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Zoya Pramod Khera April 4, 2016

Beneath the *Lihaaf:* Sites of Freedom and Imprisonment in Ismat Chughtai's *The Crooked Line* and *The Quilt*

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Abstract

Beneath the *Lihaaf:* Sites of Freedom and Imprisonment in Ismat Chughtai's *The Crooked Line* and *The Quilt*

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This thesis examines the sites of freedom and imprisonment as depicted in two of Ismat Chughtai's most famous works, *Terhi Lakir/ The Crooked Line* and *Lihaaf/ The Quilt*. These sites are defined in relation to the degree of agency accorded to the characters, and their ability to express their sexuality. Through examining these sites, the thesis argues that sexuality is used as a tool for gaining agency in these two texts. The above is argued in two ways: First, through demonstrating that the expression of female sexuality is an act of rebellion against the patriarchal society of the texts, which additionally allows them to hold greater power in the household; Second, through illustrating how this sexuality is used to alter the role of the woman as voiceless symbol of the nation, created by the nationalist movement of the freedom struggle. Further, I argue that through expressing their sexuality, the female characters of the texts transform their sites of imprisonment into sites of freedom. Additionally, the thesis highlights the power dynamics inherent in sexual relationships and between the women of the *zenana*.

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, the regional literatures of South Asia have repeatedly been left in the shadows of literature written in English, which as a lasting colonial effect is perceived as the most elite language in the region. Still, Urdu literature has managed to maintain a more prominent position in the canon of South Asian literature than many of the other regional literatures. Within this field, Ismat Chughtai (1915-1991) is an essential figure whose role as a female author writing works discussing sexuality and gender norms openly set her apart from her male peers approaching such themes. Chughtai's fiction also enjoys the benefit of visibility that arises from the works being translated into English by multiple, prominent scholars including, Mohammad Asaduddin, Ruth Vanita, and Tahira Naqvi.

Emerging out of the politically-charged late colonial age of South-Asia in the early twentieth century, Ismat Chughtai constantly infused the political into her work. As part of the Progressive Writers' Association, Chughtai also epitomized their goals of incorporating sociological conversations into their fiction. Nevertheless, in contemporary years, the critical focus on Chughtai's work has largely been constricted to the aspect of her fiction that deals with sexuality and gender. Scholars like Tahira Naqvi, Gayatri Gopinath and Kanika Batra have written about Chughtai and her interpretation of female sexuality. In this thesis, I incorporate an examination of female sexuality in *Terhi Lakir/The Crooked Line* (1944) and *Lihaaf/The Quilt* (1942) within the framework of the nationalist movement of the freedom struggle in South Asia. I argue that the expression of female sexuality is a means for women to acquire agency through refuting gender norms and altering the role of the woman in the nationalist movement.

THE PROGRESSIVE WRITERS' ASSOCIATION

Although the thesis does not take a historicist approach in its analysis of the texts, it recognizes the need for historical background due to the nature of the works, which are tightly intertwined with their historical context. In this section, I thus, first provide a brief account of the background of the Progressive Writer's Association (PWA) and Ismat Chughtai's role within in. The fictional version of the Progressives Union that exists within *Terhi Lakir*, and is criticized by Shaman, the protagonist and a member of the Progressives, is separate from the PWA that Chughtai is a part of.

Archivist Rajwanti Mann chronicles the movement that was The Progressive Writers' Association (PWA) of South Asia in her book *Social Radicalism in Urdu Literature.* Mann explains that the regionally contained Association arose out of multiple international movements in the twentieth century. She clarifies, "Some historians designate the broad spectrum of widespread political and social reform activities in the period from 1900 onwards as the Progressive Movement" (Mann 51). Thus, the many unique movements, although disconnected from one another, are collectively referred to as the broad Progressive Movement. The broader Progressive movement encompassed the growth of American socialism in the late nineteenth century, the rejection of older Victorian ideals in the culture and literature of England, and the spread of Marxist ideas (Mann 53-55).

The above-mentioned international Progressive Movement manifested in colonized South Asia through the creation of the Progressive Writer's Association in the early 1930s. The members of this forum were directly influenced by these movements as the writers and scholars of the Association had travelled beyond the confines of the colony to Britain and Russia. Here, they were exposed to the ideas of socialism and Marxism, and brought these philosophies back to

India. The Russian Revolution in particular became "a model for workers and peasants [in India. And] Its propagandist literature, brought to India between 1925 and 1929, often hailed the achievements of the Workers' and Peasants' Governments in Russia" (Mann 59). Communist philosophies, thus, spread through the colony. The influence of communism became particularly important for the PWA, leading the intellectual class of scholars to form this organization that aimed to incorporate these philosophies into the literature of the colony.

The PWA became a region-wide literary movement, which questioned authority and included writers of many South Asian languages but had the most significant effect on Urdu literature. This thematic change of these writers' fiction "from sentimental and religious subjects to social problems" began in the 1930s and was first demonstrated in *Angare/Embers* (1932), a collection of radical short stories by Sajjid Zaheer, Rashid Jahan, Ahmad Ali, and Mahmudzaffar (Mann 66). As Ralph Russell chronicles in his book *The Pursuit of Urdu Literature* (1992), the publication of these short stories by authors who all, except for Ahmad Ali, were communists, caused an uproar that resulted in its ban. As Russel explains,

> All the stories include accounts of intimate sexual relationships… And there are satirical attacks not only upon religious leaders but on religion… [Correspondingly,] because *Angare* was seen as a challenge to accepted literary values, its appearance is regarded as a landmark in the history of Urdu literature (Russell 206).

Thus, the sexual content of the collection and the critical approach to religion was in stark contrast to Urdu Literature prior to the anthology's publication. While the collection was well-received by the literary elite, the greater section of the readership was unaccustomed to the incendiary nature of the works and was insulted by it. Sexuality and relationships were rarely discussed in such an explicit manner prior to this, and this change along with the satirical tone with which religion was discussed was offensive to the largely religious readership and the collection was thereby banned.

The following section of the PWA manifesto helps establish the aims of the organization:

> It is the duty of Indian writers to give expression to the changes taking place in Indian life and to assist the spirt of progress in the country… It is the object of our association to rescue literature and other arts from the priestly, academic and decadent classes in whose hands they have degenerated so long; to bring the arts into the closest touch with people and make them the vital organs which will register the actualities of life, as well as lead us into the future… We believe that the new literature of India must deal with the basic problems of our existence today—the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjugation (Mann 69).

As the above quote details, the literature of PWA was largely tied to the social conditions of the colony, which was in a state of political unrest as it neared the end of colonial rule. When the PWA was formed in the 1930s, the South Asian region was still under British rule. However, the colony was a site of nationalist movements and an aggressive struggle for independence with Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru already being prominent leaders in the struggle. The hostile discourse between the colonial government and the colonized people is reflected in the PWA literature. The great push to incorporate the struggles of the lower classes including poverty and hunger was particularly important for PWA. The depiction of these issues relayed the core problems plaguing the country, which led it to remain a colony where many suffered.

ISMAT CHUGHTAI

As part of the PWA and also outside of it, Chughtai was part of a new wave of revolutionary feminist writing in Urdu, including authors Rashid Jahan and Qurratulain Hyder. Their works incorporated narrative revolving around female protagonists as they tried to live fulfilled lives in patriarchal societies. Having encountered *Angare* whilst in college, Chughtai was particularly influenced by the work of Rashid Jahan, whose stories were revolutionary since she was the first female writer of Urdu literature "who portrayed so bluntly the callousness and injustice women suffer at the hands of their menfolk" (Russell 207). Indeed, it was Jahan who

first brought Chughtai to the PWA meetings and introduced her to the writers that she would later consider her friends.

Having fought for her own right to education from a very young age, Chughtai went on to earn both a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Bachelor of Education degree. She, thus, understood the struggle that women went through to acquire education. As Partha Chatterjee mentions in his essay, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Questions", female education in particular became an essential feature of the decolonization process. He explains that towards the end of colonial rule when independence and partition were imminent, the nationalist movement strove to elevate women's roles within the region. This push for female education was a big part of the movement's goals. As Chatterjee delineates, however, the focus on education was a superficial one that only marginally raised the woman's role in society. Having been educated and worked as a school headmistress, just as Shaman does, Chughtai is aware of the shortcomings of this supposed push for female empowerment. She is, thus, able to illustrate the lack of actual opportunities for women within the nationalist movement, and within society both before and after independence. Additionally, the competitive nature of the colonial government and the nationalists in exhibiting their support for female empowerment ensured that the discourse was detached from the actual cause, lacking the voices and experiences of the women. Thus, as Gayatri Spivak details in her discussion of the conversation regarding *sati*[1] in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" the discourse once again fails to incorporate the voice of the subaltern, namely the uneducated women of the lower classes.

Furthermore, Spivak's question of visibility and the theft of the subaltern's voice is of particular interest to the discussion of Chughtai's differences from the PWA. Chughtai disagreed

[1] Former Hindu practice of a widow's self-immolation in the funeral pyre of her dead husband.

with the aforementioned PWA norm of basing their fiction on the people of the lower classes. A narrative like that of *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand, which chronicles a day in the life of a sweeper, was the type of literature PWA promoted. Chughtai's narratives, instead largely focus on the people of the middle classes. As Chughtai describes in her essay *Progressive literature and I,*

> When the policy of the party rigidly concluded that Progressive literature is only that which is written about the peasant and the labourer, I disagreed. I cannot know and empathize with the peasant class as closely as I can feel the pain of the middle and lower middle class (Kumar and Sadique, 131).

Thus, Chughtai refused to create a superficial narrative regarding members of the lower class, wherein she was incapable of truly understanding their experiences due to her own middle class upbringing. Instead, Chughtai writes specifically about the life of the middle class protagonist. Thus, whilst establishing the process of how her female protagonists struggle for agency, Chughtai recognizes that this struggle is different for the women of the various classes.

This significant difference between Chughtai and PWA illustrates a greater issue within the nationalist movements of the region. All the members of PWA were educated, lower to upper middle class writers who were mostly men. Although depicting the struggles and issues of the people of the lower classes is essential in understanding the basic shortcomings and needs of the region, speaking on behalf of them invalidates this attempt. The vast majority of the writers of PWA are incapable of comprehending the plight of the peasant and the laborer. By attempting to create a voice for them, the writers were drowning out the actual voices of the subaltern.

In addition to preventing the substitution of Chughtai's voice for the voice of the subaltern, Chughtai's fiction expresses her middle class protagonist's experience in a way that male writers' narratives are often unable to do. Thus, the nature of the existence of Chughtai's

fiction in itself is an act of women acquiring agency within the broader nationalist movement. Chughtai's stories often deal with female sexuality and the woman's desire to be able to express her sexual urges without restraint, particularly when restricted to the confined private sphere.

Additionally, the texts illustrate the power dynamics inherent in the domestic environment, and within sexual relations. Scholar Ann Laura Stoler has examined the role of power and sexuality in the colonial context in her book, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's* History of Sexuality *and the Colonial Order of Things.* As Michel Foucault recognizes that "sexuality is a 'dense transfer point' of power", Stoler contextualizes this aspect of sexuality within colonization (Stoler 3). This intertwined nature of sexuality and power is of particular interest to this thesis as it examines the role power plays in the nature and expression of one's sexuality in these two texts by Chughtai.

SCOPE OF THE THESIS

The thesis offers an analysis of *Terhi Lakir/The Crooked Line* and *Lihaaf/The Quilt* through a combined lens of psychoanalytic and postcolonial criticism. The use of these approaches in unpacking the texts through my method of reading them offers the best supplement to the following argument. The thesis demonstrates the sites of imprisonment where women relinquish their agency and argues that these sites play a dual role through their simultaneous function as sites of freedom. Both freedom and imprisonment, in this context, are defined by the degree of agency that these sites offer to the characters. On recognizing and studying these sites, the thesis argues that in these two works, sexuality is used as a tool for obtaining agency. The thesis argues the above by first demonstrating that the expression of female sexuality is an act of rebellion against the patriarchal society of these two narratives. Next, the thesis details how sexuality is used to transform sites of confinement into sites of

comfort. Finally, the above is argued through illustrating how sexuality is used to alter the use of the woman as a voiceless symbol of the nation as created by the nationalist movement of the freedom struggle.

PRIMARY TEXTS AND BRIEF SYNOPSES:

Both *Terhi Lakir* and *Lihaaf* are examined exclusively in their translated forms. Thus, the content of this thesis can only speak for the following translations of the texts and is reliant on their ability to accurately relay the content as written in the original Urdu form. Further, the decision to study these two texts together arises from the similarity between the content of these two works, particularly with regards to child sexuality, sexual fluidity, and gender norms within the household.

The primary text studied in this thesis is *Tehri Lakir/ The Crooked Line*. Originally published in 1944, the 1995 version of the novel as translated by Tahira Naqvi is the version that this thesis examines. Written from the perspective of a Muslim woman growing up in a large family, the novel creates a narrative focused on the protagonist, Shaman, from the moment of her birth and through the decades that follow. The novel is divided into three sections, titled "The First Phase", "The Second Phase", and "The Third Phase", each focusing on different periods in her life. The scholar Tahira Naqvi as well as others have compared these divisions to the "Formative Years" section of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, despite it being published five years after *The Crooked Line*.

In the First Phase, the child Shaman is depicted through her early years as she is exposed to several mother surrogates, in place of her own mother who ignores her. This section establishes the bond she feels with her mother figures, first Unna and second Manjhu, and her desire to recreate this bond as seen through the course of the novel. Her early encounters with

education, friends, pregnancy, sexuality, and puberty are chronicled in this section. Here, she is also sent to an all-girl boarding school where she experiences a desire for her friend Najma. In the Second Phase, Shaman continues to study at school and later college. She encounters her first desire for a relationship with a man. Rashid and Shaman's friend, Prema's father Rai Sahab are two of the most important people in this phase of her life. Additionally, she is exposed to marriage and family dynamics in this phase. The Third Phase is the most political phase of Shaman's life and the book. Here, she encounters the Progressives who gather to discuss philosophies and the problems within the South Asian region. The nature of the Progressives' meetings is akin to the PWA meetings that Chughtai attends. The section follows her through the years as she becomes a headmistress at a school and later marries an Irishman. The novel ends with Shaman and her husband, Ronnie, being unable to come to terms with their differences as they embody the roles of colonized and colonizer respectively. In the final scene of the novel, Ronnie leaves Shaman and flies off to fight in the World War unaware that she is pregnant with his child.

As mentioned earlier, in addition to *Terhi Lakir,* the thesis examines Chughtai's most famous work, the short story *Lihaaf/The Quilt*. Originally published in 1942, the short story has been translated numerous times over the decades. The version that this thesis relies on is translated by Syeda Hameed and included in the 1994 anthology *The Quilt & Other Stories,* compiled by Tahira Naqvi and Syeda Hameed. The short story offers an exploration of lesbianism through the perspective of an eight-year old child. The story, however, is less a study of homosexuality, and more one of female sexuality and the freedom to express female desire. In the short story, the young female protagonist is sent to her aunt's house as part of her punishment for her deviant behavior. Here, each night she encounters a terrifying elephant in her aunt, the

Begum's bed beneath her quilt. While the child is unable to understand the situation, it soon become clear to the reader that the Begum is in a relationship with her maidservant Rabbo as a means to quell her feelings of isolation. Soon, the young protagonist, too, begins to desire the Begum. The story ends with the exposure of the act beneath the quilt or *lihaaf*, and the ripping away of the established site of freedom. The story offers an elaborate study of power dynamics within the *zenana*[2] and between sexual partners.

THESIS STRUCTURE:

In the first chapter, the thesis takes a psychoanalytic approach to the study of these two pieces of fiction. The need for such an approach arises out of the nature of "The First Phase" section of the novel, which is concerned with experiences in a person's infancy and the emergence of sexual desires. In this chapter, I offer an analysis of the beginning of sexuality in the protagonist Shaman's infancy and the reverberating effect this has on the relationships and sexual desires that Shaman experiences through the course of her life. Of particular interest is the nature of the mother-infant relationship and Shaman's continued search for such a bond in her relationships. The chapter studies the power hierarchy within such a bond and the result this has on Shaman's unconscious desires. The mother-infant relationship also embodies the first and only form of unrestricted exploration of sexuality that Shaman is allowed to experience as she attempts to understand her body and desires through these early sexual pleasures. Additionally, I examine her initial exposure to sexual intercourse and her resulting correlation of sexuality with sickness and disgust throughout the course of the novel. Thus, the thesis establishes the unconscious as a site where the freedom and simultaneous restrictions levied on female sexuality take root, becoming a site of concurrent freedom and imprisonment for Shaman's desires.

[2] The section of the house where the women reside

In Chapter Two, I alter my approach to a sociological one where I largely incorporate theory regarding the social structure of South Asian society during the 1940s and women's struggle for agency within the space of the household. The examination, thus, largely concerns itself with the differentiated experiences of men and women with regards to their sexuality. This chapter examines how the women of the novel attempt to bridge this gap and use their sexuality as an empowering tool for gaining agency within the household. Thus, the chapter demonstrates how the expression of female sexuality is simultaneously an act of necessity and an act of rebellion. Further, the chapter examines the portrayal of marriage within these texts and how it functions within the power hierarchies. Additionally, the chapter offers a study of the sites of freedom and comfort as created by the female characters as a means to freely express their sexuality and escape their isolating prisons.

Having demonstrated how women use their sexuality to gain agency and rebel against the restriction imposed on them, in the final chapter the thesis turns to the question of women's role in the nationalist movement. In this chapter, I illustrate the symbolic role of the woman as developed within the movement and how sexuality and power help alter this role. By studying the relationship between Shaman and Ronnie, the thesis provides an analysis of the intertwined nature of sexuality and power as seen through their marriage as they slowly come to embody the stereotypical roles of colonized and colonizer. Further, I explain how Shaman's life becomes a metaphor for the nationalist movement in a similar manner to how the symbolic woman becomes a metaphor for the nation. However, in *Terhi Lakir* this symbolic nature is altered to depict the shortcomings of the movement and to offer a sexually independent version of the woman, rather than a representatively maternal one.

SITUATING THE THESIS

As mentioned above, Chughtai's fiction has been written about in relation to her depiction of sexuality, with several of her short stories being published in anthologies of queer literature. Additionally, much of the above discussion focuses on *Lihaaf.* In this thesis, I incorporate relevant pieces of such scholarship, particularly that of Gayatri Gopinath and Geeta Patel, both of which are introduced below. Despite the secondary assessment of *Lihaaf,* this thesis largely shifts the focus from the short stories that Chughtai is most known for, to her novel *Terhi Lakir* instead. In addition to this, the argument builds upon the analysis of sexuality to establish the role of the woman in the nationalist movement.

Since the term "agency" is integral to this argument, it must first be defined in the context of this thesis before the above scholarship can be introduced. For the purpose of the following discussion, the term "agency" is used as defined in *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, as edited by Bill Ashcroft et al. Agency is, thus, "the ability to act or perform an action… [which] In contemporary theory… hinges on the question of whether individuals can freely and autonomously initiate action, or whether the things they do are in some sense determined by the ways in which their identity has been constructed." Hence, in the following argument, I examine the extent to which the characters of these two texts are able to "freely and autonomously initiate action," having freed themselves from their constructed behaviors, and in the case where are unable to so the same, the processes they undergo in order to reach this free stage (Ashcroft et al., 9).

Having established the implications of the term "agency" I will now introduce the major scholarly works this thesis incorporates. In the psychoanalytic section of thesis, I largely rely on on a section of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, specifically the discussion of "The

Formative Years". Beauvoir's study of the early sexual experiences of the infant is an integral base to understanding the depiction of the early years of Shaman's life in *Terhi Lakir.* Through a comparative study of Beauvoir's explanations and Chughtai's depiction, I establish the beginning of Shaman's sexuality and how her early experiences influence her sexual existence throughout her life. In doing so, I am able to demonstrate how the restrictions on female sexuality begin to take root in the child's unconscious and, later, how the female characters of the novel work to move past this and reclaim their sexual agency.

A shortcoming of using Beauvoir's book, however, is the intrinsically Eurocentric nature of the work, which is in stark contrast to the texts that are entrenched in the very different customs and experiences of the South Asian region. In order to resolve this contradiction, I incorporate the work of Indian psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar as well. Kakar's version of psychoanalytic theory relies on the conditions and social structures of India. A shortcoming of Kakar's work, however, is that he exclusively studies Hindu society, which is only a section of the region's experience. Moreover, both of Chughtai's texts include protagonists that are a part of the Islamic society instead. Although this is certainly a limitation of the thesis' argument, I am looking past it due to the fact that despite the texts being entrenched in the narrative of Muslim families, the fiction tends to offer a more universal experience of the region that incorporates characters from varying religious backgrounds. In *Terhi Lakir*, particularly, Shaman is drawn to characters from different religions, including the Christian Alma, Hindu Rai Sahib and Christian Irishman Ronnie. Thus, the novel acknowledges the influence of Hindu society on Muslim communities and vice versa, making the addition of Kakar's theory to Beauvoir's literature beneficial.

Apart from the psychoanalytic theory incorporated, the thesis in largely concerned with the following three scholars: Gayatri Gopinath, Geeta Patel, and Partha Chatterjee. In *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures,* Gayatri Gopinath looks at the nation and the diaspora, both as homes being reconfigured in the "queer diasporic imaginary" (Gopinath 187). Although much of the book focuses on film, Gopinath also provides an extensive review of Chughtai's *Lihaaf* in the chapter "Local Sites/ Global Contexts: The Transnational Trajectories of *Fire* and *The Quilt."* In this chapter, Gopinath offers a glimpse into Chughtai's use of space and power hierarchies to establish her discussion of the two texts. Gopinath's analysis is one that this thesis agrees with and is in conversation with in its argument. Her discussion of power dynamics within relationships is of particular importance to the following chapters. The thesis further incorporates Gopinath's study of *Lihaaf* and the film *Fire* to address power hierarchies in *Terhi Lakir*. The relationships between the women of the domestic sphere is examined within my argument as I study the various methods the women use to influence the power dynamics in any relationship and to obtain more agency. Unlike Gopinath, however, who is interested in contemporary diaspora culture, the thesis focuses specifically on the conditions of the pre-independence South Asian region and the people that reside here.

In addition to Gopinath's book, Geeta Patel's essay, "Homely Housewives Run Amok: Lesbians in Marital Fixes," is of particular significance to this argument. Patel offers a study of *Lihaaf* in conjunction with the study of the real life story of two policewomen in India. She insists that the idealized depiction of the Indian family, devoid of any real basis in economic, social, or religious characteristics is used to foster an image of the new nation. These images were of particular relevance to the freedom struggle as nationalists strived to foster a sense of national unity in the region as they moved towards independence and the subsequent creation of

nations from the former colony. In this essay, Patel also illustrates *Lihaaf* as a story that destroys the "homely" or domestically-oriented depiction of women in heterosexual marriages in these above images. Patel argues that it is this disruption of the heterosexual household that angered the people who encountered this short story. She writes, "The nexus of desire in the story was a good wife [the Begum] seemingly ensconced behind the veil, someone who had no intentions of leaving her *zenana* but who attracted the sexual attention of the child [the narrator] she was supposed to inculcate into homeliness" (Patel 145). This implicit denunciation of the structure of the household by the Begum who was a woman of the upper middle class angered people as it disrupted the above-described image of the homely, conforming housewife, which was integral to the traditions of the region and the nationalist movement. In this thesis, I demonstrate the extent to which this image permeated through society and the differentiated experiences that men and women of this society have of the world and the ability to express their sexuality. Patel's argument helps establish how this varied expectation imposed on male and female sexuality is explored in the two discussed texts and how the women use their sexuality as a tool to rebel against these restrictions.

Finally, Partha Chatterjee's essay, "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" provides an account of the depiction of the woman in the nationalist movement and how it is in agreement with the image that Patel describes in her essay. In this paper, Chatterjee chronicles the dichotomy that the movement adopts in the attempt to incorporate western behaviors in the outer or material sphere of the people, while maintaining a traditional life in the inner, spiritual realm of the nationalist. This dichotomy between the material and the spiritual is reflected in the dichotomy between the public and the domestic sphere. Thus, Chatterjee explains that the movement adopted western philosophies in the public sphere, including in fields like

science, technology, education, and governance as a means to demonstrate a desire for further economic and social development. Through this, the nationalists were able to establish that they were capable of governing the region on their own. Simultaneously, by adhering to age-old social customs in the personal lives of the people and elevating the traditional philosophies of the region, the nationalists held on to the core spiritual center that defined the future nature. Further, they were able to cater to the interests of the masses by upholding their core values, thereby incorporating them into the movement.

The woman became the core of this traditional message with her being relegated to the role of mother and accorded respect in that position. The region was described as having given birth to the future citizens and the term "Mother India" was used extensively. Thus, even in this respect the female is associated with being a symbolic and nurturing figure who must be fought for and protected. In this new patriarchy the New Woman as defined by the movement was one who is educated and sophisticated through a push for education in the material sphere, but is accorded a false emancipation while being relegated back to the domestic sphere. Chatterjee explains, "the new patriarchy advocated by nationalism conferred upon women the honour of a new social responsibility, and by associating the task of 'female emancipation' with the historical goal of sovereign nationhood, bound them to a new, and yet entirely legitimate subordination" (Chatterjee 248). Thus, the woman is pushed into the realm of the invisible by being forced into being the sexless, voiceless symbol of the mother. Through examining Shaman's role in the Progressives Union and the national struggle, and the symbolic function of her life being a reflection of the nationalist movement, the thesis studies the depiction of the woman in *Terhi Lakir*. The thesis demonstrates how sexuality is used to both create and then destroy this image,

thereby altering the role of the woman in the nationalist movement. The terms material and spiritual are used in this thesis according to the above definitions by Chatterjee.

Thus, using the above theoretical base, the thesis examines the relationship between sexuality and power in *Terhi Lakir* and *Lihaaf*. The thesis argues that through this relationship, female sexuality is used to rebel against the restrictions on sexuality and gain agency in the domestic sphere. Further, the thesis argues that the ability of sexuality to assert power in these texts is used to alter the image and role of the woman in the nationalist movement of the freedom struggle.

CHAPTER ONE

THE UNCONSCIOUS AS A SITE OF FREEDOM AND IMPRISONMENT

As mentioned in the introduction, the initial chapters of *Terhi Lakir* chronicle the early stages of the protagonist Shaman's life. It is an incredibly rich and fascinating section of the novel, offering the varied experiences of the world as perceived by a young girl from infancy through puberty. The novel depicts Shaman's relationships with various mother figures, and the fear of abandonment that arises from these relationships. She is also exposed to pregnancy and maternal instincts in these initial chapters. This chapter studies these relationships and argues that Shaman has an unconscious desire to recreate this mother-child bond in all her subsequent relationships. *Terhi Lakir*, thus, depicts Shaman's first experiences of sexual desire through the above described relationships and her attempts at understanding both her body and her urges. Chughtai is intrigued by this initial exposure of children to sexuality, and explores it in *Lihaaf* as well.

In this chapter, I will explore the depiction of this early exposure to sexuality in *Terhi Lakir* and *Lihaaf,* and the extent to which this exposure in the young Shaman's infancy reverberates through the course of her life and influences her sexuality and relationships. Further, the development of the unconscious fear of sexuality and association of sex with sickness and disgust in the minds of the young female protagonists is examined in this chapter. Thus, this first chapter establishes the first instance of Shaman's free expression of sexuality and sexual curiosity through her relationship with her mother figures and her own body. The chapter demonstrates how this freedom changes with the introduction of fear and the manner in which the restrictions on female sexuality begin to be imposed. Through demonstrating the extent to which these restrictions permeate into the female characters' psyches, stripping them of any

sexul agency, this chapter establishes the base of this loss of agency, which is further explored in the next chapter. Due to the detailed and hyper-sexualized nature of the depiction of these early years, in this chapter I examine the narratives of the *Terhi Lakir* and *Lihaaf* through a psychoanalytic approach. As described in the introduction, this chapter largely draws on the work of Simone de Beauvoir and Sudhir Kakar as its theoretical base.

THE MOTHER'S WARMTH

In Volume II of *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir writes about "The Formative Years" of one's development into a woman through her experiences during childhood, adolescence, and her sexual experiences. Although published five years before Beauvoir's seminal work, the structure and content of Chughtai's *Terhi Lakir* almost exactly reflect the content and structure of this section of Beauvoir's book. Beauvoir's description of the years a child spends in infancy is deeply psychoanalytic and is the section of her work which most strikingly corresponds to *Terhi Lakir.* Perhaps the most striking similarity between Beauvoir's text and *Terhi Lakir* is the depiction of the bond between a mother and her child. The importance of this relationship is one which Freud, too, describes as "unique, without parallel, established unalterably for a whole lifetime as the first and strongest love-object and as the prototype of all later love-relations—for both sexes" (Freud 188). In accordance with Freud's assertion, this particular bond is one that Shaman tries to replicate throughout the course of her life.

For Shaman, however, this bond is established first with her wet nurse Unna and later with her older sister Manjhu, rather than with her biological mother. Having already given birth to nine children, Shaman's mother immediately pushes Shaman away after her birth. She is unwanted by everyone in the family, with her oldest sister Bari Apa proclaiming "May God curse this baby sister! Why won't Amma's womb close up now?" after her birth (Chughtai, *Lakir*

1). This initial abandonment results in Shaman being given over to Unna who becomes Shaman's first maternal surrogate. Despite the fact that she did not give birth to her, Unna becomes the person who first introduces Shaman to the world. With Unna and Unna's lover, Shaman experiences her earliest exposure to a familial bond. Additionally, Unna's lover is the only true father figure Shaman has until Rai Sahib, as he would "hitch Shaman on his shoulders and… [run] around pretending to be a horse" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 2). His playfulness, thus, provides Shaman the existence that is denied to her by her biological family. This proxy family of Unna, her lover, and Shaman is further unconventional since the surrogate parents are lovers rather than a married couple. Hence, Shaman's first and only unregulated experience of sexuality and familial bonds is separate from the socially accepted household that is based on matrimonial bonds.

A study of Beauvoir's chapter on "Childhood" offers a deeper glimpse into the connection that Unna and Shaman share. Beauvoir explains that even after birth, the newborn is "still immersed within the Whole as he was when he was living in the darkness of a womb." The infant is, thus, unable to differentiate between itself and its mother, and the child is "invested with the warmth of maternal flesh" (Beauvoir 331). The manifestation of this undifferentiated existence is evident in Shaman's behavior. In the first of many dreams that Shaman describes over the course of the novel, Shaman dreams of a hundred Unnas "ripe like a mango" around her. As these apparitions dance around her, Shaman is overcome by a desire to be consumed by Unna, and Shaman "cooe[s] and burrow[s] herself into the rounded softness [of Unna's breasts], her lips moving, the veins in her throat throbbing as if she were gulping down great quantities of milk" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 3). Bonded to Unna in this respect, Shaman becomes so possessive of her that "[n]o one could touch Unna while Shaman was awake" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 3). Furthermore,

the yearning to be one with Unna and her flesh, as demonstrated through the image of Shaman gulping Unna's milk, depicts the strength of the allurement of the warmth of the mother's body.

When Unna's relationship with her lover is found out and she is dismissed, this warmth is taken away from Shaman, and is replaced by Manjhu. Shaman accordingly searches for Unna's warmth in Manjhu's body. This event increases in Shaman the fear of abandonment that establishes itself in Shaman's mind from the very beginning of her existence. Beauvoir suggests that as the child begins to recognize herself as a separate entity from the mother, she begins to experience a sense of abandonment from the mother. This initial abandonment, which is usually gradual, is forced upon Shaman in the form of Unna's departure. The distraught Shaman reels from this abandonment and as she is forced to be her own body, she struggles to attach herself to Manjhu. She, thus, insists on sleeping in Manjhu's bed and is violently protective of her. Accordingly, she "would suddenly reject the bottle and cling to Manjhu, snuggling in her clothes like a puppy, looking for her Unna" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 4). Thus, due to the metaphorically violent nature of Shaman's abandonment arising from her and Unna's unified form being torn in half, Shaman is unable to recover from this abandonment and continues to seek replacements for Unna.

Therefore, Shaman accepts the substitute that is Manjhu and soon associates Manjhu's warmth with Unna's. As narrated, "[i]f Manjhu wasn't beside her she couldn't sleep; lying next to her, she felt the same warmth she had known in Unna's lap" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 4). Shaman becomes just as reliant on Manjhu's body as she was on Unna's and is only able to sleep beside Manjhu, wrapped in her arms and unified as one. Once she is abandoned by Manjhu after Manjhu's wedding, Shaman is forced to accept her separation from the mother's body. Despite this acceptance, Shaman in her relationships continues to search for the "warmth of the maternal

flesh" that Beauvoir describes and which Shaman fleetingly finds in Unna and Manjhu. The search for this warmth becomes an unconscious force in Shaman's life, controlling her desires.

Furthermore, the mother's body becomes the site of the child's first sexual arousals, thereby creating a correlation between sexuality and motherhood in the child's mind. As Beauvoir explains, it is the "soft, smooth, supple feminine flesh [of the mother] that [first] arouses sexual desires" in a child. This results from the fact that "sucking is the first source of their most pleasurable sensations" (Beauvoir 330). Thus, in *Terhi Lakir,* as Unna takes on the initial role of Shaman's surrogate mother with "plenty of milk to offer," it is this mother surrogate's flesh that Shaman "kisses, touches, and caresses… in an aggressive manner" (Chughtai*, Lakir* 2; Beauvoir 330). Thus, Shaman's desire for the warmth of a mother figure's flesh and her sexual desires become indivisible from each other.

One manifestation of the above described uncontrollable and unconscious desire is Shaman's lust for her teacher Miss Charan. The strength of this desire is so powerful that Shaman associates it to the strong bond she felt with Manjhu, and Miss Charan becomes "the first person after Manjhu to create a place in Shaman's heart, to have the power to influence her." Being her teacher, Miss Charan already occupies an authoritative position of power that puts her in the role of a motherly figure. Further, Miss Charan's efforts to help Shaman, and her unwavering faith in Shaman's abilities give Shaman the type of attention and support that she craves from her ideal surrogate mother. Soon, Shaman's "fixation [with Miss Charan] intensifie[s], gradually becoming tinged with a romantic feeling that overwhelmed her thoughts" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 49). Thus, Shaman is unable to distinguish a kindred relationship from a sexual one and so longs to be unified with Miss Charan's body as she was with Unna and Manjhu.

Similar to how it does with Unna, Shaman's desire for Miss Charan manifests in the form of dreams where Shaman is "thirsty, her throat is parched, and Miss Charan is dripping cool, fragrant juices into her mouth" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 49). Here, the fragrant juices take on the role of the mother's milk in the dream with Unna. In other dreams,

> [Shaman] sees herself rambling in the night, crying then finds herself on the frosty grass, shivering with a chill, and suddenly Miss Charan picks her up and puts her on the bed, her head resting on her down-filled pillow, and there Shaman pretends to be unconscious because she's afraid if she opens her eyes the dream will be shattered (Chughtai, *Lakir* 49).

Shaman, therefore, fantasizes about Miss Charan looking after her in this new maternal role and lying beside her just as Manjhu did. Confused by the force of these desires, Shaman begins to roam the halls of her boarding school in her dream-induced trance and often finds herself "in front of Miss Charan's room, searching for something." On one such occasion she breaks out of the trance to find herself "in front of Miss Charan's room again, this time sobbing hysterically" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 50). Shaman is, simultaneously aroused and saddened by this desire as it reminds her of the loss of the mother's warmth.

Unable to comprehend this pain and her tears, Shaman races back to her room and in this panic-induced phase is frightened by the "ghost" of her own shadow. The narrator conflates this ghost with Shaman's unconscious, which takes possession of Shaman's body in the night. Thus, Shaman "turned into a ghost at night and wept outside her [Miss Charan's] room" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 50). In her attempt to recreate the bond that she shares with Manjhu, Shaman becomes a version of herself that is overcome by carnal desires and is unable to grasp or control it. The pain of the transformation into this "ghost" along with its combined association with the abandonment that Shaman feels from the many mother figures in her life, result in her tears and confusion.

Shaman's infatuation ends adversely one night when she wakes up from this trance to find herself lying on "Miss Charan's bed! A real bed! Not the bed of her dreams" looking for Miss Charan's warmth, and is found by Miss Charan and the school principal. (Chughtai, *Lakir* 51). Miss Charan is subsequently sent away just as Unna was, and Shaman does not "shed a single tear" similar to when she does not cry at Manjhu's departure. She insists that her tears dried up during her original abandonment by Unna. Instead, "[s]he walked about guiltily without a word, but all the time her steps were measured, as if she were carrying a delicate, cracked object that would be shattered with the slightest jolt" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 52). Instantly, she reverts back to being the Shaman she was before Miss Charan's arrival and "[t]he thought of becoming attached to something made old fears come to the fore, [and] the wound associated with Miss Charan's memory seared her mind" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 53). Thus, the fear of abandonment that is established early on during Shaman's infancy grows with each relationship.

The trauma of this abandonment leads to Shaman's attention-seeking behavior. Beauvoir writes, "[a]ll children try to compensate for the separation of weaning by seductive and attention-seeking behavior" (Beauvoir 341). Shaman, first, compensates for her initial separation from her biological mother by attaching herself to Unna. She longs to leap from "one [Unna's] lap to another" in her dream and attempts to secure all of her attention. Next, she turns to Manjhu for the attention she desires but on her separation from Manjhu relives her initial abandonment. For Beauvoir, this attention-seeking behavior involves the girl child looking upon herself as an object, specifically a doll, and gaining the adoration of those around her by dressing up. Shaman, on the other hand, throws herself into the misery of her invisibility, refusing to bathe or dress herself up. She becomes increasingly unruly and violent, forcing her family members to despise

her existence. Thus, Shaman turns to the attention-seeking behavior of being dirty and violent to get her family members to notice her and bring Manjhu back to take care of her.

This violent nature first arises in her relationship with Manjhu. Chughtai notes this correlation of violence with pleasure through the following line: "Girls generally nurse a desire to get married, but of late Shaman had been experiencing a desire to hit people" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 8). This desire is expressed in Shaman's relationship with Manjhu as, "Shaman yearned to deliver a solid blow to Manjhu's strong back and, gripped by this desire, she would soon be lost in a world of dreams in which she was slapping Manjhu, taking off her clothes, giving her a bath" (Chughtai *Lakir*, 9). Seduction, violence and attention, thus, go hand-in-hand for Shaman as she begins to equate violence with pleasure. This initial carnal understanding later becomes cognizant to the child in an incident that occurs after Manjhu's return to the house shortly after her marriage. As Manjhu beats Shaman, Chughtai writes that "Shaman burst into tears, but not from pain; her heart was deeply saddened by the pleasure of these attention-laden smacks" (Chughtai *Lakir*, 21). This scene is followed by one of care and affection where Manjhu gives Shaman the first real bath Shaman receives since Manjhu's wedding. This violent desire is one arising out of the maternal bond that Manjhu and Shaman share, so that after Shaman's beating, "Manjhu too felt as if she had quenched a burning thirst" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 21). Both Manjhu and Shaman are, thus, finally replenished.

Shaman's violent behavior further establishes the role of power in the maternal bond that Shaman seeks. By being attracted to those who she must look up to and who assert their power over her by taking care of her and punishing her, Shaman longs to be in a relationship where she relinquishes the power over her own body. At the same time, however, through her desire to beat Manjhu just as Manjhu beats her, Shaman demonstrates a similar amount of pleasure in both of

these roles. In both expressions, at this point in her life Shaman only seems to desire a relationship where one person asserts their power over the other. Thus, in searching for a sexual relationship where the parental figure maintains a larger amount of power over her, as demonstrated through Manjhu's beating, Shaman longs to recreate this bond. But through the desire to be the violent one, Shaman demonstrates that within this relationship she would ideally be the one taking on the role of the authoritative figure.

Thus, in addition to searching for a mother surrogate, Shaman also searches for a child so as to take on the more powerful role of the mother. After Manjhu's departure, thus, Shaman begins to experience maternal emotions in order to replicate the lost mother-daughter bond. During Manjhu's wedding preparations she wears Majhu's golden *choli*[3] and pretends to be a housewife. In this performance, she is a mother proclaiming, "Oh the baby is asleep in my lap!" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 15). Momentarily entranced in this performance, Shaman lifts her shirt in order to feed the baby, but in doing so is distracted by a mosquito bite on her knee and is pulled out of this reverie. Furious at losing this imaginary child by the shattering of her hallucination, Shaman once more turns to violence and destroys all the wedding clothes and dowry items. She, thus, alleviates her sexual frustrations through violence.

Despite the many forms of abandonment that Shaman experiences, she remains connected to the idea of a maternal bond. Soon after her infatuation with Miss Charan, Shaman goes through puberty and due to the phenomenon never having been explained to her, Shaman is terrified. Convinced of her impending death as "different parts of her body were developing at different speeds" Shaman isolates herself from the rest of the world (Chughtai, *Lakir* 54). As she struggles through this "illness", her cousin Noori suggests that Shaman is pregnant. Having

[3] "Small, tight blouse" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 371)

learnt to associate sickness with pregnancy through her exposure to Manjhu's pregnancy, which is discussed in the second section of this chapter, Shaman accepts Noori's assessment of her condition. Before long, she wishes to hold the "tiny little baby" (Chughtai *Lakir*, 56).

Shaman is preoccupied by thoughts of how she would find time in between her education to take care of the baby. She is increasingly upset when even after she begins to feel better nobody shows her the baby that she believes exists. It is only after she confides in her friend Saadat that she realizes that the baby never existed and "[t]he image she had formed in her head of the baby, as small as a mouse, slowly began to blur." The pain of "the loss of this imaginary baby" runs deep for Shaman as once again she is torn apart from the body of this imaginary baby. Just as Shaman would sleep next to Manjhu, and as she tried to sleep next to Miss Charan, so too would Shaman wake up feeling as though this baby "were sleeping right next to her." Further, "[o]ften while she slept, the sound of a crying baby crept into her ears and she would wake up with a start, staring about her wide-eyed in the darkness, searching for the illusion until finally she fell asleep again" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 57). The strength of Shaman's desire to be unified with her baby overpowers all her other desires as she is rendered lifeless by this loss.

Towards the end of the novel, Shaman tries recreate this bond by inviting Manjhu's child into her life in her later years. This new form of Shaman's most powerful relationship with Manjhu, is thus replicated with Shaman taking on Manjhu's role and Majhu's daughter taking on Shaman's role. Shaman's desire is fulfilled in the most satisfying way. This fulfillment, however, ends in the death of the young child. This death rips apart any residual bond between Manjhu and Shaman, and symbolizes the death of Shaman's belief in this bond as she declares "No one is hers, and why does she need anyone? Is she inadequate?" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 299). This belief only

reemerges when Shaman realizes that she is pregnant. Her final fulfillment of her lifelong desire offers a brief hopeful indication in the otherwise melancholy end of the novel.

Prior to this eventual fulfilment, however, Shaman continues to search for a mechanism with which to recreate the bond she experiences first with Unna and later with Manjhu. At every point where this possibility arises, however, she is denied it and it chips away at her soul. One of the most prominent examples of this is her relationship with Rai Sahib, the father of her Hindu friend Prema. The difference in this instance is that Rai Sahib takes on the role of a father figure rather than the mother figure. Shaman, thus, experiences a heterosexual transference of her infatuation with parental figures that are more powerful than her. Despite the fact that Shaman's father exists and is a part of Shaman's family and home, they never have a relationship and his presence in the book is negligible. Rai Sahib is, thus, the first father figure in Shaman's life after Unna's lover. Shaman is intrigued and overwhelmed by the fatherly nature of Rai Sahib and looks up to him in the same manner that she looked up to Miss Charan.

After her first encounter with Rai Sahib, Shaman is overcome by her desires and "entangled in the exuberance of the dance [he performed], her soul was still wound up, still in a whirl." Accordingly, "[s]he didn't know why, but her heart longed to yield to some dynamic power, for the first time a tiny flower of devotion was blossoming in her heart." Thus, Shaman's unconscious desire of giving in to Rai Sahib's power comes to the forefront. Having never seen such a close father-daughter relationship before, Shaman "experiences a twinge of annoyance" when she sees Prema with him. She feels like scolding Prema and asking her "why she let him love her so much, but she realized what foolishness that would be." Instead, she swallows her envy and "clutched her pillow to her breast and silently rocked back and forth, the creaking of her bed like a song which placated her thoughts" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 121). Shaman is, thus,

tormented by her realization of the loss of a father that she only now recognizes she experiences, having never had a relationship with a father before. This becomes an additional factor that seals her sense of abandonment and loneliness, which builds up over the course of her life until she wishes to jump into the crowds and scream, "hide me, surround this frightening loneliness from all sides and make it disperse" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 275). Shaman, thus, now faces the dual loss of both parental figures and transfers the desire for a female with power to a man with the same.

Shaman devotes all her time to him, "stitching Rai Sahib's buttons while he sat at her feet, telling stories and handing her one button at a time" (Chughtai *Lakir*, 129). She strokes his curly hair and while Prema and her brother Narendar sleep, "Shaman kept plunging into the deep abyss of Rai Sahib's hair" and watching "the smile that played on his half-open lips, Shaman felt as if she were slowly sinking into soft, cool quicksand" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 130). In the same manner that Shaman longs to simultaneously take on the roles of provider and dependent in her relationship with Manjhu, Shaman experiences maternal feelings towards Rai Sahib. Rai Sahib, thus, seems "like a child [to her] when he played with them and openly cheated and often he and Prema ended up tussling with each other." Hence, Shaman behaves like his mother, seen through the maternal image of her stroking his hair. As indicated above, this relationship works dually for Shaman as "she [also] experienced this strange desire to be a little child in his presence" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 131). In this unique dynamic, thus, Shaman both views Rai Sahib as a child whom she must take care of as well as the father she never had, who would protect her. The latter, is the one that excites her and allows him to touch and play with her without reservations, perhaps even beating her the way that Manjhu used to.

The above relationship, further, reaches its demise in a scene of fatherly affection. Chughtai writes,

> Rai Sahib patted her [Shaman] as he would a child. With her head resting on his chest she breathed deeply until she was overcome by a feeling of drowsiness. Rai Sahib lowered his face to look at her and she pretended to be asleep. He continued to pat her for a while longer and then tried to move her slowly to the bed. All at once she clasped him with both hands; she was shaking (Chughtai *Lakir*, 140).

Thus, it is in this scene of paternal affection that Shaman's powerful feelings boil over to the surface. She grabs on to his arm, alarming him "by the wildness of her gaze" in the same way that Manjhu was once alarmed by her gaze as she studied her body. Shaman tells him that she loves him "in a dry, hoarse voice" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 140). Immediately, "Rai Sahib recoiled as if he had been struck with a rock" and Shaman was left behind wishing that "she could descend into the earth along with the bed on which she lay, inside, deep inside the earth so she could hide in the earth's bowels" (Chughtai. *Lakir* 140, 141). By attempting to overtly incorporate her sexuality into their relationship, Shaman disturbs the power dynamic of the relationship and alienates herself from the only fatherly relationship she ever has.

The dual maternal and child-like instincts that Shaman experiences for Rai Sahib are more straightforward in how they manifest in her for Rai Sahib's son Narendar. With him, her feelings are purely maternal. Looking at him she realizes, "[s]he was not a child anymore. She knew Narendar loved her. What is love? Narendar seemed like a fool to her; how clumsy, how inane his love was" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 131). She fails to realize that this is the way her love appears to Rai Sahib as well. Just as Shaman clung to Rai Sahib like a child, so too does Narendar pull "her close and cl[i]ng to her like a bear." Shaman is "prompted by innocent feelings of motherly concern" and takes care of Narendar (Chughtai, *Lakir* 138). Despite being offered the relationship that she longs for in Narendar, however, Shaman feels no sexual desire

towards Narendar as she does with his father. The above suggests that it is isn't complete parental power that Shaman seeks and associates with sexual desire. Instead, it is the relinquishment of power and only momentary acquisition of it that becomes the source of Shaman's unconscious desire.

The above discussion of the role that power plays in the mother-infant relationship establishes some of the sexual tendencies that exist within Shaman's unconscious. Shaman experiences her first instances of sexual desire through this relationship and in the only instance in the novel is able to freely enjoy it. Through this relationship, however, she also learns to desire the relinquishment of power in a sexual bond rather than to enjoy an equal control of it. The acquirement of this desire influences Shaman's approach to relationships as a woman in the society depicted in *Terhi Lakir*. The loss of power and subsequent loss of agency is apparent in all of the female characters' relationships as depicted in this novel. Through demonstrating the extent of this loss of power in combination with the repeated loss of power-yielding partners, the thesis sets the stage for further analysis of agency, including sexual agency within the household, and in the society beyond. Building upon this base, the following section argues the simultaneous development of the fear of sexuality in the young female child's infancy and adolescence, as depicted through Shaman's experience in *Terhi Lakir* and the young female protagonist's experience in *Lihaaf*. This fear further diminishes the women's agency in the texts.

SEXUALITY AND FEAR

As described in the preceding section, the relationship between the mother and the infant child plays an integral role in the development of the female child's sexuality in *Terhi Lakir*. In addition to experiencing her first sexual desires and pleasures through the physical nature of this relationship, Shaman also begins to explore both Manjhu's female body and her own form in an

attempt to understand her body. As Manjhu allows Shaman to sleep in her bed with her the way that Unna would, Shaman "stroked Manjhu's neck and her cheeks (Chughtai. *Lakir* 4). As Sudhir Kakar describes it, the "well-defined community of women" within a household results in "a special kind of inviolate feminine privacy and familiar intimacy" (Kakar 282). It is within this sphere that a young girl learns what it means to be a woman. In a manifestation of Lacan's description of the mirror stage, Shaman begins to explore Manjhu's body in order to learn about her own. In one such instance, Shaman walks in on Manjhu bathing. Instead of being indifferent to the situation, Shaman is transfixed by it. She stands still and stares "at Manjhu so strangely she made her blush. As if in a daze, she continued staring at her." Embarrassed by this behavior and the strength of her stare, Manjhu picks up a "ladle-jug to cover herself" with (Chughtai, *Lakir* 3). In this recognition of the individual physical form, Shaman is fascinated by Manjhu's body and sees her own form in it for the first time.

In addition to to being fascinated by Manjhu's body, Shaman also explores the female body through her interactions with her doll. Unhappy with their doll's appearance, Shaman and Noori one day, "summoning up great courage… secretly stuffed two balls of cotton in the doll's *koti*[4]" in order to manufacture breasts. The doll "now looked like a woman alive and real" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 43). The two of them use this doll as a manifestation of their bodies in order to recognize and understand them as they grew and changed. Correspondingly, Beauvoir suggests that in an attempt to understand her body, "the little girl pampers her doll and dresses her as she dreams of being dressed and pampered" (Beauvoir 340). She insists that it is natural for these young girls to assign the doll the role of a body surrogate by which to explore their own body.

[4] "Waistcoat-like garment worn over shirt" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 372)

It is at this point in the young children's lives that they begin to recognize sexual curiosity and freedom as something that is punishable. For instance, when Noori's mother, Bari Apa, finds the sexualized doll with the cotton breasts she removes the cotton and stitches the *koti* so as to prevent the young girls from doing the same again. The newly restored doll is uninteresting to the girls who never play with it again. Thus, the discovery of their sexual and bodily curiosity results in the perceived punishment of their favorite doll being taken away and replaced by a duller version. Furthermore, the girls recognize that such curiosity is forbidden and even before Bari Apa confiscated it "they felt such shame [at what they had created] they couldn't even look at" the doll (Chughtai, *Lakir* 43). This recognition of the taboo that is sexual curiosity earlier manifests in Manjhu's denial of her body to Shaman through her shielding it from Shaman. The girls are, thus, exposed to the restrictions imposed on them and their bodies at an early stage.

In addition to Shaman being exposed to the physical form of the woman's body through her interaction with Manjhu and the doll, Shaman also experiences her first exposure to sexual intercourse in the presence of a surrogate mother. While looking after Shaman, Unna and her lover would take Shaman to the barn with them and ignore her while they engaged in sexual intercourse. Thus, "Unna rolled on the hay and her lover tumbled after her while Shaman crawled around the two of them, mirthfully clapping her hands" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 2). On being discovered, Unna is punished for her behavior, fired and sent away. Through Unna's departure, Shaman learns that unrestricted sexual freedom is forbidden as she views this departure as a punishment for Unna for acting on her desires. She, thus, understands sex as something that occurs only behind closed doors. As Sudhir Kakar explains, "In the identity formation of most young women in India, the conflict between the individual needs and social norms leads to

persistent feelings of guilt around premarital sexual contact." The girls engaging in sexual intercourse outside of marriage are expected to be overwhelmed by "overpowering feelings of shame" like Shaman later is, and thus Unna is punished. (Kakar 173) Furthermore, it is Shaman's screams that bring her family members to the barn and expose Unna and her lover. Her separation from Unna becomes a punishment for Shaman, and thus, she associates her act of bringing female sexuality into the realm of the visible as a punishable act as well.

Moreover, unable to comprehend the above-described scene between Unna and her lover, she associates the lover with the "monster" in her later dream who "pushed her [Shaman's] hand away and, grabbing Unna wrestled her down." This initial association of sexual intercourse with violence results in Shaman linking sexuality with monsters in her unconscious. Accordingly, this scene in her dream is accompanied by an imagery of snakes and snake bites, which frighten Shaman while her "childish eyes [are] dazed by the revolting scene before her" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 3). The above scene further results in the invocation of the imagery of snakes in the narrative each time Shaman experiences any form of sexual desire.

This association of sexual intercourse with monsters and snakes results in Shaman unknowingly fearing her sexual desire. One of the first and most important occurrences of this imagery of snakes in *Terhi Lakir* is in the sequence describing Shaman's burning desire to eat mud and unite herself with the dirt. In the sequence, Shaman and her friend "tossed about in the sand" until "[s]and penetrated their very beings, but still they had not had enough of sand and mud" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 7). The two girls would grab handfuls of the mud and eat it several times through the course of the day. Shaman is drawn to the mud in the same way that she is later drawn by the desire to touch the objects of her desires. She wonders, "Why did she love the earth so much? She wanted to disappear into its bowels." When Manjhu punishes her for playing in

the dirt by letting her remain filthy, Shaman realizes that "to sleep in dust was not a curse as far she was concerned, it was a benediction. This was what she desired the most" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 8). Thus, just as Shaman desires to burrow herself in Manjhu's flesh and sleep there as a unified form, so too does she desire to become one with the dirt.

Furthermore, the phenomenon of Shaman eating mud is described in a manner akin to the description of pregnancy. Having rolled in the sand, Shaman and her friend "devoured [the mud]… as if it were delicious caudle. Like pregnant women, they relished the aroma of mud." The mud is, thus, compared to caudle, a drink prepared for the sick, implying that the mud alleviated their illnesses and replenished them. Fulfilling the urges of pregnancy, Shaman and her friend continued to let this desire overcome their behavior. Before long, their stomach swelled up and "they began to resemble women who are pregnant." As the narrator writes, "Who can say what sons were being nurtured in their swollen, melon-shaped bellies?" Nothing could stop Shaman from being drawn to the mud as "[a]pparently the son growing in her belly was drawing her to the aroma of mud" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 7). Soon, Shaman finds out that she has roundworms. But not before "the son she had been nourishing in her belly appeared" while she was defecating. Shaman believes that this worm was a snake and fears that there were many more such snakes inside her. "She felt there were innumerable clusters of snakes looping around in her stomach… creating havoc inside her" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 8). Thus, Shaman associates snakes with pregnancy, thereby linking them to any bodily process implying sensuality and desire.

This early association of snakes with pregnancy and desire is cemented in Shaman's mind through this experience. Consequently, when Manjhu is later pregnant, Shaman is convinced that she is going to give birth to a snake. Shaman spies Manjhu "chewing on a piece of yellow clay… She remembered that when she used to eat clay a snake had been born. And

now Manjhu was eating clay." In addition to this, Manjhu "was gradually becoming fat and indolent" just as Shaman did (Chughtai, *Lakir* 29). When Manjhu gives birth to a child and nobody satisfies Shaman's inquiries about the snake, this association between pregnancy, snakes, and desire becomes further indistinguishable to her.

This connection is also seen in Alma's pregnancy. Just as Shaman's primal nature draws her to the mud, Alma is carnally drawn to Satil. She proclaims, "Opposites always attract" and "[w]hen I see him I'm tormented by shocking emotions and I feel as if I am a lump of flesh" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 163). She sees Satil as someone "with whom you want to [be with], just once, for the sake of experience… [but] later they make you recoil, the very thought of them makes you sick, you feel like picking them up and throwing them somewhere far away and forgetting about them" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 164). Alma too, thus, confounds feelings of desire with those of sickness. Eventually she gives in to her desire for Satil just as Shaman gives in to her desire for mud. In her resulting pregnancy, Alma is disgusted by the seemingly snake-like illegitimate child who reminds her of her desire for Satil.

The above association between desire and disgust is further established through the similar relationships Shaman has with her school roommate Rasul Fatima and cousin Ajju. Rasul is overcome with desire for Shaman and would relentlessly pursue her. Shaman despises Rasul and "would feel anger directed towards those eyes building up inside her, an emotion that made her wish she could drive two fiery steel nails into those eyes" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 58). Rasul would push her bed next to Shaman's in the night and would touch her. Shaman describes Rasul's hand as a "mouse" darting into her bed at night (Chughtai, *Lakir* 59). She is frightened and disgusted by this mouse to the extent that she struggles to spend the night outside her room. Thus, her

bedroom, which is associated with safety and comfort in general, becomes a site of terror for Shaman.

Shaman's experience with Rasul also forms the basis of her future experience with Ajju. The image of Rasul sliding up next to Shaman in her bed is the same as the later image of Ajju who would wait until everyone was asleep before he "stealthily stretched his foot and tried to pinch Shaman's toes with his" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 105). Similarly, the above-mentioned "mouse" that was Rasul's wandering hand clawing its way into Shaman's dreams, appears in the depiction of Ajju and his behavior as "Shaman felt as if there were mice hopping about on her bed" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 105). Once again her bedroom, this time in her home, is transformed into a terror-filled site of imprisonment. Fear and disgust, thus, interject themselves into these two situations.

Another similarity between these two relationships is the way in which these encounters end. With Rasul, Shaman locks her in the prayer room where she falls ill, and Shaman is racked with guilt and refuses to see her. Despite her guilt, she is grateful for this sickness since it saves Shaman from Rasul. Likewise, Ajju is sick towards the end of his initial role in the novel. Unlike with Rasul, however, Shaman is forced to help care for him and in the process touches his lips with her fingers, which "become petrified after coming into contact with a corpse." Conflicted, Shaman wonders, "why her emotions were in such turmoil" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 108). As Ajju's condition worsens, his fate becomes ambiguous. It is only on his later return that the reader's assumption of his death is overturned. The narrative decision to leave out Ajju's improving health highlights Shaman's outwardly disregard for his health. The implication, nonetheless, is that Shaman desires Ajju; An implication which later becomes apparent when he returns, better-looking and richer, and Shaman longs for the opportunity to marry him.

Even Ajju's return as the improved Ejaz, is reflected in Shaman's earlier experience with Rasul. The difference in these reappearances is that Rasul's return in a new form is not Rasul herself but Najma, whom Shaman is immediately drawn to. In contradiction to her earlier experience, Shaman takes on Rasul's role, overcome with desire whenever she is around Najma. The snakes that often emerge when Shaman is overwhelmed in this manner, emerge once again. The narrator writes,

> When she had got rid of Rasul Fatima she had thought that she had crushed a snake. But concealed in her heart was the fear that if you kill a serpent, it's mate seeks revenge. The female serpent sees the picture of her enemy in the serpent's dead eyes and sets out to sting the killer. So, was Najma seeking revenge for Rasul Fatima's injuries? (Chughtai, *Lakir* 72)

Thus, the desire Rasul experiences for Shaman now resides within Shaman as she longs for Najma, resulting in Shaman's tormented condition. Her premarital desire, thus, leaves Shaman with "strongly ambivalent feelings around [her] sexual identity and its bodily expression." These conflicted emotions result in Shaman's "overpowering feelings of shame" which manifest within her in the form of snakes (Kakar 173). It is, thus, not surprising that Shaman experiences fear whenever she is around someone like Najma or is physically drawn to Najma's *koti* in a manner that made her "heart beat so rapidly that she thought her chest would explode" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 67).

Furthermore, as soon as Shaman begins to give in to her changing feelings for Ejaz, she is spurned just as Rasul was. The snake of desire that continues to drive her lust, hence, strikes back at her as Shaman "had thrust her hand into an orange bush and had been stung by a poisonous viper. Surging and sizzling, something resembling poison darted towards her head; she didn't try to ward it off." Rejected and embarrassed, Shaman hides her emotions and insists

that she would marry "any animal but Ejaz" and begins to transform into the rebellious young woman we are presented with for the rest of the novel (Chughtai, *Lakir* 156).

Shaman's initial association of sexual intercourse with monsters in *Terhi Lakir* is also seen in the young child protagonist of *Lihaaf*. In the short story, Chughtai depicts the relationship between the Begum Jan and her maidservant, Rabbo, as seen through the eyes of the young female narrator. Sharing a room with the Begum, the protagonist is repeatedly exposed to sexual intercourse, which is depicted as a frightening "elephant" struggling beneath a shaking quilt. The constant exposure of the narrator to the loud and monstrous elephant "terrified" and confused the young girl just as Shaman was terrified by the monster, Unna's lover (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 8). This elephant with the "terrifying shadows… [it cast] on the wall" plagues the protagonist through the course of the story until she attempts to expose it at the end. Moreover, the narrator's exposure to sexuality is further frightening to her due to the homosexual nature of the intercourse.

Soon after her arrival at the Begum's house, the protagonist begins to grapple with her own confused sensibilities of desire and sexuality. She experiences sexual desire for the Begum and is entranced by the Begum, whom she views as "a figure of dignity and grandeur." The narrator would "sit by her side for hours, adoring her like a humble devotee" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 6). Thus, just as Shaman simultaneously looks up to and desires the power-holding mother figures in her life, so too does the protagonist of *Lihaaf* desire the relinquishment of power to such a figure. In an attempt to rationalize the homoerotic nature of her attraction towards the Begum, the narrator explains that "[s]ometimes her face became transformed before my adoring gaze, as if it were the face of a young boy" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 7). In turn, the Begum too is fond of the narrator and turns to her for comfort in Rabbo's absence. She demands that the narrator massage her, and fulfil Rabbo's household duties. Despite the narrator's initial eagerness to

replace Rabbo, she soon begins to fear this interaction as the Begum holds her close while she "struggled to get away" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 10). Thus, the narrator's desire slowly turns into fear and the mother surrogate's body, which is site of comfort for Shaman becomes a site of terror for the narrator of *Lihaaf*.

Accordingly, in the affect-infused description of the act of touching, the narrator blurs the lines between desire and disgust, just as Shaman does. On the one hand, she is markedly envious of the Begum and Rabbo's relationship and admires the Begum's appearance to the extent that "whenever she [the Begum] exposed her ankles for a massage, I [the narrator] stole a glance at their rounded smoothness." On the other hand, however, she is overcome by feelings of disgust. In describing the Begum's daily massages, she points out the constant rubbing and hypothesizes that "if someone touched me continuously like this, I would certainly rot." Further, she describes how "imagining the friction caused by this prolonged rubbing made [her] slightly sick" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 7). The narrator is, therefore, confused by her conflicting emotions, arising from her contradictory unconscious desires and fears.

In addition to the above aversion to the constant nature of the rubbing, the narrator becomes afraid of the Begum, who transforms into a witch in the narrator's eyes. The Begum is extremely aggressive in her approach as she turns her "ardent heat" onto the child, and as a result begins to terrify her (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 10). Thus, as the Begum transforms, so too does the narrator who begins to question her desires and actions. She wonders why her mother sent her there in an attempt to prevent her from "mixing with the boys, as if they were man-eaters who would swallow her beloved daughter in one gulp." To the narrator, the Begum had "turned more terrifying [to her] than the fear of the world's worst goons" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 11). The terror of the Begum's demonized form, thus, becomes too intense for the narrator.

Further, the Begum, whose beauty the protagonist had once admired, now appears to her with "her upper lip darkened…her nose and eyes… covered with tiny beads of perspiration… [and] her hands [which] were stiff and cold." The narrator's description of her become akin to that of a witch, and the room is filled with "a claustrophobic blackness" whenever she arrives. Therefore, the protagonist is "gripped by an unknown terror" and she begins to feel "nauseated" on being close to the Begum's "warm body" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 10). Further, unlike the Begum, who is fulfilled by realizing her desire for Rabbo, the protagonist is repulsed by the realization of her desire for the Begum.

In this story, Chughtai thus manages to transform the connation of the motherly warmth that Shaman desires into an object of the narrator's terror. Hence, while the desire for such warmth exists in *Lihaaf*, it has an adverse effect on the narrator, altering her associations with it in the same manner that Shaman slowly begins to give up her desire for a relationship that always leaves her alone and upset. The young female protagonists begin to incorporate a fear of female sexuality in their unconscious and learn to hide their sexual desires.

Thus, as detailed in this chapter, the early years of Shaman's life play an essential role in her behavior and desires through the course of the novel. The desire for a motherly bond and the conflicting notions of desire and fear or disgust become essential features of Shaman's existence, just as it does the narrator's existence in *Lihaaf*. In conjunction with Kakar's description of how a woman in South Asian society constructs her sexual identity as a shameful feature of her existence, the above chapter helps establish how this shame and fear begins to enter the woman's unconscious in her early years. Her unconscious, thus, becomes a dual site of freedom and imprisonment where desire and shame overpower the other forces, leading to conflicting emotions. Having established this base of the early manifestations of restrictions on sexuality, in

the second chapter the thesis further explores the constraints imposed on female sexuality by the society, and how the women of the two texts begin to use their sexuality as a means of rebelling against these restrictions.

CHAPTER TWO

SITES OF FREEDOM AND IMPRISONMENT IN THE SPIRITUAL SPHERE

As indicated at the end of the previous chapter, this chapter studies the restrictions imposed on female sexuality by examining the disparity between the norms regarding male and female sexuality in the South Asian region of the 1940s, as included in the texts. Here, I examine how these different expectations levied on the female characters lead to a confined existence, forcing them to find sites of comfort and sexual freedom as established by the symbol of the *lihaaf.* This chapter is largely concerned with the power hierarchies within the household as demonstrated through the use of space and the above-described sites. Furthermore, the chapter argues that the female characters of the two texts use female sexuality as a tool for rebelling against the segregated society, and for obtaining a greater degree of both agency as a female character and sexual agency.

Moving away from the psychoanalytic approach of the first chapter, this chapter examines the texts through the lens of sociological theory. Scholarship by Gayatri Gopinath and Geeta Patel is of particular relevance to this section. Further, the chapter continues to use Sudhir Kakar's examination of society to establish the norms of sexuality in the region. In addition to this, the chapter also uses sections of Ismat Chughtai's nonfictional essays as compiled in her autobiography *Kaghazi Hai Pairahan/A Life in Words* and Chughtai's interviews to better demonstrate the social conditions and gender norms prevalent in the 1940s colony depicted in both the texts.

A DIVIDED EXPERIENCE OF CONFINED SEXUALITY

As quoted in chapter one, Sudhir Kakar illustrates how a woman's sexuality is relegated to the domestic sphere and only within the confines of marriage, in the society of the colony in this era. *Lihaaf* is preoccupied by this notion of confined sexuality. Kakar writes that,

> [t]he Indian 'romantic' yearning is not for an exploring of the depths of erotic passion, or for being swept off the feet by a masterful man. It is a much quieter affair and, when unsatisfied, this longing shrivels the emotional life of many women, making some go through life as mere maternal automatons (Kakar 176).

Thus, Kakar argues that the average woman of this society longs to be married to a man who accommodates some of her desires within the privacy of their home. She is unable to discuss her sexuality openly and, thus, cannot overtly ask for her desires to be satisfied. When this desire goes unmet the woman leads a shriveled and unsatisfied existence. This shriveled emotional existence is the isolated and lonely existence that Chughtai documents in much of her fiction.

In *Lihaaf,* the Begum is married to the older, rich, and respected Nawab, who subsequently abandons her in her section of the house. She is restricted to this space and is unable to leave it. There is no indication of any sexual or emotional contact between the Nawab and the Begum. Instead, after their marriage, "he deposited her in the house with all his other possessions and promptly forgot about her" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 4). Thus, not only is she a "prisoner of the house" who is not allowed to leave, but she also becomes a part of the house as one of her husband's many possessions. Her life begins to fade into oblivion while she becomes "a picture of melancholy and despair" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 5). Deprived of physical contact in this shriveled existence, the Begum turns to Rabbo to alleviate her sexual needs.

Through the course of the story, this space of the Begum's confinement becomes increasingly constricted. Thus, initially she is confined to her room and peeks out at her husband,

the Nawab, through "the chinks of the drawing-room doors," where he spent most of his time (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 6). Next, as she spends more time with Rabbo, her confinement moves from the broader "prison" of the house, to the even smaller "sanctum" of her room that only Rabbo and the protagonist may enter. Finally, she is relegated to the confines of the quilt, where she expresses the full extent of her desire (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 7). The quilt or the *lihaaf*, thus, simultaneously becomes a site of comfort for the Begum, as it the only space in the house where she can freely her desire, and a site of the Begum's imprisonment as her existence becomes confined to the space of the *lihaaf.* This dual connation of the *lihaaf* is similar to the dual appearance of pleasure and fear that Shaman experiences in the manifestation of her desire.

Accordingly, the prison that is the house also becomes a simultaneous site of terror and pleasure for the protagonist. She arrives at the house as a form of punishment by her mother. Her quarrelsome behavior is in sharp contrast to her older sisters who were "busy collecting admirers," and is analogous to Shaman's violent nature in *Terhi Lakir* (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 5). The child protagonist of *Lihaaf,* thus, views the Begum's house as "an apparent site for the inculcation of gender-normative behavior as well as of complicated, non-normative arrangements of pleasures and desires" (Gopinath 145). Thus, she is sent to learn the "homely" behaviors that Geeta Patel recognizes as being part of the woman's gender roles. As suggested by its description as a site of non-normative pleasure, however, it becomes a place that inverts its function as a site for heteronormative behavior and desires, through the growing bond between Rabbo and the Begum. Despite the fact that the Begum desires to experience heterosexual sexuality, the actual acts invert the function through the defiance of her solitude. Here, the narrator is attracted to the Begum and overcome with desire, while simultaneously being

frightened by the non-normative nature of household, due to the fact that she was already being punished for non-normative behavior.

This inversion of heteronormativity, although primarily depicted as female homosexuality, is further seen in the behavior of the Nawab who, although escaping the notice of the child narrator, also appears to engage in homosexual intercourse. He is described as being renowned for never having a "dancing girl or a prostitute in his home." In contrast, he has "a strange hobby," wherein he keeps an "open house for students; young, fair and slim-waisted boys, whose expenses were borne entirely by him" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 1). As the Begum "wilted in her loneliness," she realized that "the household revolved around the boy-students." Peeking through the aforementioned "chinks in the drawing-room doors, Begum Jan glimpsed their slim waists, fair ankles, and gossamer shirts and felt she had been raked over the coals!" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 6). Thus, while the Begum was made to suffer in her seclusion, the Nawab was free to engage his desires through the procurement of young lovers, whom he could entice with financial favors.

The above distinction between the Begum and the Nawab's ability to acquire alternative means of fulfilling their sexual desires highlights a critical divide between the social norms regarding men and women's sexualities. As Partha Chatterjee explains of the Indian philosophy, it was believed that,

> Modesty, or decorum… is a specifically human trait… Human beings seek to cultivate in themselves, and in their civilization, spiritual or god-like qualities wholly opposed to forms of behavior which prevail in animal nature. Further, within the human species, women cultivate and cherish these god-like qualities far more than men… Women express in their appearance and behavior the spiritual qualities which are characteristic of civilized and refined human society (Chatterjee 242).

These were the standards and norms the women of the society were expected to incorporate. Women functioned as symbols of the civilized yet traditional society and were, thus, expected to adhere to stricter regulations on their bodies and sexualities. Men, in contrast, had much greater freedom to express their sexuality.

Accordingly, in the famous trial that followed the publication of *Lihaaf* on the grounds of obscenity, the anger was directed towards the depiction of female homosexuality in the story and ignored the depiction of male homosexuality. The then colonial government, which was informed of the story by the Muslim community, regarded the female characters' assertion of her sexuality as being a much greater threat. As Geeta Patel discusses in her essay, the role of women as a "homely figure" is essential to the colonial government as well as the national movement in maintaining the traditional Indian households and appeasing the people. Thus, both sides of the freedom struggle imposed regulations on female bodies, relegating them to symbolic roles and stripping them of any agency. In accordance with the above, Patel argues that the anger regarding *Lihaaf* was due to a threefold violation: "the story tells of two women—one clearly identified as a wife—exchanging pleasure for money; it is narrated by a child sent to the *zenana* to be socialized as a woman; and it was written by a Muslim woman who was to be married" (Patel 145). Thus, the narrative implies the social rebellion of a married woman, an impressionable young girl, and an influential female author who would soon be a wife. This rebellion was seen as an attack on the society and its customs.

Above, Patel perfectly encapsulates the environment surrounding the anger, and provides essential context for the society within which these characters reside. Even Chughtai's writer friend, Urdu author M. Aslam whose story *Gunaah Ki Raatein/ Nights of Sin* involved "the details of sex act merely for the sake of titillation," retorted to Chughtai that his situation was

different because he was a man and Chughtai was "an educated girl from a decent Muslim family" who was expected to act and speak in a certain way (Chughtai, *Kaghazi* 29, 30). The disparate gender expectations are, thus, apparent even in the world of literature, demonstrating the different expectations regarding male and female sexuality. Women were not expected to know about or speak of such things. In her later years, Chughtai admits that she did not anticipate that the content of her work would be as controversial as it was. In a 1972 interview with *Mahfil* she says, "when I first wrote *Lihaaf* this thing [lesbianism] was not discussed openly. We girls used to talk about it and we knew there was something like it, but we didn't know the whole truth. I had not read any book or any literature on it" (*Mahfil* 170). It was something that all women talked about and was an aspect of their sexuality that Chughtai felt was simply a realistic detail to include in any text exploring female sexuality. Thus, Chughtai begins to explore it in *Lihaaf* and later explores it once again in *Terhi Lakir.* Chughtai is therefore largely concerned with encouraging women to assert their sexual agency and find outlets to express themselves within this world.

Furthermore, this divided anger regarding the Begum's lesbian relationships and the Nawab's homosexual ones is one that is in line with Kakar's assessment of homosexuality within Indian society. In Kakar's observations, "Sex between men, especially among friends or within the family during adolescence and youth, is not regarded as sex but *masti*[5]*,* an exciting, erotic playfulness" (Kakar 176). Thus, even the men of this period who engage in sex with other men rarely see themselves as gay men. Further, "Lesbian activity, on the other hand, is invariably seen as an outcome of the lack of sexual satisfaction in unmarried women, widows, or women stuck in unhappy, sex-less marriages" (Kakar 179). It is this lesbian woman, arising out of

[5] Fun

loneliness, rather than one who is actively attracted to women without a lack of sexual satisfaction, that Chughtai portrays in her fiction. Thus, it is simply a necessity in the case of the above set of women, and is not seen a real thing that exists.

Moreover, when discussing the woman who inspired the character of the Begum, Chughtai writes that her objective was that she "wanted that some brave fellow release her from Rabbu's clutches, encircle her within his strong arms and slake her life's thirst" (Chughtai, *Kaghazi* 41). Chughtai appears to wish for her protagonists to find the perfect sexual and emotional relationship. In the best case scenario this would be her husband, only in the absence of which she would turn to any one she can find. Correspondingly, at the end of the essay "In the name of those married women…" Chughtai quotes the famous Urdu poem of Faiz Ahmed Faiz, based on which the essay is titled,

> *In the name of those married women*
> *whose decked-up bodies*
> *atrophied on loveless,*
> *deceitful bed* (Chughtai 2012, 42).

Chughtai clearly fears for the doomed, lonely existence of the many women forced to live in loveless marriages, left to themselves while their husbands are able to turn to other wives and prostitutes. Chughtai, thus, wonders, "where is the ideal Indian woman… Is she getting suffocated today under the *lihaaf*? Or is she playing Holi[6] with her own blood in Faras Road[7]?" (Chughtai, *Kaghazi* 42). Therefore, for Chughtai female homosexuality is a necessary condition, rather than a pleasure-driven desire.

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[6] Indian festival known as the festival of colors
[7] "Prostitute quarters in Mumbai" (Chughtai, *Kaghazi* 42).

Moreover, while *Lihaaf* certainly depicts homosexual desires within both men and women, nothing is ever explicitly delineated. The narrator, like the reader, constantly searches for the manifestation of the lesbian identity as the final reveal of the story. She is transfixed by the shaking quilt and simultaneously longs and fears to see what is beneath it. The reader, not a child like the narrator, knows what is beneath the quilt yet awaits this revelation. Specifically, the intended reader of the story, who would be a person living in colonial India in the 1940s, would similarly fear the child's discovery.

Chughtai is uninterested in outlining sexual identities. The fascinating feature of the relationship for her is not the depiction of a lesbian, but instead the depiction of a confined and unhappy woman fulfilling her primal needs of desire and sexuality. Chughtai, thus, tempts the reader with the revelation of what is beneath the quilt. When the narrator finally rips off the quilt, however, she does not articulate what she sees. Instead she writes, "What I saw when the quilt was lifted, I will never tell anyone, not even if they give me a lakh of rupees" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 12). Despite the violent act of the exposure through the ripping off of the quilt, the Begum and Rabbo's realization of their desire is therefore still protected by the veil of secrecy. Chughtai's objective is not to expose but instead to explain this feature of female sexuality. As Gayatri Gopinath sums up, female homoeroticism in Chughtai's fiction is "located as simply one form of desire within a web of multiple, competing desires that are in turn embedded in different economies of work and pleasure" (Gopinath 145).

Despite Chughtai's intentions, this thesis argues that the homosexual relationships between the women act as more than an act of necessity; it is an act of rebellion. The Nawab's indifference towards the Begum, and his fulfillment of his own desires through his engagement with the young students is what leads to the Begum's strained existence. By refusing to silently

accept her solitude and in finding pleasure separately from the Nawab, the Begum rebels against the expectations levied on her. This process of rebellion invigorates her and is repeatedly compared to the primal desires of hunger and thirst. The narrator notes the following rapid transformation that the Begum undergoes on Rabbo's arrival:

> Her emaciated body suddenly began to fill out. Her cheeks became rosy; beauty, as it were, glowed through every pore! It was a special oil massage that brought about the change in Begum Jan. Excuse me, but you will not find the recipe for this oil in the most exclusive or expensive magazine! (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 6).

Rabbo's presence and the physical nature of the interactions between her and the Begum, brings nourishment to the Begum's life, making her healthy once again. The Begum's time spent with Rabbo and the time spent eating become further intertwined as the Begum spends her days "having her back massaged [by Rabbo, and simultaneously], chewing on dry fruit" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 8).

The narrator further notes how Rabbo would sit for hours and massage the Begum, scratching her everlasting itch, "as if getting scratched was for her the fulfillment of life's essential need, somehow more important than the basic necessities required for staying alive" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 7). This itch, thus, becomes a metaphor for the Begum's unsatisfied sexual desire. Further, her sexual desire goes beyond "the basic necessities" implying that it is more than a simple act of survival. Additionally, the narrator describes the Begum and Rabbo's activities beneath the quilt with the sounds of "smack, gush, slobber" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 12). Unable to comprehend the situation, the narrator believes that the Begum and Rabbo were "polishing off some goodies under the quilt," further equating their act as one that was performed to satiate hunger (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 12). The site of freedom beneath the *lihaaf* is, thus, a site of nourishment for the Begum. Accordingly, when Rabbo leaves to visit her son, the Begum is lost

and doesn't eat even "a morsel" of food. Instead, she "drank so much tea that her head started throbbing" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 9). With her source of nourishment being taken away from her, she has no desire to eat and tries to quench her unending thirst with tea. She is unsuccessful, however, and turns to the protagonist to obtain sustenance.

The Begum's hunger is one that can only be satiated through physical contact. This being the most essential of her desires, the Begum employs Rabbo's assistance in fulfilling it. In addition to the massages, the Begum takes two-hour long showers each day, with "scented oils and unguents… [being] massaged into her shining skin" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 7). Rabbo, and later the narrator, are the only inhabitants of the house who are allowed into the room during this process. This room becomes a private space for the three of them where no other member of the household is able to enter. Creating their own personal site of sexual freedom, the women rebel against the segregation by reclaiming the site of imprisonment and turning it into one of freedom, and through the very expression of their sexuality reclaiming female sexuality as their own.

Just as the Begum turns to Rabbo to satisfy her desires in *Lihaaf*, so too does Bari Apa turn to Rashid, her doctor, in *Terhi Lakir.* The grief of Bari Apa's widowhood is apparent in the lack of affection that she receives, and the desire that she experiences to fulfil her needs. Bari Apa begins to fall sick, experiencing seizures and "the only person who had been able to treat [her]… was Rashid." Indeed, "A thousand medicines had been consumed, but the seizures had persisted." Further, "at the time of the seizure, Rashid had always been there" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 44). There is, thus, a clear connection between Bari Apa's seizures and the Begum's persistent itch as corresponding metaphors for the women's lack of sexual satisfaction. Hence, just as the Begum clings to Rabbo to alleviate her itch, Bari Apa clings to Rashid to alleviate her seizures.

As detailed earlier in the chapter, at the time that these two stories were written, Chughtai believed that homosexuality was a result of women's lack of sexual outlets. Looking back, she says "I thought – how stupid of me! – that this was something only women did." As she did not know much about it "because no one ever discussed it" she stuck to the belief that it was simply a means of expressing a woman's suppressed sexuality. And thus, Chughtai "thought that men always went to prostitutes, but because girls can't go to prostitutes, they do this" (*Mahfil* 170). For Chughtai, homosexuality was but a natural feature of a woman's sexuality resulting from her oppression and segregation. Although this assertion contradicts the inclusion of the Nawab's homosexuality in *Lihaaf,* the fact that he is able to turn to the young boys in order to fulfil his desires of being with men while the Begum is unable to do so upholds this discriminatory ability.

Thus, when the Begum is confined to the *zenana*, she relies on Rabbo, and when the girls of Shaman's boarding school are segregated into this girl-only institution, they begin to experience strong attractions towards their schoolmates. The women, thus, transform their sites of imprisonment and segregation into rebellious sites of sexual freedom. Rasul Fatima, for instance, is overcome with desire for Shaman in the same way that Shaman later desires Najma. Najma, for her part, is in a committed relationship with Saadat. Although none of the girls openly discuss any of these infatuations and relations, it is a phenomenon that is intrinsically a part of their life in the school. Almost all the female characters are, thus, sexually fluid and express their sexuality based on their desires, rather than the social norms constructed for them.

The sexual fluidity of the female characters and the expression of these desires is tied to marriage as an institution, which like the *lihaaf* becomes a paradoxical site of freedom and imprisonment. Shaman's views about marriage continue to change over the course *Terhi Lakir*. Despite her distaste for her sisters' preoccupation with marriage, Shaman too experiences a

desire to fulfil the role imposed on her as a woman. At a young age, the child Shaman and Noori watched a wedding ritual where the bridegroom "licked *kheer*[8] from the bride's hand" in a "ceremony imbued with romantic innuendo." Aroused and intrigued by this, Shaman "found herself in the grip of a strange longing" which affected both her and Noori (Chughtai, *Lakir* 42). Shaman, thus, learns to associate sexual intercourse with marriage and longs to be married.

Shaman's views regarding marriage first begin to change during a conversation with fellow Progressive, Iftikhar. During Noori's marriage, Shaman ponders over this conversation and is disgusted as she watched Noori get ready. She wonders:

> Was it a woman who was going to be adorned like a delectable slice of *halwa*[9] and presented to a new guest? She would be bathed and doused with fragrance so that if there was any odour at all it would not be detected; the bride would be smeared with sugary syrup and placed in the bridegroom's mouth and, once the morsel was swallowed, the lion is ours. This temporary varnish will wear off in a few days and the bride will simply be a wife (Chughtai, *Lakir* 171).

Shaman, thus, develops a great deal of disdain towards the institution of marriage. She recognizes it as a site of imprisonment where the woman is a wife who must adhere to her husbands wishes and desires. She believes that the association of sexual intercourse with marriage, which she develops at an early age, is a false association as it is only the husband who is able to enjoy this aspect of marriage. Women, in turn, only exist to please their husband. Their own desires often go unmet.

Thus, Shaman looks at Noori and determines that, "Noori will diminish and exist only as a man's woman" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 178). To her, Noori is simply a "cow" being sold like in a transaction at a market. Immediately after her denouncement of Noori's fate, however, Shaman

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[8] "Sweet rice and milk dessert" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 372)
[9] Indian dessert

contradicts her earlier assertion and begins to pity the bridegroom instead, suggesting that the bride maintains the power within the household. She begins to see the groom as someone who "was about to put chains on his existence," and "[s]uddenly she saw all men as victims and all women as laden with gold and rupees as tyrants who controlled men's income just as blood-sucking industrialists controlled the blood and sweat of poor workers" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 182). Thus, Shaman recognizes the power hierarchies within the household and the manner in which a woman can use her sexuality to gain power and transform her marriage into a site of agency. The following section of the chapter examines this hierarchy and how this transformation occurs.

HIERARCHICHAL STRUCTURES WITHIN THE ZENANA

Most of the female characters of *Terhi Lakir* are constricted to the confined spaces of the domestic home, and fight to maintain supremacy within this space. Characters like Bari Apa and Shaman's mother are confined to their home in a manner similar to the Begum's imprisonment, particularly restrained by the lack of affection they receive from the men in their lives. As a means to assert any form of agency, thus, these women turn to various other methods of gaining power within the house. Often, this struggle to assert dominance manifests through the care taken in their appearance and through their daughter's successful marital prospects. In other words, the women use their own sexual appeal or the sexual appeal of their daughters, as gauged through their marital prospects, to gain agency. Through this use of their sexuality to maintain power, the women rebel against the denial of female sexuality and take advantage of this invisible nature of sexuality to lead to more meaningful existences.

Bari Apa is the perfect example of such a character. Widowed only a few years after her marriage, she is distraught on returning to her mother's home with her two children. In her isolation, she first turns to Rachid as an outlet for her sexual frustrations. When she is denied this

relationship, she alleviates these urges by asserting her dominance over the other women of the household. As required by her widowhood, she throws her colorful clothes and bangles, yet manages to maintain a beauty that overshadows the other women's. On her appearance:

> There were such tints in her white *dupatta* that she glowed, and once even a new bride's wedding garments seemed pale in comparison… the neckline [of her garments were] adorned all over with [the] dainty needlework of flowers and trimmed with fine silken braids, a mesh devised of golden stars and tassels made of beads at every step… [She also wore] two delicately crafted bangles… [and] the emerald ring which had been her husband's gift (Chughtai, *Lakir* 34).

Thus, whenever Bari Apa left the house, she was greeted with the comment, "Why, she's blossoming in rags!" In one incident, she receives wedding proposals in place of her younger sister and "[i]t was with great pride that Bari Apa narrated this story of how she, a mother of two children, was mistaken for a virgin" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 34). Thus, Bari Apa finds meaning in her strained existence through her sexual appeal and is accorded greater respect in the household.

Bari Apa uses her appearance and femininity as a tool for exerting her power over the other women of the household since this superiority allows her to do and say as she pleases without anyone having the mettle to oppose her. It is with this authority and added the pity that accompanies her widowhood that Bari Apa is able to get away with deviating from the norms expected of a widow. As Shaman notes,

> As for the parting of her hair, she wasn't allowed to have one, but who would have stopped her? It was the poor woman's own heart that was dead. For this reason, she fluffed up all of her hair on the top and left curls on each side of her face, just long enough for her earlobes to peer from under there (Chughtai, *Lakir* 34).

She could, thus, dress as she pleased. Additionally, this power allows her to mock Shaman and her mother's maternal abilities. With Shaman being a failure in the eyes of heteronormativity, unable to conform to the gender norms imposed on her, her mother, Amma, was deprived of

much of her household power. Bari Apa's constant taunts regarding Shaman, "made Shaman's mother blush with embarrassment and she proceeded to wish for Shaman's death" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 32). Thus, Amma is often left speechless around Bari Apa.

Bari Apa also uses this freedom to leverage the needs of her children over the needs of the many other children in the household. This leverage is particularly employed with regards to marital prospects, another method of gaining control within the house. As Shaman's family home is filled with several daughters, the older women are constantly vying for opportunities to marry their daughters and younger sisters to suitable men. Therefore, Noori and Shaman's similar ages often resulted in a rivalry between Bari Appa and Amma whenever a prospective suitor arrived. When, for instance, Abbas arrives at the house it is immediately taken into account that he has transformed from being the son of a disliked "good-for-nothing, useless man" to a man who had "returned [from his studies in England] with the blinding glitter of a shining star" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 109). The entire family pounces upon them and lavishes him with luxuries, in sharp contrast to the disdain and disrespect with which they had regarded him and his parents before.

Bari Apa is able to exert the power that her misfortunes afford her in this situation. As the narrator notes,

> Shaman's mother didn't have the courage to open her mouth [and talk about Shaman's availability] because within minutes Bari Apa would bring up the matter of her husband's untimely death and start wailing. As a grandmother, could she take away her granddaughter's match? (Chughtai, *Lakir* 113)

Bari Apa, thus, complains until she gets her way and uses the lack of agency over her own marital fate to guide her agency within the household. Comments like "*Ai hai,* people don't refrain from sucking a widow's blood" and "there's no shortage [of men] for the others, but if an

orphan gets lucky, why it's something" were constantly thrown about by Bari Apa. Moreover, she uses religion to her advantage saying, "The Koran also says, first it's the right of the orphan and the widow" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 111). Chughtai, thus, makes it abundantly clear that despite the lack of opportunities for the women of the *zenana*, there are still ways for women to exert their agency within the patriarchal household.

In addition to the use of appearance and one's daughter's sexual appeal as a means of obtaining power and greater agency in the household, sexual relationships become a tool for asserting supremacy over one's sexual partner. Through this assertion of power, one can also gain control over the rest of the household. Of *Lihaaf,* Gopinath writes, "The erotic circuits within which Rabbo, the Begum, and the girl narrator circulate are marked by radically uneven positions of power, both generational and economic" (Gopinath 148). These systems of power play out in the many relationships depicted in *Lihaaf.* At the basic premise, the Begum yields her power to the Nawab. Her confinement in the house is the direct result of his wishes and her freedom is restricted to what the Nawab allows her to do, while he engages in other relationships. The Nawab further exerts his power in these other relationships with men. The age difference between the Nawab and the students he entertains affords him a disproportionate level of power in these sexual exploits. Moreover, the fact that he pays for all their expenses puts him at an even higher position within the hierarchy. In addition to this, there is also an indication of an encounter between the Nawab and Rabbo's son, who after staying with him "ran away and never returned" (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 9). In this case, because Rabbo worked for the Nawab, the son is preyed on by someone maintaining power over him.

The Begum's relationship with power, however, is the most interesting feature of *Lihaaf.* At first glance, the Begum appears to hold power within her relationship with Rabbo. This

uneven power balance is due to Rabbo being employed by the Begum. The Begum also holds the power in her relationship with the narrator, who is a child dependent on the Begum. There is, thus, a huge generational gap between the two and the relationship is abusive. Therefore, the sexual contact between the Begum and Rabbo, and the Begum and the narrator each come with strict power differentials, which dictate the course of the relationship. Hence, based on these initial observations it would appear that the Begum holds all the power within her household. This, however, is not the case. It is actually Rabbo who emerges as the most powerful character, while the Begum simply hangs on to the lower branches of the domestic hierarchy, reaching for any form of nourishment.

Chughtai, thus, turns this power hierarchy on its head by altering the range of power that each character actually maintains. Gopinath observes this alteration as well, writing that "Chughtai complicates the notion of domestic labor, desire, and servitude in her refusal to delineate unambiguous relations of exploitation and domination within the household" (Gopinath 148). Within the space of the *zenana*, Rabbo becomes the envy of all the servants in the house. These servants while "muttering their disapproval, handed over various necessities at the closed door" of the threshold of the Begum's room that only Rabbo, and later the narrator, are able to cross. This threshold of the "closed door" is one that separates the free space of the Begum from the rest of the house that she is restricted from (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 7). Thus, Rabbo becomes the gatekeeper to the private site of the Begum's simultaneous freedom and imprisonment.

Rabbo's high level of freedom and agency is further depicted through a study of the domestic space. Rabbo "occupies a privileged space of indeterminacy within the gendered and class-marked economy of the household" (Gopinath 148). She is able to move freely between the spaces of the household in a way that no other character in the story can, travelling from the male

quarters to the female ones. Thus, while the Begum is restricted to her *lihaaf*, Rabbo moves across the different regions of the house completely unrestricted. As Gopinath rightly notes, she has the "ability to transgress spacial boundaries, [and thus] Rabbo becomes the purveyor of both bodily and psychical knowledge, effecting miraculous transformations on the Begum's body, as well as relieving her of periodic 'fits' of hysteria" (Gopinath 148). In doing so, she becomes more powerful than the Begum and the other women and servants of the household.

This ability to move through the various spaces of the house is one that even the Nawab lacks, unable to access the part of the house where the Begum resides. Correspondingly, through the course of the story, he becomes further confined to the drawing-room where he entertains the young boys and is only referred to in relation to this room until he disappears from the story completely. The drawing-room becomes to him what the quilt is to the Begum, and both of them are doomed to reside within their individual confinements. Rabbo, thus, gains more power than any other character in the short story and asserts this power over the various inhabitants of the house.

Moreover, while the Begum is unable to leave the space of the house, Rabbo leaves to visit her son. This brief departure from the house within which the story is claustrophobically contained, results in the Begum once again suffering from starvation as she aches for the sustenance that Rabbo brings her. She suffers with her "unfortunate itch" that only Rabbo can alleviate. Her attempt to let the narrator fulfill Rabbo's role is unsuccessful and she longs for Rabbo. While she is devastated by this departure, Rabbo, on the other hand, returns invigorated by her reunion with her son. Thus, Rabbo maintains the upper hand in this relationship with the power to leave and sustain herself without the Begum. She exerts her power by using her sexuality in order to maintain a hold on the Begum, thereby gaining agency and becoming more

powerful than any other character in the story. Therefore, despite the renewed freedom of the Begum's life through her relationship with Rabbo, the relationship simultaneously results in her being plunged deeper into the abyss of her imprisonment.

As detailed in this chapter, the divided expectations imposed on male and female sexualities results in a strained existence for the women of Chughtai's fiction, who are unable to satisfy their sexual desires. These restrictions, thus, result in the homes of the women functioning as sites of imprisonment. Through the use of their sexuality as a tool to rebel against the regulations on their bodies and sexual agency, the female characters of *Terhi Lakir* and *Lihaaf* are thereby able to gain more power in the household. This power results in greater agency and the acquirement of the ability to make their sites of imprisonment concurrently function as sites of sexual and social freedom.

Partha Chatterjee suggests that the domesticated and regulated norms imposed on women in these sites of imprisonment played a part in the nationalist discourse prior to and following independence. This symbol of the New Woman who was educated but also confined to the domestic world is one that was invoked in order to a maintain a sense of traditionalism in the movement. The following chapter provides a broader examination of the novel in the context of the nationalist movement, and the loss of female agency in the outer sphere through the relegation of the woman to a symbolic role.

CHAPTER THREE

SITES OF FREEDOM AND IMPRISONMENT IN THE MATERIAL SPHERE

In the final chapter of this thesis, the novel looks to the outer sphere and role of women within it. Here, Shaman's attraction towards the anti-imperialist and revolutionary tendencies of those around her, and her experience with colonialism play vital roles. After detailing Shaman's trysts with nationalist sentiment and the resistance she encounters as a female progressive, the chapter demonstrates the way in which Shaman's life works as an allegory for the nation. The relationship between Shaman and Ronnie, an embodiment of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, is of particular importance within this section. This chapter further examines the image of the woman as the voiceless and sexless mother figure in the nationalist movement, and how the woman is imprisoned in this symbolic role. In this chapter, I further incorporate Partha Chatterjee's assessment of how the woman's question was answered in the nationalist movement. Deniz Kandiyoti's essay "Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation", which details the role of the woman as a symbol of the nation is additionally included in the following argument.

THE ROLE OF THE WOMAN IN THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT

In "The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question" Partha Chatterjee describes the nationalist philosophy as comprising of two spheres: the outer, material sphere where "the claims of western civilization were the most powerful," including science, technology, economics, etc.; and the spiritual, inner world where "the East was superior to the West," consisting of the spiritual essence of the nationalist culture made up of traditions and the household (Chatterjee 238). Consequently, the outer world becomes the world of the male and the inner world becomes

that of the female. As Deniz Kandiyoti asserts, thus, "The integration of women into modern 'nationhood', epitomized by citizenship in a sovereign nation-state, somehow follows a different trajectory from that of men" (Kandiyoti 429). In the women's trajectory, the woman simply becomes a symbol of the revolution and of the nation through an invocation of her role as a mother.

Kandiyoti argues that women "bear the burden of being 'the mothers of the nation'… as well as being those who are the privileged signifiers of national difference" (Kandiyoti 429). Thus, women embody the spiritual core of the movement through their role as the mother and the maintainer of the inner sphere. Additionally, the above mentioned role of "mothers of the nation" emerges through the nation itself being feminized and described as the "motherland" giving birth to its many future citizens. Furthermore, the nation is referred to using female pronouns in most of the region's languages, including Urdu. Therefore, "the nation itself is represented as a woman to be protected, or less consciously, in an intense preoccupation with women's appropriate sexual conduct" (Kandiyoti 430). This correlation between woman and nation is one that continues to construct the woman's intrinsically spiritual nature as a domesticized entity.

Moreover, the role of the woman in the actual movement is governed by this above perception. The case of the material vs the spiritual, thus, restricts their role in the struggle to a simply symbolic one. Just as the men fight to defend the female nation, so too is there the need to "protect, preserve and strengthen the inner core of the national culture, its spiritual essence" that is the women's maternal role (Kandiyoti 430). The function of being the above symbol further imprisons the female characters in the novel. In the Progressives union, where Shaman and the other Progressives discussed philosophies and the growing sense of nationalism in the colony, Shaman and her peers are unable to be taken seriously. Their symbolic function means that their

entire role in material sphere dealing with the political conditions in the colony is a figurative one.

When female characters enter the nationalist discourse as represented through Shaman's involvement with the Progressives, thus, they are met with frustration as the prejudiced notions arising out of this symbolic role begins to come to the forefront. Thus, when Alma and Satil, two Progressives, debate each other, the conversation comes to an end with Satil's dismissive statement: "What does a woman have to do with politics… there's only one purpose in her life" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 161). The Professor, another member of the Progressives Union, later similarly denounces women's views as he claims he "discovered that no matter who a woman is or where she is, it is foolish to try and understand her. She's not there to be analysed, she's there to be used" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 289). Despite the socialist nature of the Progressives Union, which is critical of the bourgeoisie nationalism that superficially empowers women through the creation of the New Woman and ignores the people of the lower classes, the extent to which the nationalist discourse regarding women solidifies itself in the minds of the Progressives becomes clear in the above incidents.

Deniz Kandiyoti describes the simultaneous celebration and denouncement of the woman's role in the nationalist movement as a sham where "women [are mobilized] when they are needed in the labor force, or even at the front, only to return them to domesticity or to subordinate roles in the public sphere when the national emergency is over" (Kandiyoti 429). Thus, when needed to demonstrate development in the material sphere, there is a push for female education as a symbol of female emancipation. In reality, however, this push is largely superficial and does not actually move the woman out of the site that is the household.

Thus, the Progressives of *Terhi Lakir* establish the extent to which they buy in to the new nationalism discourse invoking the material/spiritual dichotomy, and are unable to accept the female Progressives. Furthermore, the female characters belonging to the union themselves come to embody this role and, thus, even whilst participating in the movement remain preoccupied with a search for attention and companionship. Through this they utilize the same method of obtaining agency as in the household using sexual appeal, to overcome the lack of agency in this sphere. Therefore, Shaman notices "Alma's admirers" and is envious of how "their hearts were actually dancing to the beat of Alma['s] …laughter" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 159). Emerging from her rejection from Ejaz, Shaman, thus, strives to emulate Alma and in the process of transforming into her, and by association into a Progressive, acquire the same kind of attention that Alma does.

Shaman's initial relationship with Alma is filled with disapproval. Alma is introduced as Shaman's Christian friend whose radical opinions and ideas rubbed most people the wrong way. On one of the first encounters between the reader and Alma, she is introduced with a poster in her room of two monkeys. She changes this poster into one of John Bull, the personification of Britain, as a monkey sitting on top of the branch and an Indian man in a dhoti as a monkey at the bottom, prodding Bull with a stick until a map of India falls down at him (Chughtai, *Lakir* 122). Alma is, thus, immediately introduced as a revolutionary with charged philosophies and as someone who is unafraid to share them. She also becomes one of the greatest stimulants in Shaman's transformation into a Progressive, being the first to supply Shaman with "some books on serious subjects which Shaman [initially] found extremely dull and uninteresting" but later uses to aid in this transformation (Chughtai, *Lakir* 123).

This initial disapproval is depicted extensively as Shaman is taken aback by Alma's outspoken behavior and in one instance, even loses "her temper [with Alma, and] her eyes [filled]… with tears in anger" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 122). Yet as the novel progresses, Shaman begins to idolize Alma. Immediately following Ejaz's rejection, Shaman begins to transform into the independent revolutionary that she sees Alma as. Inspired, she is convinced that "she could pass through the fires of hell with a smile if she had her hand on Alma's shoulder" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 156). Thus, Shaman uses the Progressives to cope with the rejection and loneliness she feels. Shaman similarly uses the Progressives again at a later point in the novel when she finds out that Iftikhar, the Progressive and one person she truly cared for, was married and used Shaman and several other women for money. This process of rejection and the following rebellion establishes Shaman as a flawed nationalist who does not seem to truly believe in the cause. This, however, results from a lack of agency and opportunity in this sphere, rather than a disregard for the cause. Thus, just like the household, the site of the Progressives meetings becomes a site of imprisonment through the loss of agency of women, and a site of freedom through the use of sexuality.

Thus, in her initial rebellion, Shaman puts herself in Alma's hands, seeing herself as a "present" for Alma to mold by placing "a new rebel into an old rebel's lap." She is instantly immersed in Alma and the union's world, where the Progressives meet and discuss various philosophies, and "with great speed Shaman observed that facet of life in which you emerge out of your shell and see something other than yourself" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 157). Shaman is invigorated by this change and the attention she garners from the other male Progressives. Despite Shaman's adoration for Alma, however, she remains critical of many of her ideas. Shaman, thus, simultaneously remains in awe of and critical of Alma's opinions.

A manifestation of the above critical approach to Alma's philosophies is seen in Shaman's disapproval of Alma's overt sexuality. Alma talks about her sexuality openly, unlike Shaman who talks about it in conjunction with sickness and snakes. For Alma, thus, the space of the Progressives is more of a site of freedom than for Shaman, as created through the free expression of her sexuality. Alma, hence, declares that when she sees Satil, she is "tormented by shocking emotions and [she] feel[s] as if [she is] a lump of flesh" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 163). Additionally, regarding Iftikhar, Alma mentions that despite the fact that she doesn't love him, she wants her "first child to be fathered by him" after which she would "get tired of him [Iftikar] in two days" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 165).

Shaman is initially shocked by these sexual revelations but soon begins to accept them into her own life. Thus, just as Shaman begins to emulate all of Alma's ideologies, so too does she begin to reflect Alma's views about Satil. In Satil's company, Shaman realizes that "Alma was right. One felt like a lump of flesh in Satil's presence" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 166). In contrast to Alma's boredom with Iftikhar, however, Shaman begins to flirt with the possibility of being in love with Iftikhar. Whenever "they met it seemed as if they had known each other for years" (Chughtai. *Lakir* 168). This desire which is in conflict with Alma's emerges at the moment when Shaman realizes that she is "no longer overpowered by Alma's enchanted eyes and her poisonous teeth, and began to hear echoes of an unfamiliar tinkling in her own laughter" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 169). Having reached a point where Shaman completely embodies the character of Alma, Shaman is no longer entranced by her and is able to move past the process of emulation to being in competition with her.

Through the course of this competition, Alma and Shaman appear to swap ideologies. Shaman becomes open to Iftikhar's social-norm refuting ideas regarding marriage, her only

qualm being the judgment imposed on women by society. This progression occurs slowly as even after the beginning of this swap Shaman criticizes women who outspokenly exert their sexuality like the prostitutes that Shaman describes as "wretches" who ought to "lead respectable lives" instead (Chughtai, *Lakir* 189). Yet, when Alma learns that she is pregnant with Satil's child, it is Shaman who reassures her while Alma declares that she has "committed a sin" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 191). Years later, Alma invokes Shaman's imagery of snakes. In reference to the child, Alma calls him a "viper" like his father and sees him as a punishment for her sins. Here, it is Shaman who holds the position of intellectual power, imparting her liberal outlook to Alma. Later, this role is once again reversed as Shaman blindly denounces Ronnie until Alma encourages her to spend time with him.

Once again, the two female Progressives in *Terhi Lakir*, thus, are torn away from the actual nationalist movement and relegated to the spiritually domesticated nature of their beings. Further, the contradictory nature of both Shaman and Alma's personalities reveal a greater criticism of the Progressive Union within the novel. The narrative implies that much of this ideology is simple discourse which lacks any real action. This critical approach to the Progressives' methods in the novel is further apparent in the depiction of the university and the debates within the union as existing within a bubble. Once students leave this protected sphere, however, their actions fall short of their promises. Thus, the Alma that readers are introduced to in her early years at the university is in stark contrast to the Alma who emotionally and physically abuses the child that reminds her so much of Satil.

Like Alma, many students become aware of this university bubble and struggle to remain within it. Miss Boga, whom Alma called the "heavenly mother" of the Progressives, hence, works on her third master's degree since "she had got used to life in the university and her life

was reduced to zero outside the university walls." Indeed, "she didn't know how to communicate with anyone except college students" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 160). Failing to begin a career outside of the university, Miss Boga, thus, returned to the protected sphere of the university to engage in debates.

The narrator denounces this nature of the university, writing "[l]ife in college and the university is like a bubble. As long as it's afloat it reflects the myriad colours of the rainbow, but the minute it bursts everything disappears." Correspondingly, "[t]he same Iftikhar whose presence was like a guiding star in the university had today fallen into the darkness of anonymity" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 185). In the later years, Iftikhar becomes "thinner and more unsightly than before" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 207). He portrays himself as a revolutionary, still fighting the colonizers and running from the police whilst fighting a losing battle with his illness. Instead, however, he is simply running from his family and preying on women like Shaman for financial support. He is incapable of maintaining the revolutionary identity he creates for himself and, thus, falls apart on leaving the bubble that is the university. Chughtai even uses the comforting motif of a quilt in this novel, associating it with the university bubble when discussing Iftikhar, who wraps himself within the safety of the quilt that reminded him of his past.

In describing the university as a bubble of political discourse with no real action, the narrator struggles to demonstrate a similar problem in the atmosphere of the country. Alma says,

> When we Hindustanis go beyond the allotted limit, we receive a jolt and are forced to turn back. This darkness exists in our blood. As far as our imagination is concerned, no one can compete with us in that sphere. In our dreams we can even conquer the seven regions of the underworld, but when it comes to action, we are left behind (Chughtai, *Lihaaf* 193).

This is a sentiment that is repeated on numerous occasions by both Alma and Shaman. On the one hand, it demonstrates the shortcomings of the freedom struggle in the country, leaving the country to remain a colony, as it was at the time the book was written. This is demonstrated through the existence of the university bubble and the struggle the Progressives face outside of it. On the other hand, the above sentiment regarding the condition of the people of British India closely aligns with the life and shortcomings of Shaman's existence.

In addition to the above-discussed assertion that the Progressives of the country are unable to convert ideologies into action, Chughtai points to the philosophers of the nationalist movement who belong to the bourgeoisie and so are unable to fight for the masses. Thus, the depiction of the university as a bubble of revolutionary thought also serves the purpose of depicting the class differences apparent in the struggle for freedom. A cry for independence is typically a cry of the upper classes who at this point in South Asia's history were generally more educated, exposed to Marxist ideology, and had the time and luxury to worry about the intellectual problems associated with colonialism. The average resident of the region, however, was more concerned with basic necessities like food. After independence, this divide becomes even more apparent when for the higher classes Independence was a cause for celebration while for the lower classes, the people only associated it with the violence and displacement caused by partition. As Gyanendra Pandey reports in *Remembering Partition,* one bookseller asks "when did I ever receive any share of Independence?... it was only in the bloodshed of Partition that ordinary people saw the shape of Independence" (Pandey 125). Thus, the divide in nationalist sentiment in the various classes is demonstrated in the novel though this bubble.

The above sentiment was prevalent in the country even before independence, since for the lower, working classes independence was an abstract concept, which in their perspective

would do nothing to alter the course of their lives. They were unable to see past the immediate needs of their lives. This assertion that independence would not necessarily improve the life of the average inhabitant of the region comes true when Partition and the associated violence become a reality. In *Terhi Lakir,* thus, Chughtai effectively demonstrates this divide between the privileged intellectuals of the university bubble and the working classes outside of it. It is for this reason that the Progressives in the novel fail to transform their ideologies into active action. Shaman faces this problem when she distributes grain to the people towards the end of the novel. Shaman sees the desperation of the people whose only desire is to receive grain. To them, it does not matter whether it is supplied by a British or Indian government. It only matters that they receive it. Paulo Friere in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* outlines this idea with the following:

> Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects to be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated (Friere 47).

By catering to the truly oppressed solely through the adherence to core, spiritual values of the region, the nationalist movement fails to incorporate the actual voice of the oppressed in their movement. It is the lack of this initiative that prevents the people living within the bubble in *Terhi Lakir* from truly understanding the problems beyond the university. Thus, just as the movement renders the woman voiceless, so too does it relegate the lower classes to the realm of the invisible.

SHAMAN AS NATIONAL ALLEGORY

Over the course the novel, Shaman's life depicts the progression of the nationalist movement. By doing the above, *Terhi Lakir* established Shaman, or the woman, as an allegory for the nation in a manner that is similar to the symbolic portrayal of the woman in the nationalist

movement. In doing so, however, the novel alters the role of this symbol by using it to delineate the shortcomings of the movement. Further, the attention paid to Shaman's sexuality changes the image of the sexless mother to a woman filled with sexual desires. Finally, through her marriage to Ronnie, Shaman demonstrates the struggle between the colonizer and the colonized, as their marriage becomes a site of simultaneous imprisonment and freedom for both Shaman and Ronnie.

The narrator writes that not many knew that within Shaman's "anxious and fearful exterior there existed the hidden embers of rebellion and self-reliance, [or] that enclosed in this flat, silent, stony breast was a smoldering fire just waiting to be awakened, and that once aroused all the slumbering powers were going to bubble furiously." This hidden potential is the same desire for independence which emerges in region as "embers of rebellion" and a "smoldering fire" in the early twentieth century. Noticing this fire in herself, Shaman too is "blinded by its radiance" and wonders "How insignificant and dull the old Shaman looked in comparison to it" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 185). Shaman, thus, symbolizes the progression of a nation's enlightenment, and the maturation of its political and revolutionary philosophies. The colonized South Asia, too, begins to shine in the realization of its revolutionary potential and wonders how it could ever have existed without it.

As detailed in the earlier chapters, Shaman repeatedly feels drawn to certain people, even dreaming about them on numerous instances. However, she rarely acts on these desires. Even with Iftikhar, she practices restraint and refuses to marry him. Shaman struggles to not give in to her desires, and if she does she is usually punished for it. This is seen in her being rejected by Ejaz, Rai Sahab, Iftikhar, and even Ronnie. Similarly, despite her liberal outlooks, her reactions regarding prostitutes and other women delineate a clear distinction between her philosophies and

actual actions. Of all these relationships, Shaman puts the most effort into her marriage to Ronnie, just as the nation "start[s] something with such excitement, but soon selfishness, separatism and avarice come in the way and erase everything," and Shaman and Ronnie's pride and stubborn political differences drive them apart (Chughtai, *Lakir* 193). Thus, the fear and desire that Shaman experiences is similar to the fear and desire the nation associates with the idea of independence. This fear gives way to separatism and, thus, the demand for separate nations emerges and divides the region.

Furthermore, in addition to the inaction in Shaman's personal life, Shaman's political activism, too, begins to erode once she leaves university. On joining a school as its headmistress, Shaman attempts to make an active contribution to the people of the nation. Yet, when corruption seeps into the school she refrains from doing anything to stop it. Instead, she laments the nature of these institutions as a lost cause and wonders "when will that storm rise here which will dissolve all the baseness like an impermanent dye, and wash it away with the sludge? At least then people will stop pushing baseness towards even greater baseness" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 224). This inaction is similar to the above-discussed inaction Shaman perceives with regard to the Progressives of the novel.

Thus, when towards the end of the novel, the Professor convinces Shaman to help him in distributing grain to the underprivileged as shortages arise in this late colonial period, Shaman arrives on the first day, hoping to relive her days as a young Progressive. Instead, she leaves with her "fine georgette sari which, having been soaked in the nearby gutter, now looked like a dead rat" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 358). Just like with regards to her job as a headmistress, Shaman arrives expecting to be admired in this powerful position. On the contrary, she is hated and thereby finds the work "uninteresting and quite painful" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 359). Instead of treating this like

essential work necessary to help the country in the way she claims to want to, Shaman finds herself using it as a way to keep herself busy. Thus, like the Hindustanis that Alma speaks of, Shaman refuses to move past a certain "allotted limit." Additionally, just a Shaman is propelled by false, idealistic visions, so too is the nation, which finds itself falling short of the vision it longs to achieve. Instead of feeling a sense of accomplishment, Shaman therefore blames the failure on the question, "Why is Hindustan so averse to order" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 359).

Another parallel between the perceived problems of the nation and Shaman is seen in Alma's assertion that Hindustanis "are born to be enslaved and to worship others." Alma insists that the people of the province are lost without the presence of a leader. She says of the growing national movement, "Gandhi *ji* tried to free us from bondage and what did we do? We turned him into a Mahatma and started worshipping him. That intense national fervor was focused on the meaningless adoration of a god" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 193). Alma, thus, insists that the country will never truly be able to be free until it stops replacing one god with another. Friere, too, relays a similar qualm with revolutions. He writes, "many of the oppressed who directly or indirectly participate in revolution intend—conditioned by the myths of the old order—to make it their private revolution" (Friere 26). The oppressed, he writes, fail to see past the current struggle of the current oppressors. For them, it is the colonizers who are at the root of all the nation's problems. Once they are replaced, they assume the problem will fix itself. Such an approach fails to see past the shortcomings of the system, which continues to replace one set of oppressors with another in the phenomenon coined as neo-colonialism. Thus, when Alma recognizes this problem that constantly manifests itself in India's history, she points out her fear for the future of the country, which even after liberation would be unable to break away from the shackles of this neo-colonialism.

Correspondingly, Shaman appears to suffer from a similar ailment where she is unable to separate respect from idolization. Thus, Shaman looks up to and emulates Alma. Even the narrator's physical description of Alma paints her as a supernatural being with teeth "tinged with a faint bluish pallor… [and which] were pointed and appeared like poisonous fangs, [which] shone brilliantly" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 121). This mystical description immediately sets Alma apart from the others at the university. Shaman is drawn to Alma and her radical philosophy just as the nation was drawn to powerful anti-colonialist ideology. Just as Shaman grapples with Alma's many ideas, pondering over and deciphering them, so too does the nation grapple with the national movement. Further, as soon as Shaman stops looking at Alma with idolization, she is no longer drawn to her "enchanting eyes, and her poisonous teeth" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 169).

Similarly, Shaman looked at Rai Sahab with the same level of adoration. As he dances before her, she describes his body as "a marble statue [which] had stretched and come to life" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 119). Next, she describes his chest as emanating "the spellbinding fragrance associated with sacred temples" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 132). Thus, Shaman once again attributes these supernatural qualities to the object of her affection, calling him a "Hindu god". Shaman goes through such cycles of adoration where one godlike figure is replaced by another. Like the people of the country, she is unable to break free of this self-oppression, thereby resigning herself to a lifetime of pain. It is only towards the end of the novel after Ronnie's departure, in a scene that is simultaneously melancholy and hopeful, that Shaman is finally able to rid herself of this cyclical system, hinting at an optimistic look at the future of the region.

Alma's philosophies, thus, begin to not only shape Shaman's opinions but also determine the course of her life. In the first Progressive meeting that Shaman attends, Alma claims that,

> [T]he only cure for Hindustan's eternal enslavement and instability was absolute destruction. She said that this dying nation didn't need the elixir of life, it needed a

> poisonous gas so that it could be completely annihilated. Plague cannot be cured with calcium shots, it has to be treated by branding with hot steel; this centuries-old poison will be squeezed out not with balms but with more poison (Chughtai, *Lakir* 160).

There is a clear parallel between the above description and Shaman's own life. Firstly, the very incident that propels Shaman into this revolutionary existence is her rejection by Ejaz, which is described as an event that leaves "something resembling poison… [darting] towards her head" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 156). Immediately after this description, the sentiment of rebellion begins to strengthen its hold on Shaman. Despite the clear link between the poison and Shaman's new birth into a life of rebellion, this incident is only the beginning of the poison that enters Shaman's life. On several occasions what appears to insert itself into Shaman's life as an "elixir of life" ends up destroying her instead.

The initial freedom that Shaman experiences through this transformation and in the presence of these elixirs soon fades away. Chughtai writes, "when a bird's feathers have been clipped once, it remains imprisoned even when it's free, and the clipped feathers don't grow back in this life and even if they do they reappear all out of shape and crooked" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 165). Thus, in line with Alma's prophecy, Shaman must be completely and devastatingly destroyed so that when she is reborn from the ashes of her annihilation of "this life" she can truly be free. Such is the case of a colonized nation. To simply be freed from colonization is not enough for the featherless nation to be able to move past its colonized past. The pain of the feathers being clipped and the ensuing repercussions of colonization remain with the nation for an unaccountably long period of time.

One of the biggest pitfalls that Shaman encounters in her life is the discovery of the truth of Iftikhar's life. Approached by his distraught wife, Shaman appears to be plagued by sickness after this encounter. Distressed, she wonders, "So this was the harvest from her garden of love."

Following her encounter with Iftikhar's wife, Shaman "became numb… [and] didn't move" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 273). She spends days in a daze with a "force of restraint [that] had paralyzed her feelings" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 274). However, Shaman comes out of this demolition of her life with renewed feelings of empowerment. She decides, "'every curve [of her spine] will be erased, this crookedness will have to be straightened,' she ordered and slipped into a deep sleep that had evaded her years" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 277). Thus, just as a colonized nation stumbles with each setback, and comes back stronger and more passionate in their cause, so too is Shaman invigorated with each setback she experiences.

This process of pain and invigoration is epitomized at the very end of the novel, where Ronnie and Shaman's marriage completely falls apart. Over the course of their marriage, the constant conflict between Shaman and Ronnie, which over the course of the novel comes to depict the conflict between the colonizer and the colonized, pull at each of them until they are drawn apart. At the end of their relationship, Shaman is pleased to be freed from the bonds of their broken relationship, just as India hopes to rid itself from the shackles of colonialism in the years following the publication of this novel. Shaman is the one who fights Ronnie and demands that he leaves her. At the same time, however, she is torn apart by the pain that accompanies his departure. She is finally, completely destroyed by this abandonment in a scene that foreshadows the devastating effect of Partition, which accompanies Independence.

Although the above relationship between Ronnie and Shaman does not start out as such, it comes to depict the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized and, thus, between India and Britain as a whole. Ronnie, being an Irishman, does not accept Shaman equating him with the English, having suffered at the hands of their empire himself. He does not believe in the philosophies of the colonial government and marries Shaman, adopting her South Asian customs.

Reeling from the judgment they receive at the hands of their friends, however, over the course of their marriage they continue to fight and live in misery, forcing their political arguments to become more polarized. In addition to these arguments, the two begin to despise the other's culture. For example, on deciding which film they would view in the cinema they went out of their way to make their displeasure known. "Even if the [Indian] film was good, he slept through it and Shaman, her cheeks puffed in anger, continued to sit and stubbornly watch it all the way through. And if they were at an English film she pretended to be tired. In other words, no matter what film it was, neither of them enjoyed it" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 349). The above example is a template for the manner in which much of the debates in their home would function.

Just as the customs of a colonizer begin to seep into a colonized nation, so too were Ronnie's English behaviors seeping into Shaman's life. She questions, "Why was it that despite her staunch opposition to Europe, she was slowly becoming coloured by the European way of life" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 350). Thus, Shaman uses this realization as a means "to sharpen her obstinacy." She begins to denounce all British customs and behaviors as a manner of rebellion, eating by hand and wearing a "*gharara*[10] and *kurta*[11] to bed "instead of a nightdress" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 351). Hence, just as the nation adopts *khadi*[12] and other Indian-made goods in place of foreign-made ones to protest the British empire, Shaman adopts numerous Indian mannerisms.

On Ronnie's part, he too is pushed further away from Indian culture as a result of his strife with Shaman. He slowly begins to gain the colonial gaze and take on the role of the stereotypical colonizer. He now declares to Shaman, "your culture is colourless. [And] Your men

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[10] "Type of garment with flared legs, gathered on the lower section, worn by women (Chughtai, *Lakir* 371)
[11] "Tunic-like shirt (Chughtai, *Lakir* 372)
[12] Homespun Indian fabric

are more intelligent than the women. They marry European girls and become cultured and refined. [Unlike Indian women,] Their entire manner changes, they become more sophisticated" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 350). Shaman, however, chooses to remain connected with the region's culture. Shaman and Ronnie continue to fight each other against the backdrop of nationalism and colonialism fighting each other in the colony. Despite their brief moments of reconciliation, they soon return to the constant battle of being in each other's company. The everlasting struggle alters them as they truly begin to embody their given roles of colonizer and colonized with the endlessly drunk Ronnie becoming crueler in his treatment of both, Shaman and his servants. Moreover, Shaman oscillates between hiding in her locked room, afraid of Ronnie, and actively instigating him. Ultimately, it is war and violence that results in them being rid of each other, with Ronnie flying away to face death. Thus, through his departure to fight in the World War for the British, Ronnie truly becomes one with the government in this manner.

As the above description of their relationship implies, their marriage becomes a simultaneous site of freedom and imprisonment for both Shaman and Ronnie, just as the household becomes this dual site for women. In their unified and miserable existence, Ronnie and Shaman are imprisoned in their marriage to a spouse they come to hate. Similarly, in the further polarization of their philosophies they take on the stereotypical roles accorded to both the colonizer and the colonized, becoming imprisoned in these roles. At the same time, however, through the celebration of their cultures and the denouncement of the other's, both manage to find a sense of agency within their home through freely expressing the customs that their partner cannot take away from them. Thus, their marriage simultaneously frees and imprisons them.

After being abandoned by Ronnie, Shaman is let out of this site. She first calls out for Ronnie but later gives in to the "first shudder of life [which] fluttered like a wave and floated

through her body. The forces that were drowning slowly began to re-emerge from the darkness, the strings that had become taut gradually began to slacken" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 369). Thus, initially on being let out from the site of her marriage, Shaman is further depressed by this loss. Annihilated by the pain of Ronnie's departure, Shaman is slowly reborn into a new life, reinvigorated by the child growing inside her. Like the nation, she emerges stronger than she had ever been before. Her child, however, forms the kernel left behind by the colonizer which will remain in the nation as a result of years of colonization. Hence, "The pain swelling inside her flowed from her eyes, her sobs turned into laughter and, shedding the terrifying feeling of being attacked, she crawled out from under the squalid rubble… alone?" The concurrent nature of this annihilation and enrichment fulfils Shaman who has "never felt so weak and so courageous, so anxious and so content" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 369). Instead of languishing in her own pain, Shaman conversely pities Ronnie instead, "alone and empty-handed. She felt sorry for his impoverishment, just as if she would feel sorry for a wretched beggar shivering in the cold outside her palace window" (Chughtai, *Lakir* 370).

Thus, Shaman moves from one site of freedom and imprisonment to another such site. Freed from the bond to Ronnie, Shaman is able to be content in her own existence through the fulfilment of her greatest desire, which is the maternal relationship. Her sexuality is no longer tied to Ronnie, allowing her to express it as she desires. However, through the loss of Ronnie, she loses the love they once felt for each other, and loses her ties to her national identity. Once again, Shaman is imprisoned by her loneliness. The bittersweet nature of the bizarre end to the novel perfectly demonstrates the bittersweet nature of Independence. Independence, for the South Asian region, comes to be association with the traumatic nature of Partition. Forever tied to the violence of Partition, through independence the newly established nations move from

colonial imprisonment to the imprisonment they feel beneath the shadow of Partition that overlooks the freedom of independence. Thus, the newly independent nations become the final site of freedom and imprisonment that *Terhi Lakir* alludes to in its conclusion.

IN CONCLUSION

Over the course of the three chapters, this thesis has argued the presence of sites that simultaneously accord freedom to the characters through a greater provision of agency, and imprison the characters through the loss of their agency in other spheres. These sites, thus, comfort and frighten the characters. In the first chapter, the thesis established the beginning of sexuality and the fear of desire in the minds of the young protagonists. In doing so, the thesis establishes the unconscious of the character's minds as the primary site functioning in this dual manner. The thesis then argues the disparate nature of the expectations levied on male and female sexualities. Here, I demonstrate how the female characters use their sexuality as a tool for obtaining agency and greater freedom in their prisons of the domestic, spiritual or inner sphere of the region as defined by the nationalist movement. Finally, through examining the symbolic nature of the woman's role in the nationalist movement, the thesis demonstrates how *Terhi Lakir* alters this image through changing the narrative of the symbol and transforming the sites of imprisonment to ones of freedom. The above discussion of *Terhi Lakir* and *Lihaaf*, thus, depicts the ever-changing nature of these sites and power hierarchies in society and the household. Through this discussion, the thesis demonstrates the use of female sexuality as a tool for obtaining power, and for altering the narrative of the nationalist movement.

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