

## A Comparative Study of Ismat Chughtai and Namita Gokhale's Literary Works

**Monica Karki**

Research Scholar

Department of English

Kumaun University, Nainital

### Abstract

Indian English literature has been steadily rising in eminence and two writers from this literature who have been recognized worldwide are Ismat Chughtai and Namita Gokhale. This paper presents a comparative study of these two writers. Both writers are known to dabble with different genres with equal ease. Comparison is done on the aspect of their themes, representation of subaltern voices in their work, and their writing style and form. They both belong to the progressive and radical writers' community. Chughtai was a member of the Progressive writers' association and one of the pioneer feminist writers of India. This paper will analyse the representation of subaltern voices, women's experiences, and their writing style and form. Both Namita Gokhale and Ismat Chughtai write in different languages. Namita Gokhale writes in English and Chughtai writes in Urdu, about women from entirely different backgrounds – Pahadi and Muslim and yet both of their writings stand for feminism and against gender discrimination.

**Keywords:** Comparative method, Femininity, Subaltern, Ismat Chughtai, Namita Gokhale

### Introduction

Ismat Chughtai, a fiery and divisive author, first arrived on the Urdu literary scene at the height of the Progressive Writers Movement. To quote her, "The progressive movement's foundation stone was laid when the first man, in the history of mankind, groaned under the oppression experienced through injustice, the usurpation of his rights, exploitation, inequality, and tyranny. As long as there is the possibility of progress on this planet, progressivism will live" (Progressives and I 129). Ismat Chughtai was constantly conscious of the discrimination that women faced in the primarily feudal and patriarchal culture of the

period. She is regarded as the most influential feminist Urdu writer on the Indian subcontinent; by her outspoken, daring, and contentious work, she became the fervent voice of the voiceless.

Ismat Chughtai was a pioneering writer in Urdu literature, known for her fearless and frank depictions of taboo subjects, particularly the experiences of women and marginalized communities in India. Born in 1915, Chughtai was a feminist writer who challenged societal norms and conservative values through her writing. Her writing style is characterized by her straightforwardness and her willingness to tackle difficult and often controversial subjects. In 1937 Chughtai wrote her first play titled *Fasaadi*, published in *Saqqi*. She wrote many novels - *Terhi Lakeer* (The Crooked Line), *Masooma*, *Saudai*, *Ajeeb Aadmi* (A Very Strange Man), *Ek-Qutra-e-Khoon*, and *Dil Ki Duniya*.

Namita Gokhale is a well-known Indian author, publisher, and literary festival director. Born in 1956, she is known for her imaginative depictions of characters and events in her novels and her lyrical prose. Gokhale's writing often explores the complexities of women's lives within the confines of traditional Hindu society, and she is known for her emotional depth and her commitment to exploring the experiences of marginalized communities. Some of her most famous works include *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, *The Book of Shadows*, *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*, *Priya: In Incredible Indyya*, *The Habit of Love*, *Things to Leave Behind*, and *The Blind Matriarch*.

### **Representation of Subaltern Voices**

The subaltern refers to marginalized and oppressed groups who often go unheard in mainstream society. Gokhale and Chughtai are known for their portrayal of subaltern communities and their struggles. Both writers represent the voices of the subaltern and their representation differs in terms of tone, narrative style, and political stance. They both give voice to marginalized and oppressed communities, including the lower castes, rural poor, and women. They seek to shed light on their experiences and perspectives, which are often excluded from dominant narratives. They both depict the struggles of subaltern communities, including economic hardship, social injustice, and political oppression. They aim to raise awareness of these issues and challenge dominant power structures. They both use

storytelling as a means of exploring subaltern experiences and perspectives. They use characters, plot, and setting to illustrate the lives and struggles of these communities.

In her works, Ismat Chughtai often gave voice to subaltern communities, such as women and the lower classes, who were often marginalized in Indian society. The representation of the 'subaltern' in her works is a complex and nuanced one. She often portrays the struggles of those who are oppressed and marginalized in society, highlighting the power dynamics between different social groups. Her stories often focus on the intersection of caste, class, and gender, showing how these three aspects can shape a person's life. She also explores the role of religion in society, particularly women's rights and autonomy. In her short story "Lihaf" (The Quilt), Chughtai writes- "Having married Begum Jaan he tucked her away in the house with his other possessions and promptly forgot her" (Chughtai 17). The Quilt, speaks of a woman's struggles to be liberated from the constraints of her patriarchal society. Chughtai highlights the subjugation of women in traditional Indian society and the limitations placed on their desires and autonomy. She disclosed the psycho-pathetic state of those women who are victims of fate and patriarchy. She attempts to challenge the established societal structure. She accurately depicted the predicament of the underprivileged, particularly Muslim women who were suppressed in society.

Similarly, Namita Gokhale's works also give voice to subaltern communities and explore the experiences of marginalized groups in India. In her novel "Paro: Dreams of Passion", Gokhale writes, "Who are you, Paro? I asked myself. And I knew I didn't know. So I started looking for myself again, deciding to follow wherever my search took me" (Gokhale 109). Paro eventually realizes that the world she has built through sex, glamour, jewellery, and food is not lasting. Despite her claims of independence, her suicide reveals her dependence and vulnerability. Paro's insanity satisfies her desire for independence. Gokhale highlights the struggles of women in India to assert their individuality and break free from the restrictive norms imposed by society.

However, there is a difference in their tone and approach, while both writers depict subaltern struggles, their tone, and approach can differ. For example, Chughtai often uses irony and sarcasm to critique patriarchal norms and values, while Gokhale uses a more direct and empathetic tone to highlight the experiences of subaltern communities. They both explore women's experiences, but they differ in their portrayal of women's agency and

resistance. Chughtai is known for her feminist perspectives and her depiction of women who challenge patriarchal norms and values, while Gokhale often depicts women in the context of their communities and cultural traditions.

### **Writing style and form**

Ismat Chughtai's writing is known for its straightforward and bold approach. She often deals with taboo and controversial subjects, and her writing is often described as frank and unapologetic. On the other hand, Namita Gokhale's writing is characterized by its imaginative depictions and lyrical prose. Her writing is known for its introspective and emotional nature and often deals with the complexities of human emotions.

Both writers are known for their ability to bring to life the complexities of the human experience and to explore the nuances of the social and cultural context in India. While Chughtai's writing is often bold and unapologetic, Gokhale's writing is more introspective and lyrical, offering a more nuanced and imaginative exploration of the human experience. Chughtai is known for her short stories and essays, while Gokhale writes fiction and non-fiction. Chughtai's short stories are often succinct and to the point, and her writing is characterized by its economy of words. Gokhale's novels, on the other hand, are known for their more expansive and imaginative storytelling, and often explore the complexities of human relationships and emotions in great detail. They both bring their unique perspectives and writing styles to their works. Their writing is a testament to the significance of literature in shaping cultural discourse and advancing social justice.

### **Themes in the works of Ismat Chughtai and Namita Gokhale**

Ismat Chughtai and Namita Gokhale explore a range of themes in their works, which are a reflection of the social and cultural context in India during the 20th century. Both Ismat Chughtai and Namita Gokhale tackle themes that challenge traditional societal norms and explore the complexities of relationships, personal and cultural. However, their works differ in the specific themes they address. Chughtai focuses on issues of gender and sexuality, specifically exploring the experiences of women in a patriarchal society. Her works often challenge societal taboos and conventions surrounding female desire and agency. On the

other hand, Gokhale delves into themes of identity, tradition, and history. Her works often draw from Indian mythology and folklore to examine the cultural heritage of India, while also exploring the challenges and imperfections within it.

While both writers tackle themes of societal norms and relationships, they approach these themes from different perspectives and cultural contexts. Both Chughtai and Gokhale wrote about women's experiences in patriarchal societies and their limitations. Chughtai's "Lihaf" (The Quilt) and Gokhale's "Paro: Dreams of Passion" both deal with the theme of women's sexuality and the societal norms that restrict it. "Terhi Lakeer" (Crooked Line) and Paro: Dreams of Passion, deal with the theme of individuals who challenge societal norms. They both explore the journey of women who break free from societal restrictions and conventions. Paro, in Paro: Dreams of Passion breaks the conventions of society. She divorces her husband and has a sexual relationship with other men. In Tehri Lakeer, Shama, the protagonist is headstrong and rebellious. Namita Gokhale and Ismat Chughtai bring attention to the experiences of marginalized communities in India, including women, lower castes, and rural populations. Chughtai's "Ajeeb Aadmi" (A Very Strange Man) and Gokhale's "The Himalayan Love Story" both highlight the complexities of rural life and the experiences of those living in remote areas. Gainda (Marigold) by Chughtai revolves around caste and class oppression and the taboo surrounding widow remarriage. Namita Gokhale's work Things to leave Behind explores the way the caste system has imprisoned humanity.

### Context and Influence

Cultural movements such as the Progressive Writers' Movement and the Indian independence movement had a significant impact on the writing of Ismat Chughtai, one of the most prominent Urdu writers of the 20th century. Chughtai's writing reflects her progressive and feminist views and her deep engagement with her time's social and political realities. She was known for challenging societal norms and conservative values in her writing, which often dealt with taboo subjects such as sexuality, gender, and class. Her work is considered a major contribution to the development of modern Urdu literature.

The works of Namita Gokhale, have been influenced by several cultural movements. As a feminist writer, her works reflect the influence of the women's movement and the fight for gender equality. Her writing often explores the experiences and perspectives of women in

Indian society. In addition, Gokhale's writing reflects the influence of India's cultural and spiritual heritage, particularly Hinduism, which is often intertwined with the country's history, mythology, and tradition. She is known for her interest in exploring and interpreting these cultural themes in her writing. Gokhale has also been influenced by the Indian independence movement, which has significantly shaped the country's history and identity. The movement's ideals of democracy, freedom, and justice are often reflected in her writing.

## **Conclusion**

Ismat Chughtai and Namita Gokhale are two prominent Indian writers who have made significant contributions to Indian literature. Both writers have unique writing styles that reflect their perspectives and life experiences. In terms of themes, Chughtai and Gokhale both tackle issues related to gender, identity, and cultural norms. Chughtai is known for challenging patriarchal and cultural taboos, while Gokhale explores the complexities of female experience and spirituality. Both writers are influential in their way. Overall, the comparative study of Namita Gokhale and Ismat Chughtai highlights the rich and diverse literary heritage of India and the impact that these writers have on Indian literature and culture. Both writers have left a lasting legacy through their works, and their writing continues to be relevant and inspiring in contemporary times.

It is also worth noting that both writers made significant contributions to the development of Indian women's writing. Chughtai is one of the first Indian women writers to address taboo subjects such as sexuality and female desire, and her work helped to lay the foundation for a new generation of Indian women writers. Similarly, Gokhale's works delve into the complexities of female identity, and she has been recognized for her contributions to Indian women's writing and the feminist literary tradition. Both writers belong to different timelines as Chughtai's writing was heavily influenced by the feminist and anti-colonial movements of the early 20th century, and she used her writing as a form of resistance against patriarchal and colonial forces. Similarly, Gokhale's writing reflects India's changing social and political landscape in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Her works are an exploration of the complexities of modern Indian society and the cultural, spiritual, and political forces that shape it.

This comparative study of Ismat Chughtai and Namita Gokhale highlights these writers' important contributions to Indian literature and culture. Through their writing, they have given voice to marginalized communities and explored important social and cultural issues, inspiring readers to broaden their perspectives and think more deeply about the world around them. Their works continue to be an important part of the rich literary tradition of India and a source of inspiration for future generations.

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