social picture of them doesn't necessarily change much.

Ismat Chughtai's intense observational quality and keen method of looking at the lives of women draws our attention to the inner chambers of their hearts and their hearts. Her unapologetic nature becomes a part of her works too drawing our attention to her candid portrayal of the lives of women.

Khushi Bajaj in her article titled, "Ismat Chughtai's Feminine Perspective That Subverted Patriarchal Literature & Activism" makes a mention of this spirit in Chughtai which eventually translates into her works.

Ismat Chughtai's observational writing and essays, therefore, act as a window to see the social and political bearings of being an unapologetic and independent woman during her time. She does not claim or try to be objective, but instead invites the readers into the subjectivity of her feminine artistic experience (Bajaj).

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