

Metaphors and Metamorphosis: The Politics of Sexuality in Ismat Chughtai's "The Homemaker"

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Abstract

Ismat Chughtai, a prominent feminist writer of twentieth century India, has often been criticized for her iconoclastic stand on the treatment of female sexuality in her stories though she has always used strong metaphors to subtly express such boldness in her heroines. In "The Homemaker," she presents the characters, Lajo and Mirza, in a relationship that involves a certain pattern of sexual politics. Mirza, driven by Lajo's sexuality, falls in love with her, and, bugged by his sense of religiosity and patriarchy, attempts to make a "decent" woman out of her. Chughtai's brilliant narrative establishes here two strong metaphors, lehnga (a long skirt worn by Indian women) and pyjamas (trousers worn by Indian women), to capture two phases of metamorphosis that Lajo goes through from being a maid to becoming a homemaker first, and then from a maid to a wife, followed by a retreat to being a homemaker again. Drawing from Simon de Beauvoir's theoretical reflections on sexual politics, this paper will show how Lajo's journey from lehnga to pyjamas, and her retreat from pyjamas to lehnga metaphorically tell the story of her metamorphosis within the sexual politics of her relationship with Mirza.

Keywords: metaphors, metamorphosis, sexual politics, patriarchy.

Ismat Chughtai, one of the most controversial feminist writers in Urdu literature, has created a great number of female characters in her short stories who experience their sexualities on equal terms with men of their time. Her story, "The Quilt" ["Lihaaf"], is considered the first Urdu story to explore lesbianism. That Chughtai is a writer of unapologetic demeanor is proved by the other short stories that followed the obscenity trial on "Lihaaf" in 1945. As a member of the Progressive Writers' Movement of India, her approach of presenting female sexuality is often coined with strong metaphoric expressions in her stories. This is exemplified in the story "The Homemaker" ["Gharwali"].

Before moving to the main discussion, it is necessary to understand the words "metaphor" and "metamorphosis" first. M. H. Abrams in his *A Glossary of Literary Terms* presented some significant ideas of the metaphor which came in the twentieth century. From the traditional perspective, a metaphor "involves an implicit



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comparison between two disparate things” and “a metaphor serves mainly to enhance the rhetorical force and stylistic vividness and pleasantness of a discourse” (Abrams 155). However, according to Abrams, I. A. Richards, in the first half of the twentieth century, had a different perspective. To him, the “metaphor cannot be viewed simply as a rhetorical or poetic departure from ordinary usage, in that it permeates all language and affects the ways we perceive and conceive the world” (Abrams 155). Richards’ idea was further discussed and developed by Max Black in his essay “Metaphor” in the 1950s. Being a member of the Progressive Writers’ Association, Ismat Chughtai, too, employed metaphors in her stories in a manner that corresponds to the twentieth century definition of the word. Her metaphors say more than the plain words in the whole narrative. As a result, sometimes the metaphors become key forces in her stories. Similarly, the regular definition of “metamorphosis” refers to a process of biological development in animals. The concept of metamorphosis, however, has been adopted to denote psychological and social changes in characters in fiction as well. In the coming-of-age novels, such changes are observed in the protagonists. In Chughtai’s art of characterization, the concept of metamorphosis mostly highlights change or transformation in social states of the characters.

“The Homemaker” tells the story of the sexual relationship between the characters Lajo and Mirza. The principal metaphors in the story are Lajo’s lehnga and pyjamas. The metaphors show two phases of metamorphosis in Lajo: the first of her becoming a homemaker from a maid, and the second of her becoming a wife from a maid. While the former is a deliberate choice of Lajo’s, the latter is imposed on her by Mirza, and she ends up retreating to her identity as a homemaker. These phases reveal a pattern of sexual politics between the characters which does not allow the second phase of metamorphosis to complete itself and establishes Lajo as a character who emerges to be superior to Mirza. The pattern is intricately drawn by Chughtai, mocking the notions of honor, decency, and even the institution of marriage. This paper will discuss the two phases of metamorphosis along with tracing out the nature of sexual politics between Lajo and Mirza bringing references from Simone de Beauvoir’s “The Married Woman” in her book *The Second Sex*.

The story begins with the event of Lajo’s being appointed in Mirza’s house as his maid. Mirza, a bachelor who runs his own grocery store, is tired of “kneading dough and flattening rotis” (Chughtai 80). Lajo is an illegitimate child and does not have any family of her own. She does not fulfill the conventional criteria of a decent, respectable woman in the society and has always welcomed sexual advances from men around her. Mirza’s friend, Bakshi, offers to let him keep Lajo who used to work in Bakshi’s house. He suggests not to waste money on prostitutes and keep Lajo instead as she will satisfy both the need of a maid and that of a prostitute. Mirza

is reluctant “to keep a whore in the house” (80). However, Lajo, seeing the scope of securing a house for herself, quickly settles in Mirza’s house and starts working there. Though Mirza has nothing to complain about Lajo’s work, Lajo’s deliberate exposure of her sexuality baffles Mirza who, with great difficulty, stops himself from getting sexually involved with her. Lajo, on the other hand, is both surprised and offended to see him still visiting prostitutes. However, after some days of Lajo’s seduction of Mirza, a relationship – both physical and emotional from both ends – develops. Mirza, however, feels awkward seeing the men in his neighborhood taking an interest in Lajo though she rejects them all with her sharp tongue. On a friend’s suggestion, he takes the risk of “ruining” his family honor and marries Lajo. With this step, Mirza’s process of making a wife out of the “whore” begins. It is at this point of the story that the process of metamorphosis is imposed on Lajo. Mirza’s preference for pyjamas over the lehnga as his wife’s attire places Lajo in great discomfort. Also, he no longer enjoys her coquettish behavior during their sexual intercourse and tells her to act like a shy wife. Now that Mirza has secured her as a wife, his desire and interest wane and he spends less time around the house. Lajo, fuming at Mirza’s indifference to her, instigates an extramarital affair with Mithwa, a neighbor. When Mirza finds out, he divorces Lajo. With a happy heart, Lajo sells the pyjamas and goes back to wearing the lehnga. Lajo’s freewheeling nature in the neighborhood makes Mirza uncomfortable again. The story ends with Lajo’s re-entry to Mirza’s house as his maid when Mirza is told that “Nikah [wedding] with a bastard is haram – strictly forbidden” (93). Both Mirza and Lajo are relieved to know that neither their marriage nor their divorce is valid. Mirza is relieved because he thinks his honor has been saved and Lajo is relieved because she can still be the homemaker in the house without being married or in pyjamas anymore. This way the story ends exactly as it had begun.

Lajo’s lehnga and pyjamas are two powerful metaphors here. Unlike her name which means coy, Lajo plays an active part in her sexual interactions with men. She has grown up with “a very large-hearted concept of the man-woman relationship” and with “no mother or grandmother to teach her what was right and what was wrong” (Chughtai 82, 83). This has led her to be independently oriented with her sexuality. Her lehnga stands for this independence in her in dealing with her sexuality. Quintessential elements of Chughtai’s heroines from the lower class of the society, “sexual attraction and raw sensuality,” as M. Asaduddin puts it in his Introduction to the translation of Chughtai’s short story collection, *Lifting the Veil*, are found in abundance in Lajo (xxii). Chughtai’s words, “Her lehnga was fluttering in the wind,” (86) suggest the fluttering nature of Lajo as well. On the other hand, her pyjamas stand for the restrictions on attires that patriarchy imposes a woman reflected here through Mirza’s attempt to control her sexuality after their marriage.

Chughtai writes: "Mirza put a ban on the lehnga and instructed her to wear tight-fitting churidar pyjamas. Lajo was used to open space between her legs. Two separate legs joined by a strip of cloth were truly bothersome" (88). The "open space between her legs" that Lajo has always been comfortable with represents a void for Mirza that may anytime devour his male ego. His ban on the lehnga is a fine example of the double standards that patriarchy holds regarding women's clothes. Before their marriage, Lajo's bare legs sticking out from under the lehnga had aroused Mirza; but afterwards, these very legs are banned from public view as otherwise he would not be able to make a "decent" woman out of her. They would destroy his honor.

The first phase of the metamorphosis – from a maid to a homemaker – takes a shorter time to complete than the second one. It happens when, despite Mirza's hesitance, Lajo enters Mirza's house as the maid on her own. Chughtai's expression, "Lajo had already invaded Mirza's kitchen," attributes power to her character to take her own decision, and her body language while working with "her lehnga tucked up like a diaper" tells about her overt and comfortable handling of her dress (80). Mirza, on returning home that evening, notices the change in his house with surprise: "As though Bi Amma, his late mother, was back! Every object in the house – the earthen pitcher, the newly scrubbed bowl, the lantern – was sparkling. ... Spinach mixed with potato, moong daal laced with onion and cumin seeds – just the way Amma prepared it!" (81). Lajo's service reminding him of his late mother points to the absence of a woman in his house for so long, and foreshadows her becoming the homemaker in the story. Though Lajo enters his house as his maid and proves to be a perfect housekeeper on the very first day, the comparison between the late mother and the newly appointed maid shows the potential for Lajo to be someone more than just a housekeeper. During dinner Mirza tells her that he "can't afford a servant," but her reply is: "Who wants wages?" (81). This is a clear sign that Lajo has not taken up this work as a job, and that she rejects her position as a paid servant in the house. The note of interrogation in her reply also strengthens the rejection. Chughtai writes: "It was as though the issue was resolved once and for all!" (81). Her decision is more firmly stated the next morning when she tells Mirza, "No, Mian. I'm here to stay" (81). Despite his being the master of the house, he has to comply with all the major decisions that Lajo has taken on her own. Her firmness gives her the freedom to make choices and decisions not only in the kitchen but also in the whole house, and gradually she metamorphoses from a maid to a homemaker. The original Urdu title of the story, "Gharwali" says much in this regard. "Gharwali" means wife and/or homemaker. Had the title been "Naukrani," Lajo's position in the house would have been analyzed as a housekeeper or a paid servant. Her choice to be a homemaker is also reaffirmed when she shows discomfort at being Mirza's wife later in the story.

In the first phase of Lajo's metamorphosis, she is placed in the center of the power nexus in her relationship with Mirza. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* discusses the patriarchal power nexus in the sexual relationship between a man and a woman. Beauvoir, while defining "woman" in the Introduction of *The Second Sex*, emphasizes how a woman's existence is often characterized in relation to that of a man. She says: "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the Other" (Beauvoir 16). Though Lajo as Mirza's maid will be identified with reference to him, the more she takes up the position of the homemaker in his house, the more Mirza is decentralized. Her decisions of not taking any wage, of staying there to give him service, and of making sexual advances towards him, empower her gradually to be taken as the Subject, not as the Other in their relationship. This is also evident in these lines where Chughtai writes about Lajo's first impression of Mirza and his house:

For Lajo it was love at first sight. She was in love – not with Mirza but with the house. Without a mistress, it was as good as hers. A house does not belong to a man. He is more like a guest. ... Here at Mirza's house, she was the queen. She knew the moment she set eyes on him that Mirza was a simpleton. He would come quietly, much like a guest, and eat whatever was laid before him. (Chughtai 82)

One may trace a Victorian separate-sphere ideology in Lajo's character, but the daunting capacity of her to control both the man and the home to become the Subject is what Chughtai highlights as a stronger aspect in Lajo as a woman. The use of the word "queen" also establishes her superior position rather than being a mere servant.

Beauvoir clarifies further, in relation to the Hegelian concept of self-consciousness, how the essential Subject is formed only when it is set as opposed to the inessential Object (the Other). She also focuses on the reciprocity between the Subject and the Other under correlative circumstances and questions the absence of such reciprocity between the sexes (Beauvoir 17, 18). Mirza, as an agent of patriarchy, refuses to accept any such reciprocity in their sexual relationship "under the correlative circumstance" where Mirza has been decentralized in the home. It is because Lajo's reciprocal participation during the sexual intercourse threatens Mirza's subjective self. For example, Mirza's reaction to their first experience of coitus, both initiated and dominated by Lajo, presents him as the subordinate: "Lajo turned on her side and grabbed him. Mirza was dumbfounded. He had never encountered anything like this before. He went on pleading as Lajo seduced him thoroughly" (Chughtai 85). Lajo dominating Mirza in copulation allows room for the reciprocity that Beauvoir says to be usually absent between a man and a woman. This apparent reciprocity strengthens Lajo's position as the homemaker in the house.

The second phase of Lajo's metamorphosis – from a maid to a wife – is metaphorically presented through Lajo's journey from lehnga to pyjamas. It also speaks of how Mirza wants her to transform from a sexually dominating "whore" to a submissive, docile wife. No matter how complete the first phase of Lajo's metamorphosis looks, it is presented from Lajo's perspective. From Mirza's perspective, the relationship is sometimes that of master and servant – when he suspects her of stealing money – and sometimes that of husband and wife – when he suspects her of having flings with others behind his back, and when he feels ashamed and afraid to see the men in the neighborhood taking an interest in her. So, Mirza thinks of himself both as a master and as a husband, regarding Lajo as the Other and himself as the Subject in the relationship. Hence comes the need for him to make Lajo metamorphose into a wife and legalize that power nexus between them.

In this second phase, the apparent reciprocity that is found in their sexual relationship changes its course as soon as they get married:

Lajo's coquetry that had seemed enchanting before marriage now seemed objectionable in a wife. Such sluttish ways did not become decent women. She could not become Mirza's dream bride – one whom Mirza would beg for love, one who would blush at his advances, one who would feign anger and one he would coax into submission. (Chughtai 89)

Mirza's dream of a reluctant, blushful, and submissive bride narrates the patriarchal understanding of consent in women – to take reluctance as willingness, to take "no" for a "yes" – which eventually led to the slogan, "No Means No," in the fourth wave feminism in the twenty first century. Willingness gives way to consensual sex. It also means having a voice to assert one's own choice which confronts the non-reciprocal sexual politics between the Subject and the Other. That explains why Mirza has never dreamt of a willing, "sluttish," and dominating bride. In making "a decent woman of her," Lajo becomes, partially though, "tamed and reformed" (89). Lajo's dominating and welcoming sexuality that Mirza has been so threatened with is now "tamed and reformed" which gives him some form of trust. Secure in the knowledge of his superiority in the relationship, he begins to take her for granted. Whether Mirza has become the dream groom for Lajo is a question far from asking.

Mirza's suffocation in a reciprocal sexual relationship clearly indicates a patriarchal insecurity in him as well which is echoed in these lines:

Mirza could glimpse Lajo's lissome, golden legs through the door which was ajar. ... Her legs stretched further. Mirza drained one more glass of water and chanting "la hawla wala quwwat," fell on his bed. ... Then a harmless thought entered his mind: If her legs were not bare, he would not feel such

thirst for water. This thought made him bold. ... Mirza had to do it for his own safety. ... He held the hem of her lehnga and pulled it down. (Chughtai 84)

That Mirza feels “unsafe” under the same roof as Lajo associates her sexuality with evil power and brings in the ironical sense of religiosity in Mirza’s patriarchal mind. His taking refuge in the mosque and chanting “la hawla wala quwwat” [roughly meaning “There is none other than Allah to save me”] is evidence of that. This is exemplified further in this line: “The sound of her bangles would make Mullahji, coming out of the mosque, mutter “ayat-ul-qursi,” to ward off evil” (83). This sense of religiosity is marked here as “ironical” because Mirza neither feels “unsafe” nor chants “la hawla wala quwwat” when he visits the courtesans. Instead, he wears “a starched kurta with great flourish,” puts “a scented cottonwool ball in his ear,” and grabs “his walking stick” on such visitations (84). Also, no matter how frequently he visits the courtesans, keeping one at home makes his home appear to him as a brothel, turning it into a place for immoral acts. Thus, home that brings the idea of marriage – a sacred union between a man and a woman – becomes the devil’s den with Lajo’s sexual “evilness” in it. The juxtaposition of the pompous show in visiting the prostitutes and the stealthy approach in saving himself from the “evil” of Lajo’s sexuality presents the ironical religiosity that runs through the norms of patriarchy in the society from which these characters come. Later, Lajo’s regard of the pyjamas being “long as the devil’s intestines” provides a sharp and humorous contrast to the connection between the devil and herself set by the men in the narrative (89). While, for Mirza, a pair of pyjamas is the necessary tool for the chastisement in their marriage, for Lajo, it is a useless attire which is more of a “contraption” as “one has to tie and untie it each time one goes to the lavatory!” (89).

Lajo’s journey from pyjamas to lehnga speaks of the unsustainability of the second phase of the transformation in her. It would be interesting here to note that the idea of marriage appeals differently to Lajo and Mirza. On one level, both of them take virginity to be the eligibility of a woman to get married. According to Mirza, “after warming the bed of so many,” she has become “unfit to become his bride” (Chughtai 86). A similar notion of this is found in Lajo: “She had no illusion about herself: only virgins got married, and she could not remember when she had lost her virginity. She was not fit to be anyone’s bride” (88). For Mirza, to marry Lajo, who is not a virgin, would be the death of Mirza’s family honor. One cannot miss Chughtai’s intention of subtly mocking the association of honor with virginity here, and cannot but find a prophetic reflection of that, decades after, in Kamla Bhasin’s bold utterance: “My honor is not in my vagina” (Bhasin). Again, on another level, both Lajo and Mirza differ from each other regarding the need of legalizing their relationship. Mirza loves her and panics at the thought of someone

else in the neighborhood taking her away "with a better offer" (86). Given the coquettish nature of Lajo, he also suspects that she may have flings with others if he does not brand her legally as his wife. Later, when the maid is turned into a married woman, Mirza no longer worries about her fidelity. Even the neighborhood acknowledges this metamorphosis: "Now that she was married to a decent person, she became 'mother,' 'sister' and 'daughter'" (90). Lajo, on the other hand, does not understand the need of legalizing her loyalty to him in the name of marriage. She considers Mirza to be "a class apart" compared to the previous men in her life, and has "an entirely different experience of give and take with him" which can ensure her an orgasmic sexual experience (88). When Lajo can provide what Beauvoir calls "the 'service' of the bed and the 'service' of the housekeeping," marriage is just a needless burden for her (Beauvoir 476). Her question, "Where's the need?" clearly objects to the proposed metamorphosis to become a wife and this objection paves the path of her retreat from it in the future (Chughtai 87).

Lajo's retreat is triggered by her suffocation as a wife which can be explained through Beauvoir's take on homemaking in the chapter "The Married Woman" in her book. However, in Beauvoir's discussion, the wife is the homemaker who metamorphoses into the mother later whereas in Chughtai's narrative the homemaker breaks away from the wife's role to assert her solo identity and that process in this paper has been seen as a retreat. Beauvoir opines that a married woman "is to have sex pleasure only in a specified form and not individualized" (454). Mirza's dream bride mold defines that "specified form" for Lajo which is suggested by Chughtai through the metaphors of the pyjamas. Even within that, she declares her territory to be the home so much so that she does not want any maid for help: "... she could not share the house with another woman. If anyone dared to enter her kitchen or touch her sparkling vessels, she would break her legs. She could share Mirza with another woman, but as far as her home was concerned, she was the undisputed mistress" (Chughtai 90). This aspect of Lajo's character finds an expression in Beauvoir's words: "Whereas woman is confined within the conjugal sphere; it is for her to change that prison into a realm" (469). This also shows Lajo's acceptance of her husband's debauchery just as she agrees to the notion of virginity as the qualification for marriage. She has given up her lehnga and somehow manages to fit in the pyjamas but she cannot give up her home which is the only position in which she can assert herself as superior. She has been a maid for so long in other houses; in none of those has she been a homemaker. In Mirza's house, Lajo has wanted to become the homemaker – a metamorphosis that she has envisioned for herself regardless of marriage.

As the power nexus of Mirza as the Subject and Lajo as the Other has been established through the marriage, Lajo's grip over Mirza seems to have loosened a bit. Chughtai shows that in this line: "A man can do anything to please his mistress, but the wife

is altogether a different kettle of fish” (90). Instead of treating her as a mistress by going home early, Mirza now treats her as a wife by spending more time outside with his friends so that he cannot be called “henpecked” (90). Being “henpecked” would be becoming the Other which will imbalance his central position. At this point, Lajo experiences what Beauvoir describes as “no escape from immanence and little affirmation of individuality” (470). With Mirza speaking “in monosyllables,” Lajo indulges in an extra-marital affair with Mithwa as he alone is still attracted to her sexuality (Chughtai 90). This, in Beauvoir’s words, can be called Lajo’s “revenge on the sexual level” (Beauvoir 485). Lajo’s fidelity that Mirza has been concerned about before marriage is now lost due to that very marriage. Chughtai’s sarcasm on marriage as a means of securing love is matched with Beauvoir’s take on it: “It is sheer hypocrisy to hold that a union based on convenience has much chance of inducing love” (464).

While the marriage has made Lajo metamorphose from a maid to a wife, the divorce and its consequences set the tune for her retreat to being the homemaker. The discovery of Lajo’s infidelity leads to a severe beating followed by divorce. Lajo feels relieved with this news. Happily, she returns to her former position marked by her sale of the pyjamas and adoption of the lehnga once again. Here the patriarchal concept of honor is mocked by Chughtai. Sadique makes the following remark on this style of hers: “She [Chughtai] knows the art of mocking at the false pride of the male, of exposing and satirizing his hypocritical and egotistical nature” (225). After the divorce, Mirza is told by Mullahji that their divorce is invalid as their marriage itself was invalid on the grounds that Lajo was a bastard. So, the serious issue of making Lajo a “decent” woman through marriage and putting a ban on her lehnga has been mocked by the very institution that imposed it on her. Lajo emerges here as superior again through Chughtai’s portrayal: “Being a bastard served her in good stead! God forbid, if she had been the legitimate child of her parents, she would have faced the music now!” (94). The legitimacy of the relationship is not a concern for her as much as it is for Mirza. This presents Lajo as a character who is not bound by so-called social values. For Lajo, the divorce was not heartbreaking at all, rather leaving the home was: “Never before in her life had she got the opportunity to become the mistress of a household. She missed the house. Mirza would not get anyone to sweep it for fear of pilferage. The place must be in a mess” (94). So she approaches Mirza to resume her work. Without waiting long for his reply, she re-enters the house by running over the rooftops and jumping down into the house, and starts working by tucking up her lehnga again – her regular body language reaffirming her invading quality that brings her to the center of the power nexus like a queen. On Mirza’s return, he finds the house to be “spic and span” which again reminds him of his late mother and reasserts Lajo as the homemaker (94). Chughtai

writes: "A nagging feeling that he [Mirza] did not value her worth overwhelmed him. ... He got up from his bed abruptly and gathered the homemaker in his arms" (94). Lajo's worth here is in being the homemaker, not the wife. By trying to change Lajo, it is Mirza who has come to a new realization. As M. Asaduddin comments on Chughtai's heroines from the lower class: "They are frivolous village maidens and preach a robust morality that is far more healthy and creative than the attenuating social morals practised by the middle class." Lajo, through her retreat, provides a solution that is more suitable than the one Mirza has prescribed through the marriage (Asaduddin 88). Mirza's patriarchal and subjective self succumbs to Lajo's sexuality which brings back the reciprocity in their sexual relationship. With this, Lajo's retreat to being the homemaker is complete.

Chughtai, while showing the phases of metamorphosis and the sexual politics between the characters, also addresses a larger social milieu of her time. In "Introduction: Theorizing the 'First Wave' Globally," Pamela L. Caughie identifies the period from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s as the first wave of feminism in the non-Western contexts. She explains that, along with demanding and working for gender equity in the fields of education, election, and employment in the public sphere, women in non-Western countries contributed to set "a re-assessment of gender and sexual mores in the private sphere" (Caughie 5). By the time Chughtai wrote this story in the mid-twentieth century India, many women from the middle class Muslim families were deciding to leave purdah. In Gail Minault's essay, "Coming Out: Decisions to Leave Purdah," one can find an extensive account of those progressive women. In her book, *Gender, Language, and Learning*, Minault, again gives an insightful discussion on the women's magazines in Urdu published at the beginning of the twentieth century – *Tahzib un-Niswan*, *Khatun*, and *Ismat* – which reflected how educated Muslim women of that time were progressing. She states: "There were heated discussions of purdah – its necessity or not, various degrees of its observance, and so on..." (Minault 86). These accounts record the questions that were being raised at that time against purdah. Despite such progressive intellectuality spread by these magazines, the general picture in the society remained mostly unchanged as M. Asaduddin says:

they [the Urdu magazines] could not make any impact on the society as a whole. Women were denied any significant social role and the whole *raison d'être* of their lives was limited to child bearing and domestic chores A kind of Victorian hypocrisy vitiated social relations. Ismat was the product of this historical moment and exposed this hypocrisy in all its nakedness. (Asaduddin 78)

Like her intellectual inspiration, Rasheed Jahan – the only woman in *Angare* (the

first collection of stories of the Progressive Writers' Association which was published in 1932) group, Chughtai took the decision of leaving purdah. In the chapter, "Nanhe and Munne" of her memoir *A Life in Words*, an account of her experience with purdah is included: "I had to wear a burqa for the first time, and I cannot put in words the sense of humiliation I had to suffer" (Chughtai 48, 49). Taking cue from Wazir Agha's statement that "Ismat must be somewhat aware of herself to be able to unravel some of her own personality through her characters," it can be said that her humiliation in wearing the burqa is projected through Lajo's suffocation in wearing the pyjamas (Agha 199). Through the nature of the sexual politics between Lajo and Mirza, Chughtai has presented a society that was still not ready to accept the dispute over issues like purdah. Even in such circumstances, a character like Lajo – an uneducated woman from the underprivileged strata of the society – can raise and establish her voice in her own capacity, here in this context by establishing her territory and metamorphosing into what she has wanted to be – a homemaker. However, while doing so, Chughtai has been quite suggestive in choosing the metaphors. This suggestiveness is seen throughout the story.

Summing up, it can be said that, from Bakshi's to Mirza's, Lajo has metamorphosed from a maid to a homemaker – like a fluttering butterfly coming out of its cocoon. Shoving Lajo's sexuality into the pyjamas and forcing her to metamorphose into a wife is like squeezing the butterfly back into the cocoon which is unnatural. Mirza's attempt to cover Lajo uncovers his patriarchal ego that cannot accept her sexuality to be more dominant than his but it is Lajo who proves to be superior and gains her former position back in the end. In portraying these through the metaphors, Chughtai makes a brilliant presentation of a scene from her time which tells much about the time and its taboo, and which many have often looked away from.

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