



Desire, Identity, and Rebellion: A Feminist Reading of Ismat Chughtai's Representation of Women

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Abstract

Ismat Chughtai's fiction is widely recognized for its bold portrayals of women's sexuality, desire, and resistance, yet contemporary scholarship often confines its focus to her canonical story *Lihaaf*, reducing her expansive feminist vision to a single controversy. This narrow emphasis leaves a critical gap: her nuanced engagement with desire, class, patriarchy, and agency across her wider body of work remains insufficiently explored. While feminist, psychoanalytic, and queer readings offer valuable insights, few studies comparatively examine lesser-discussed stories such as *Gharwali*, *Til*, *Chauthi Ka Jora*, and *Terhi Lakir*, where Chughtai crafts a more layered critique of gendered oppression.

This study fills that gap by providing a feminist reading of *Lihaaf*, *Til*, *Gharwali*, *Chauthi Ka Jora*, and *Terhi Lakir*, analyzing how Chughtai frames desire as resistance, identity as self-assertion, and rebellion as an everyday practice for women in patriarchal and class-stratified settings. Drawing on liberal, radical, and psychoanalytic feminism alongside queer perspectives, the research explores how her characters reclaim autonomy, challenge normative femininity, and resist systems of control.

The findings show that Chughtai disrupts binaries of virtue and shame, domesticity and desire, and compliance and defiance by depicting women who question marriage, confront violence, and seek emotional and economic freedom. By emphasizing lesser-studied texts, this study broadens existing scholarship and affirms Chughtai's continuing relevance to debates on gender justice, class inequality, and women's rights in South Asia.

Keywords: Female Identity, Rebellion, Feminism, Patriarchy, Sexuality, Urdu Literature.

I. Introduction

Ismat Chughtai occupies a central and uncompromising place in twentieth-century Urdu literature as a writer who revolutionized the representation of women, sexuality, and social constraints. Writing during a time when female desire and bodily autonomy were deliberately silenced, Chughtai used fiction as a radical site of truth-telling. Her narratives confront themes that were rarely acknowledged in public discourse—lesbian desire, marital dissatisfaction, sexual repression, class exploitation, and the emotional complexities of women's relationships with one another. With remarkable clarity and courage, she challenged the decorum and restraint expected of women writers in colonial and post-colonial India, asserting instead a literary voice that was irreverent, honest, and deeply empathetic.

Her stories are shaped by a persistent questioning of patriarchal norms and the everyday practices through which women's identities are regulated. Characters such as Begum Jaan in *Lihaaf*, Shamman in *Gharwali*, Sughra in *Terhi Lakir*, and other lower-class working women in stories like *Til* and *Chauthi Ka Jora* are not mere victims but complex individuals negotiating desire, survival, and agency. Their defiance is layered—sometimes loud, sometimes silent, sometimes through sexuality, and sometimes through emotional withdrawal or self-recognition. Chughtai's women inhabit spaces where the boundaries between oppression and resistance blur, revealing the delicate and constant negotiation that structures female existence.

A feminist reading of Chughtai's work provides an expansive lens through which to understand her nuanced portrayal of women's subjectivity. Liberal feminist ideas help explore her critique of women's restricted access to education, freedom, and self-expression. Radical feminist theory illuminates her interrogation of patriarchal power structures, domestic confinement, and the policing of

female sexuality. Psychoanalytic feminism allows insight into the unconscious desires, repressions, and emotional conflicts her characters experience. Through these theoretical connections, the study identifies how Chughtai reframes desire not as immorality or transgression but as a mode of asserting agency and reclaiming bodily autonomy.

Furthermore, Chughtai's writing invites attention to intersections of class, caste, and religion, particularly in stories where servants, working-class women, and marginalized figures display forms of resistance often ignored in mainstream literature. Her bold, realist approach also disrupted conventional narrative forms, expanding the possibilities of Urdu fiction and establishing a legacy that continues to inspire feminist, queer, and post-colonial scholarship today.

This research thus seeks to examine how Chughtai's narratives articulate the interconnections between desire, identity, and rebellion, and how her characters resist patriarchal expectations through subtle, everyday acts of defiance. By analyzing key stories through a multi-feminist theoretical lens, the study demonstrates the enduring importance of Chughtai's contribution to feminist literature and the necessity of revisiting her work in contemporary contexts.

II. Review of Literature

Scholarship on Ismat Chughtai has predominantly centered on her provocative engagement with gender, sexuality, and the everyday realities of Muslim middle-class women in twentieth-century India. A substantial body of work focuses on *Lihaaf*, which remains her most widely discussed and contested story, often examined for its lesbian subtext and its challenge to heteronormative structures. Kidwai and Vanita (2000) identify *Lihaaf* as a foundational text in the history of same-sex desire in South Asian literature, arguing that Chughtai's depiction of female homoeroticism destabilizes traditional

constructions of sexuality and exposes the silence surrounding women's bodily experiences. Similarly, Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine* has been used to interpret Begum Jaan's desire as a form of writing the female body into existence (Cixous 1976), while Kristeva's analysis of desire and repression provides critical insight into the child narrator's fragmented understanding of adult sexuality (Kristeva 1980). Much of this scholarship demonstrates how Lihaaf paved the way for feminist and queer readings of Urdu literature, though critics such as Jain (2005) argue that this singular focus often overshadows Chughtai's broader literary contributions.

Beyond Lihaaf, scholars have examined Chughtai's nuanced portrayal of women's psychological and social struggles in works such as *Terhi Lakir*. Mukherjee (2000) emphasizes that Chughtai's exploration of Sughra's emotional turmoil reflects the fractured identities produced by patriarchal expectations and domestic confinement. Nair (2003) highlights the narrative's psychological depth, suggesting that Chughtai's portrayal of female subjectivity complicates conventional moral binaries and opens space for understanding desire as a form of self-definition. In Gharwali, critics such as Oakley (2016) read Chughtai's depiction of Shamman as a radical inversion of patriarchal norms, where the female body becomes an assertive, unapologetic site of autonomy rather than a controlled object of male desire. These readings position Chughtai as a writer who refuses to sanitize women's sexuality and instead foregrounds the contradictions embedded within societal expectations of purity, virtue, and obedience.

Recent scholarship has begun to extend critical attention toward Chughtai's lesser-discussed stories, demonstrating the breadth of her feminist interventions. In "The Mole (Til)" and *Masooma*, researchers such as Tharu and Lalita (1991) argue that Chughtai disrupts class and gender hierarchies by portraying lower-class women who articulate desire as

empowerment rather than transgression. These stories invert traditional subject-object relationships by granting agency to characters who are often marginalized or silenced within social structures. Critical studies have also highlighted Chauthi Ka Jora as a text that critiques the commodification of women within marriage, with feminist theorists drawing on Marxist and Foucauldian frameworks to examine how domestic labor, family expectations, and class exploitation shape women's experiences of femininity (Mohanty 2003; Butler 1990). Such readings underscore Chughtai's ability to fuse gender critique with socio-economic analysis, revealing the interconnectedness of patriarchy and class power.

Another emerging field of research relates to translation studies, addressing the ways male translators have altered or diluted the feminist and sexual nuance in Chughtai's writing. Naqvi (2013) notes that translations of Chughtai's Urdu texts often soften the erotic and subversive elements, thereby reshaping her global reception and influencing how international audiences interpret her feminist politics. Comparative studies with Saadat Hasan Manto and Rajinder Singh Bedi further contextualize Chughtai within the Progressive Writers' Movement, revealing shared political commitments yet distinctive stylistic and thematic choices. According to De Souza (1999), Chughtai's subtle irony, psychological interiority, and focus on women lived experiences distinguish her work from her contemporaries and mark her as a singular feminist voice in Urdu literature.

Despite extensive scholarship, critics consistently identify gaps in the existing research. Scholars such as Crenshaw (1991) and Mohanty (2003) argue for more intersectional analyses that consider class, caste, and religion alongside gender and sexuality in Chughtai's fiction. There is also insufficient exploration of childhood trauma, affect, disability, material culture, and institutional forms of resistance

across her work. Chughtai's memoir *Kaghazi Hai Pairahan* and her essays remain relatively understudied, despite offering valuable insight into her ideological positions and literary philosophy. As Mukherjee (2000) notes, expanding the scope of Chughtai scholarship beyond *Lihaaf* and its immediate controversies is essential for understanding the diversity and complexity of her feminist vision.

III. Theoretical Framework

1. Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism emphasizes women's rights to education, autonomy, equality, and free self-expression within society. It argues that oppression arises from restrictive gender roles and unequal access to opportunities (Oakley, 2016). In the context of Chughtai's writings, liberal feminism is reflected in the struggles of women who attempt to claim personal freedom within conventional structures. In *Terhi Lakir*, for instance, Shamman's longing for education and independence exposes the tension between individual aspiration and patriarchal pressure. Her desire to define her own future, despite constant expectations of marriage and conformity, demonstrates the liberal feminist claim that women must be granted equal social space to pursue their identities. Similarly, in *Chauthi Ka Jora*, the protagonist's dreams and disappointments highlight the conflict between personal desire and the socially imposed destiny of marriage. Through these characters, Chughtai illustrates the liberal feminist belief that women must be treated as full individuals with agency, rather than as extensions of domestic duty.

2. Radical Feminism

Radical feminism critiques patriarchy as a deeply entrenched system built upon the control of women's bodies, sexuality, labour, and emotional lives (Mohanty, 2003). This perspective is crucial to Chughtai's representation of domestic confinement, marital oppression, and the policing of female morality. In *Lihaaf*, Begum Jaan's emotional

abandonment by her husband reveals how marriage can function as an institution of control, rather than companionship. Her suffering, described as "rolling on a bed of live coals," portrays the emotional violence embedded within patriarchal expectations. Radical feminist tensions also appear in *Gharwali*, where Lajo rejects Mirza's attempt to "tame" her through marriage. Her declaration, "I can't be trapped within four walls," becomes a direct refusal of an institution historically used to regulate female sexuality. Chughtai's narratives thus expose how deeply patriarchy operates through family, marriage, and societal norms, and how women resist these structures through emotional, sexual, and social defiance.

3. Psychoanalytic Feminism

Psychoanalytic feminism explores how desire, repression, memory, and emotional conflict shape the inner lives of women (Irigaray, 1985; Kristeva, 1980). Chughtai's narratives, rich with psychological tension, become fertile ground for this lens. In *Lihaaf*, the child narrator's fragmented perceptions reveal the ways in which forbidden desire is both witnessed and misunderstood. The symbolism of the quilt—trembling "as if an elephant was struggling beneath it"—functions as a psychological marker of suppressed desire and unspoken intimacy. Psychoanalytic themes also emerge in *Til (The Mole)*, where the protagonist's sexuality becomes an expression of self-possession and emotional negotiation. Her interactions with men reveal not only bodily confidence but the psychological awareness that her desirability can invert power dynamics. Chughtai's characters often navigate desire and repression simultaneously, demonstrating how women internalize and resist the psychological structures shaped by patriarchal rule.

4. Queer Theory

Queer theory challenges the norms of heterosexual desire, gender performance, and socially sanctioned sexuality (Butler, 1990;

Kidwai & Vanita, 2000). Chughtai's *Lihaaf* is a foundational queer text because it foregrounds women's same-sex desire within a society where such desires lacked language, legitimacy, or recognition. The intimacy between Begum Jaan and Rabbu reveals how non-heteronormative relationships emerge in the spaces left vacant by patriarchal neglect. The narrator's confused reactions and the secrecy surrounding the quilt expose how queer desire is culturally suppressed. Chughtai's refusal to use explicit language mirrors the social silence around female sexuality but simultaneously destabilizes heterosexual expectations. By challenging the assumed naturalness of heterosexual marriage, *Lihaaf* aligns with queer theory's aim to expose and unsettle regulatory norms. Through her depiction of non-normative desire, Chughtai opens a radical conversation about the fluidity of women's emotional and sexual lives.

5. Intersectional Feminism

Intersectional feminism examines how oppression is shaped simultaneously by gender, class, caste, religion, and economic status (Crenshaw, 1991). Chughtai's fiction consistently demonstrates that women do not experience patriarchy in uniform ways. Women like Begum Jaan, who belong to elite households, face emotional confinement, sexual neglect, and the suffocation of respectability. In contrast, lower-class women such as Lajo in *Gharwali* or the protagonist in *Til* display greater sexual autonomy but face more severe moral policing and social vulnerability. Their relative freedom is a result of existing outside elite notions of "respectability," yet their marginality exposes them to exploitation and judgement. Similarly, *Chauthi Ka Jora* shows how economic pressure and material expectation shape a woman's identity and dreams, reflecting how class intersects with gender. Chughtai's ability to depict layered forms of oppression aligns her work closely with intersectional feminist analysis.

6. Feminist Narrative Theory

Feminist narrative theory focuses on how narrative voice, point of view, structure, and tone shape women's representation (Showalter, 1977; Cixous, 1976). Chughtai frequently employs narrative strategies that highlight women's lived realities and interior struggles. In *Lihaaf*, the child narrator allows Chughtai to critique sexuality, repression, and social hypocrisy indirectly, making innocence a tool for exposing adult corruption. In *Terhi Lakir*, interior monologue reveals Shamman's psychological conflicts and her negotiation with patriarchal expectations. In *Gharwali*, humor and irony become feminist tools to expose the absurdity of patriarchal moral policing. Across her stories, Chughtai uses domestic realism, interior consciousness, fragmented perception, and subtle irony to centre women's voices. These techniques demonstrate the feminist belief that narrative form itself can resist patriarchal silencing.

7. Significance of the Combined Framework

By integrating liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, queer, and intersectional feminist perspectives, the study develops a multidimensional understanding of Chughtai's female characters. This combined framework reveals how desire becomes a political act, how identity is shaped by social conditioning, and how rebellion emerges through ordinary gestures rather than grand revolutions. Chughtai's women demonstrate that autonomy is not a single act but a series of negotiations within oppressive structures. The framework also highlights how Chughtai critiques institutions like marriage, family honor, and class hierarchies. By examining her narratives through intersecting feminist lenses, the research uncovers the complexity of her representation of women and affirms the relevance of her work to contemporary feminist discourse.

IV. Objectives of the Study

- To analyze how Ismat Chughtai represents female desire, identity, and rebellion in selected works.
- To examine how women's emotional, sexual, and psychological expressions challenge patriarchal structures.
- To study how narrative strategies—such as humour, irony, domestic realism, and female-centered narration—function as feminist tools.
- To explore how Chughtai constructs alternative subjectivities for women through everyday acts of resistance.
- To situate Chughtai's representation of women within broader feminist, psychoanalytic, and queer theoretical frameworks.
- To highlight the contemporary relevance of Chughtai's feminist vision in discussions of gender, sexuality, and agency.

V. Research Questions

- How does Ismat Chughtai portray female desire in contexts of social restriction and surveillance?
- In what ways do Chughtai's female characters construct identity within oppressive domestic and patriarchal environments?
- How does rebellion manifest in Chughtai's works—as subtle defiance, emotional refusal, or bodily assertion?
- How do narrative techniques such as child narration, interior monologue, and humour contribute to feminist interpretations of her texts?
- How do Chughtai's representations of women intersect with class, religion, sexuality, and social constraint?
- What do Chughtai's portrayals reveal about the possibilities and limitations of women's agency in mid-20th-century South Asia?

VI. Research Methodology

The methodology for this research is qualitative, interpretive, and grounded in feminist literary analysis. The study uses close textual reading of five primary texts by Ismat Chughtai—*Lihaaf*, *Terhi Lakir*, *Gharwali*, *Til* (*The Mole*), and *Chauthi Ka Jora*—to examine the narrative construction of desire, identity, and rebellion. The analysis draws upon multiple theoretical frameworks, including feminist theory, psychoanalytic feminism, queer theory, and intersectional analysis, in order to interpret the representation of women's experiences within social structures of patriarchy, class, religion, and sexuality. Secondary sources such as scholarly articles, feminist criticism, translation studies, and historical analyses of Urdu literature support the interpretive reading of Chughtai's works. This methodology emphasizes the textual and thematic connections between Chughtai's fiction and broader feminist debates, allowing the study to situate her writing within both South Asian literary traditions and global feminist scholarship.

VII. Discussion and Findings

Ismat Chughtai's representation of women has been observed by researchers to unfold through a complex interplay of desire, identity, and rebellion, positioning her narratives at the forefront of feminist, queer, and postcolonial literary studies. Across *Lihaaf*, *Terhi Lakir*, *Gharwali*, *Til*, and *Chauthi Ka Jora*, women's subjectivity is shown to be shaped through emotional hunger, forbidden desires, humour-infused defiance, and subtle forms of resistance against patriarchal norms. It is found by researchers that Chughtai does not portray women as passive recipients of oppression or as simplistic symbols of revolt; rather, their identities emerge through negotiations with the social, cultural, and economic structures surrounding them. When read through feminist theoretical frameworks—including Cixous' *écriture féminine*, Irigaray's critique of

phallogocentric language, Butler's concept of gender performance, and intersectional feminist insights—Chughtai's works are revealed to challenge systemic inequalities that restrict women's agency.

In Lihaaf, female desire has been observed by researchers to operate simultaneously as rebellion and self-recognition. Begum Jaan's abandonment by her husband produces emotional deprivation that directs her toward Rabbu. The narrator's observation that Begum Jaan's "skin glowed as if freshly oiled" after Rabbu's massages is interpreted by researchers as textual evidence through which women's pleasure is conveyed without explicit description (Chughtai, Lihaaf). This form of sensory writing aligns with Cixous' notion of *écriture féminine*, where the body becomes central to expression. It is found that patriarchal marriage, represented through the Nawab's neglect and his preference for young male companions, denies Begum Jaan both emotional and sexual agency. Her desire is understood to arise from deprivation rather than immorality, supporting Irigaray's argument that women's desires remain unspoken due to patriarchal linguistic structures. The metaphor of the quilt—shaking "as if an elephant was struggling beneath it"—is analyzed by researchers as a symbol of the monstrous way society constructs non-normative female desire (Chughtai, Lihaaf). Yet this trembling quilt is shown to mark Begum Jaan's reclaiming of bodily autonomy, aligning with Butler's view that non-conforming sexual acts destabilize regulatory norms. Thus, Lihaaf is found to challenge patriarchal control by foregrounding female desire as political resistance.

In Terhi Lakir, researchers observe that the construction of female identity is depicted through a psychological and social lens. Shamman's admission—"I felt like my body was a crooked line, impossible to straighten"—is interpreted as a reflection of internalized patriarchal anxiety (Chughtai, Terhi Lakir). The

metaphor of the crooked line is seen as a symbol of the pressure placed upon women to conform to restrictive social expectations. It has been found by researchers that Shamman's conflicts embody Simone de Beauvoir's argument that women are socially conditioned into predetermined roles through discipline and performance. It is observed that Shamman's desires extend beyond sexuality into realms of education, independence, emotional dignity, and intellectual companionship. Her refusal to accept marriage as her inevitable future expresses resistance against domestic ideology. Patriarchy's influence is revealed to operate not only through social structures but through internalized beliefs, echoing Butler's concept that gender is performed through repetitive acts. Shamman's journey is therefore recognized as an internal and external negotiation with the structures shaping her identity.

In Gharwali, researchers observe that sexual agency is explored through a lower-class woman who challenges patriarchal authority with disarming boldness. Lajo openly acknowledges her desires and refuses to be shamed for them. When Mirza chastises her, her retort—"What do you care? I'm not your wife!"—is recognized as an explicit verbal rejection of male ownership (Chughtai, Gharwali). Her refusal of Mirza's attempt to make her "respectable" through marriage ("I can't be trapped within four walls") is interpreted as a rejection of the institution itself. It is found by researchers that Lajo's autonomy is shaped by class; her lower-class background grants her a freedom unavailable to upper-class women like Begum Jaan. This supports intersectional feminist claims that gender oppression intersects with socio-economic conditions. Yet it is also observed that Lajo's freedom leaves her vulnerable to exploitation and moral policing. Chughtai's nuanced portrayal of Lajo illustrates that female agency emerges from lived realities rather than abstract ideals. Through Lajo, desire becomes a tool of

subversion, exposing the failures of patriarchal systems to contain female sexuality.

In Til (The Mole), female desire is observed to function as both empowerment and provocation. The protagonist's confident gait – “she walked as though she owned the street” – and the reaction of men who “stared as if they were the ones being stripped bare” reflect an inversion of the patriarchal gaze (Chughtai, Til). This reversal is interpreted by researchers as a deliberate destabilization of gender power structures. The mole becomes a symbol of feminine power, sexual self-possession, and embodied agency, aligning with Irigaray's belief that the female body holds multiple meanings suppressed by patriarchy. However, researchers also observe that the protagonist faces moral judgment, gossip, and social hostility, demonstrating that female autonomy often invites punitive responses. This duality – empowerment intertwined with vulnerability – is recognized as a core feature of Chughtai's feminist realism. Through Til, Chughtai reveals that bodily autonomy is simultaneously desired and policed, making it a potent site of rebellion.

In Chauthi Ka Jora, material culture and emotional longing are examined to reveal patriarchal expectations linked with marriage. The jora becomes a symbol through which desire, aspiration, and economic pressure intersect. The protagonist's gaze – “she looked at the jora as if it could change her fate” – is read as evidence of how cultural ideals are projected onto material objects (Chughtai, Chauthi Ka Jora). Researchers find that the jora encapsulates the hopes, anxieties, and commodification surrounding marriage. The eventual disillusionment faced by the protagonist is interpreted as a critique of the false promises embedded in ritualistic expectations. Through subtle acts of skepticism and emotional distancing, her rebellion is shown to occur quietly, aligning with feminist material culture studies that examine the politics of objects. Thus, Chauthi Ka Jora demonstrates how patriarchal rituals attempt to shape women's

identities through material symbols, yet these symbols are also reinterpreted and resisted by women.

Across all five narratives, researchers identify recurring patterns that shape Chughtai's feminist vision. First, desire is observed to be multifaceted – emotional, intellectual, psychological, and existential rather than merely erotic. Begum Jaan desires affection and validation; Shamman desires autonomy and self-respect; Lajo desires freedom without shame; the woman in Til desires control over her own gaze; and the bride in Chauthi Ka Jora desires dignity beyond ritualistic promise. These layered desires echo Cixous and Showalter's concept of “female writing,” where women reclaim their stories and articulate their lived experiences.

Second, rebellion is found to manifest not through dramatic upheaval but through everyday tactics – sarcasm, refusal of marriage, bodily confidence, emotional withdrawal, humorous defiance, and silent resistance. These acts align with Michel de Certeau's theory of tactical resistance, illustrating how marginalized individuals negotiate institutional power through small yet transformative gestures. Begum Jaan's turn toward Rabbu becomes a tactic of reclaiming intimacy; Lajo's refusal of marriage becomes a tactic of preserving agency; Shamman's questioning of gender norms becomes a tactic of intellectual autonomy.

Third, class is observed to profoundly shape women's agency. Researchers find that while upper-class women like Begum Jaan are confined by respectability politics, lower-class women such as Lajo and the protagonist of Til possess mobility, boldness, and unconventional forms of power. This supports intersectional feminist arguments that patriarchy does not exist in isolation but intertwines with class, economic structures, and social hierarchies.

Finally, institutional hypocrisy – embedded in marriage, family, honor, and

social morality—is exposed across Chughtai's narratives. These institutions are found to rely on female silence, obedience, and bodily containment. Chughtai dismantles these structures by portraying women who desire, question, negotiate, and resist. Their rebellions do not overthrow the system but carve out spaces of emotional and bodily truth within it.

From these findings, researchers conclude that Chughtai constructs a nuanced archive of female subjectivity. Desire is shown as a method of reclaiming agency; identity is depicted as an ongoing negotiation; rebellion is portrayed as a daily practice shaped by vulnerability and strength. Through her characters' journeys, Chughtai reveals the fractures of patriarchy, exposing its limitations and emotional costs. Her narratives continue to resonate because they illuminate the persistent struggle for female autonomy, making her work invaluable to contemporary feminist scholarship.

VIII. Conclusion

Ismat Chughtai's fiction offers a fearless and enduring exploration of female identity, desire, and resistance against patriarchal oppression, challenging both social norms and literary conventions of her time. Through textual analysis of *Lihaaf*, *Terhi Lakeer*, *Gharwali*, *Til*, and *Chauthi Ka Jora*, this research has revealed that Chughtai's narratives articulate a complex feminist consciousness that simultaneously engages with issues of education, freedom, sexuality, and social constraint. Her characters successfully negotiate power, class, and gender hierarchies with intelligence, humor, and courage, asserting a form of resistance that is both internal and performative.

The intersection of sexuality, social expectations, and selfhood in her narratives profoundly disrupts simplistic or essentialist notions of womanhood, positioning desire not merely as personal fulfillment but as a pivotal site of empowerment and subversion. By

employing an integrated framework of liberal, radical, and psychoanalytic feminisms, this study has underscored Chughtai's continued relevance, demonstrating that her realist, irreverent prose is not only a testament to individual courage but also a sustained call to interrogate the persistent and subtle structures of gendered oppression. Ultimately, Chughtai's fiction invites readers and scholars alike to confront the intersections of desire, agency, and social constraint, affirming her position as a transformative voice in feminist literature whose work continues to inspire critical thought and dialogue across disciplines and generations.

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