

Lights, Camera and Literature: Exploring the film world through Ismat Chughtai's work 'Ajeeb Aadmi' and 'Sone ki Chidiya'

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Abstract; The intersection of literature and cinema has always been a space where imagination meets visual storytelling diversity. Ismat Chughtai, an Indian Urdu writer of the time of writers' movement, was a fearless and bold feminist writer. She was bold enough to explore the reality of women experiences and life journey in the aspect of female gaze through literature, making her a feminine icon at that time of the post-independence era in India. She had a unique perspective and approach in her works that intersect the film gaze, leading to an empowering establishment. Through her works "Ajeeb Aadmi" and "Sone Ki Chidiya", Chughtai offers a deeply personal and different exploration of the film world, removing its glory outer surface to reveal the dark reality, vulnerabilities and human exploitation behind the camera. These stories reflect her gaze to the patriarchal society and male dominance through the cinematic storyline. These cinemas of her time mirror her exposing mindset to challenge myths and question the system, making her significantly distinct from other writers. Her work in these films revolves around women, involving their societal resistance and experiences. In her novel "Ajeeb Aadmi", she portrayed an emotionally turbulent relationship between a celebrated and famous film director and a rising actress. Barely based on real-life characters, the story does not escape from showing the emotional

messiness and vulnerability of different lives. The characters and their internal relationships are complicated, making it neither approachable nor neglected. The film world Chughtai portrays in the film is not just a story setting but the real complexes that are hidden. The characters are often indifferent to the people who feed their lives with passion and dreams. On the other hand, the film “Sone Ki Chidiya” belongs to the exploitation of women in the male-dominated societal norms, demonstrated through her lens in cinema. It follows the journey of an orphan girl whose talent and luck made her a famous movie star. In the journey of her struggleful life, she later realises that she is just a mean of commodification to her own family and to the film industry she belongs to. Here, the movie name “Sone Ki Chidiya”, in English, “Golden Bird” has a powerful relativity to the cinema. It explores success and fame but also captures exploitation and loss of self-worth. Through her narrative, Chughtai portrays a deeply empathetic view of silent struggles behind fame, especially for women who are objectified and often discarded after profit. The strategy that makes both stories an inspiration as well as an exposure, is Chughtai’s strong and critical perspective through glory and darkness. She does not romanticise the film industry, but portrays the reality without any disguise. The line that connects art and life, creates a blurry inflammation buried under the world of success and fame. This study examines Chughtai’s feminist perspective on the film industry through “Sone Ki Chidiya” and “Ajeeb Aadmi”. She highlights the costs of stardom, and the silent traumas endured to achieve it.

Keywords: Ismat Chughtai, Urdu Literature, Indian Cinema, Ajeeb Aadmi, Sone Ki Chidiya, female narratives, cinematic realism.

Introduction

This study involves the dynamic intersection of literature and cinema through the lens of Ismat Chughtai, offering preserved and transformed cultural narratives.

Ismat Chughtai, an Indian Urdu writer and filmmaker, masterfully portrays the world of cinema, its characters, and its complexities (Mishra, 2023) Through the in-depth research of her work, this study explores the dynamic power structure, reality of society, and internal conflicts within the glamorous but eventually exploitative reality of film production houses. Her analysis of power dynamics and perspective on the lives involved in the whole process is well portrayed, and her writing reflects and critiques the film industry, producing a critical perspective on the glamorous world of the film industry. One of the famous and significant Urdu writers who offered bold and fearless contributions to exploring the facts of gender, caste and sexuality in society is Ismat Chughtai. Her writings intersected with cinematography and made a huge impact in the film industry portraying social conflicts and discrimination through her novel "Ajeeb Aadmi" and the film "Sone Ki Chidiya".

Ismat Chughtai, a bold writer of the times of the writer's movement, holds a significant role in Urdu literature. Her writings such as short stories especially involved women executing their lifestyle, emotional dependency and explanation of taboos in the society. It particularly focuses on challenging societal issues including female roles and responsibility in the patriarchal society of India (Sivakumar & Manimekalai, 2021) Her contribution as a writer plays a pivotal role

in feminism and her works influenced other female writers to execute all the experiences and social injustice women are put through in society. That feminist aspect made her a feminine idol to other writers. Chughtai's working style and approach were revolutionary in the socio-literary landscape of Urdu literature. She explored the everyday experiences of women regarding female sexuality, class inequality, and the hypocrisy of the middle class through relatable characters and a realistic setting. Chughtai's diverse area of work includes controversial and conservative topics such as the themes of homosexuality, and sexual exploitation, and addressing caste and class in the aspects of gendered identity.

Indian cinema holds a pivotal role and a unique cultural space where fantasy and reality diverge the plot by coexisting. That makes it both a dreamscape for aspiration and hope and the battleground of social conflicts. Every cinema context involves a wide range of perspectives and a source of collective information offering favourable glamour, heroic characters and emotionally charged storyline. However, the glitter and glamour cover the in-depth structure of the film industry marked by gender bias, class discrimination, nepotism and dominating authorities. The industry mostly portrays the stereotypical and patriarchal norms of society. Examining the dual nature of Indian cinema, the deeper insight of how a cinema offers impactful and influencing presence exhibits both an escape from and a reflection of societal struggles.

Objectives

To understand how Chughtai represents the film industry through her works.

To examine the influence of autobiographical details on the creative narrative in Chughtai's movies.

To analyze the roles given to women and their ability to act in Chughtai's movies.

To examine how Chughtai portrays the 'magic' and disappointments associated with the film industry.

The novel "Ajeeb Aadmi" and the film "Sone Ki Chidiya" can be observed when analyzing the film industry's power structure, including producers, directors, actors, and actresses. Chughtai's writings show insight into the personal relationship of filmmakers exploring the darker aspects of the film industry. They can analyze how gender and sexuality are portrayed in films, including women and their roles, through this study. This study explores the work habits of Ismat Chughtai by merging literary and cinematic aspects.

In the mid-20th century, the Indian film industry, revolutionary writing and cinematography illuminated women's experiences and societal challenges (Ahmed, 2025) Ismat Chughtai portrayed women's reflection through the challenges and complexities in the film industry through her novel "Ajeeb Aadmi" and the film "Sone Ki Chidiya". Ajeeb Aadmi (The Strange Man) tells the story of Dharam Dev, a well-known film director and his complicated relationships with women. Because of his infatuation with Zarina, a young dancer, his marriage to Mangala, a well-known playback singer, is destroyed. In the end, he headed to excess grief and loneliness and died of an overdose after being abandoned by Zarina. The novel explores the dynamics of the film industry, the expectation of a woman (Zarina) in a male-dominated industry, and how women are often objectified and exploited, showcasing the destructive nature of these factors on individuals and their relationships.

The film "Sone Ki Chidiya" (Golden Bird) tells the story of a young girl, Lakshmi, who belongs to a poor family and strikes it lucky when she becomes a massive film star or heroine. Therefore, she falls in love with her co-star and gets heartbroken when she learns that he is only interested in her wealth and prosperity. The film portrays a woman's role in the family and society and how her talented traits and earning potential can be used to satisfy the desires or greed of others, even her own family. This reflects the dark aspect of the impact of the film industry on women's lives.

In "Ajeeb Aadmi", the writer Ismat Chughtai's authorial gaze is highly introspective and psychological. The narrative voice of the novel reveals the inner lives of the characters, especially women exposing their experiences, expectations, suppressed desires and psychological conflicts. The writer also reflects on the visual gaze of the novel on the film industry presenting stages of suffering and resilience as well as the dominating superficial characters, blind to understanding the emotional complexity of women.

In the film "Sone Ki Chidiya", the screenplay presents the challenging and emotional journey of the female protagonist from exploitation to resistance. Through dialogues and scripting structures, Chughtai critiques the moral hypocrisy of a society that worships female stars on screen while exploiting them off-screen. The visual gaze of the film through the camera angles, music and close-ups linger around Lakshmi's beauty and empathise with her suffering rather than focusing on her pain. Literature plays a significant role in portraying unique perspectives of feminist, Marxist and postcolonial literary criticism that shapes social authority structure. Feminist literary criticism focuses on gender, gender roles and power

dynamics in literature and how the female characters are represented and their experiences in the patriarchal society (Meeran, 2024) literary criticism focuses on analyzing the class struggle, economic system and social discrimination through literature executing how economic flexibility shapes the characters or the narratives. Whereas postcolonial readings examine the effect of colonialism, cultural identity and the power structure of colonised societies and how it is represented in literature. By examining those approaches, the social, cultural and historical structure can be analysed in-depth.

An interdisciplinary approach through literature, cinema, and gender studies offers a comprehensive study of how gender and sexuality hold a pivotal role in social and cultural structure. (Benshoff & Griffin, 2021) An extensive study of the way the literature portrays its male and female characters and how their role reflects in the aspect of dominating or gender bias is a form of methodology as an interdisciplinary approach. The cinema is a great approach as the film itself contributes in terms of presenting or showcasing gender inequality, authority dominance and gender stereotypes. The extended study of different community power structures and how they can shape or revolve the experiences can leave a simplified version of the study.

The Silver Screen in Shadow Contextualising the Film World

The study explores the evolution of Hindi cinema in the postcolonial time or after the independence from British rule over India. Following India's independence in

1947, Hindi cinema evolved from reflecting the colonial structure to addressing societal issues that portray Indian social structure and its massive diversity to cultural and social norms making Indian cinema a global sensation (Sheth et al., 2021) Countless millions have been treated over the decades to the glamorous, music-laden, star-saturated narratives of Hindi-language narrative cinema colloquially dubbed "Bollywood. But beneath the glitz of the silver screen is a dark and often uncomfortable story. Behind the glitzy veneer of the film industry lies a darker reality built on power dynamics, gender bias, and institutional abuse. Especially for women, getting to stardom often involves compromise, objectification, and taking the high road on abuse. Women have been marginalized in traditional cinematic roles portrayed as decorative figures, submissive wives, and girlfriends, or put into a secondary position to the male lead and the industry has long valorised male power and authority, both on and off the screen.

The purpose of this section is first to contextualise the socio-cultural and industrial structures of the film world that Ismat Chughtai engages with critically in her screenwriting. The film looks at the socio-political climate of Bollywood in the mid-20th century when this space was simultaneously a zone of opportunities and a place of well-rooted disparities. Recognising the interplay of gender in fame, labour and storytelling embedded in Indian cinema allows us to better grasp the subversive brilliance of all that Chughtai smuggled into her films that opened up the nature of both the artistic labour of the film world and the reality of repression and resistance that lurked beneath that glittering facade.

In the early post-colonial period, Hindi cinema began to explore the themes of societal, discrimination over caste, creed, gender inequality, and class structure and executed the social injustice and struggle of the lower class of Indian society. The "Golden Era" of Indian cinema spanned from the 1940s to the 1960s. This period has achieved the 'Golden' for its significant and impressive contribution that includes the evolution of parallel cinema, legendary direction and acting of legendary directors and actors. The parallel cinema emphasises the realism of Indian society and culture making it a key feature of this period. Directors such as Guru Dutt, Satyajit Ray, and Ritwik Ghatak and legendary actors and actresses such as Raj Kapoor, Dilip Kumar, Nargis, Madhubala and so on left a great impact in the world of cinema by their portraying style and attractive captivating performances (Vijayan et al. 2025). Additionally, the great musical excellence of legendary composers and singers such as Kishore Kumar, Mohammad Rafi, Lata Mangeshkar and so on continued the evolutionary journey of Indian cinema.

Mumbai or Bombay city is referred as "City of Dreams", an aspiration or hope of many people building their career with lots of opportunities. Being the execution place of Hindi cinema or 'Bollywood', Mumbai is a city of mixed cultured and diverse population. It is also a city of a financial and commercial hub in India that attracts people all over India for employment and business opportunities.

Eventually, Mumbai involves many challenges in the case of the economic structure and infrastructure issues as the living cost is high enough compared to other metropolitan cities, congestion of traffic and shortage of housing due to overpopulation. The residents or the 'Bollywood' aspirant have to live the reality of the city with so many challenges rather than fantasizing about the city. The

presence of female idolized characters are often portrayed as 'muses' as male protagonists or as 'martyrs' in male agency-focused stories. Onscreen archetypes such as the vamp, the virgin, and the goddess symbolize different facets of female idols and power. The vamp majorly addresses seductively impressing women who can manipulate others with her charm. The vamp portrays a powerful woman who is not celebrated in society but exists with deliberate grace. Sexuality is her weapon of power and for that, she is both scared and abandoned. They reflect the deep and dark context of time stepping out of traditional feminine roles (Rogers et al., 2021) In classic narratives, she plays the role of sexual liberation and female independence. In the on-screen archetypes, the vamps are the so-called dangerous women with power and elegance. In contrast, the virgin represents purity, innocence, and a divine connection. The female characters portray innocent, and humble presence on screen being a powerful symbol of resistance. The characters are often sweet, silent and good in the eyes of society and play the role of a girl with morality, who waits for love to find her. Her role is simple and wanted to be loved, admired and protected. This traditional femininity involves innocence and selflessness, not existing in their truth but led by male entities. The 'goddess' archetype presents the bold and powerful female figures associated with nature, fertility and the power of wisdom. This woman are idealised and worshipped even but not touchable. They represent beauty, grace and wisdom, inspiring and encouraging other people to have dignity and divinity.

The silver screen of the film industry glows with glamour, luxury, the glittery sparkle of the limelight and stories of love. But behind the glow, a slum behind-the-scene reality lies with spread aspect. The subtle exploitation gets the women

trapped in the illusional contrary (Nicoleta , 2022). Despite modernisation, the dominant authority and gender inequality still exist in the Indian film industry in real life. Casting couch culture of casting someone, especially women for a role in the play or movie in exchange for sexual favours. For many women, the fame comes with stings. That is particularly heartbreak to know that success might not come because of talent and hard efforts but despite what you can tolerate offer in return. While male actors establish a distinguished role, female actresses are easily replaceable. In the case of opportunity, junior artists or dancers work and practice very hard to get a quality amount of pay to continue their life in the big busy city. Nepotism and personal networking have become a big issue for not acquiring actual talented artists and the dismissed opportunity turns life differently (Jeong et al., 2021). Very limited agencies welcome freshers or outcomes and demand personal favours or a massive amount of money to build their careers or to get the opportunity.

The storytelling of Ismat Chughtai portrays the woman's voice and feminist points of view. Her notable works include translating books from Urdu to English and some heavy-weight stories to society. The study of Ismat Chughtai's writings, translated by Rakhshanda Jalil, aims to accentuate the concerns faced by women in the Asian region. Feminism advocates for gender equality across economic, social, and political realms. The literary theory of feminism critiques and evaluates traditional male-dominated structures commonly found in literature. Given that half of the globe's population is effeminate and many women experience depression and inequality, feminism provides a framework for understanding these challenges. It promotes equal rights for both genders and opposes discrimination.

As a prominent mid-20th century Indian Urdu writer, she depicted women's real-life scenarios. Her literature often focused on class relations and women's oppression. "Lihaaf," one of her famous works, addressed sexuality and lesbianism, earning both criticism and fame, and led to an obscenity trial. The story critiques women's restricted roles and mocks male society's hypocrisy.

Women often face societal evaluation that hinders their ability to perform certain tasks, akin to men. Throughout her career, Chughtai authored plays, novels, short stories, and essays. Among her notable works are the novels "Toba Tek Singh" and "Angarey and Kaghaz ki Kashti," which are acclaimed for their realistic portrayal. She played an important role in the progressive writers' movement (Jabbar, 2025). Chughtai's contributions have been recognized with prestigious awards such as the Sahitya Akademi Award and the Jnanpith Award for Urdu literature. (Nair, 2012)

Chughtai's contribution is important for its narrative, while the other thinks to go with academics studying. Her representation of women's sexuality in her works is notable for its refusal and frankness to avoid addressing sensitive subjects.

Chughtai placed her character to critique society's perception of the sexual independence of females as a transgression against the establishment of social norms (Ullah et al., 2025). Her sexuality is scrutinized harshly, while she offers a nuanced portrayal of her struggles. By not feeling ashamed of her desires, she challenges the patriarchal control over female sexuality, highlighting the difficulty of her motivations (Jabbar, 2025).

Ajeeb Aadmi: A Portrait of Art, Exploitation, and Illusion

The Guru Dutt and Waheeda Rehman relationship started in Hyderabad in 1955 when the actor cum director expanded his stay in Hyderabad after a collision with

his car. Some notable works for the Dutt-Rahaman pair such as "Kaagaz Ke Phool", "Pyaasa", and "Sahib Bibi aur Ghulam". During a visit to the office of a film distributor in the city, Dutt noticed a young woman exiting a car. The distributor informed him that she was a dancer from the Telugu film industry and had appeared in a dance sequence in the Telugu film "Rojulu Marayi". After meeting Waheeda, Dutt introduced her to the Bollywood industry, debuting her in his film "CID," which was released in 1956. This film, directed by Raj Khosla and produced by Dutt, featured Dev Anand and Rehman performing together for the first time. Waheeda Rehman also recalled that initial meetings in Hyderabad in the book "Guru Dutt: A Life in Cinema" written by Nasreen Munni Kabir. Rehman mentioned, "When I first met him, I didn't think he was a famous and great director because he spoke very little. He asked me a few questions, and I assumed that all he wanted to know was whether I spoke Urdu correctly. The meeting lasted for about half an hour, and then I returned with my family to Madras". After a screen test in Bombay, Rehman was signed for a three-year contract in Hindi films. While shooting the first film, Dutt began the production of the next film, "Pyaasa," featuring Rehman as Gulab. Gulab was one of the challenging roles for Rehman as this was her second Hindi film. The Gulab and Dutt collaboration worked on many films such as "Chaudhvin Ka Chand," "noon," and "Kala Bazar" (Press Trust of India, 2023)

Ismat Chughtai also wrote about the film industry and her boldness is reflected in her writing. Her novel "Ajeeb Aadmi" (A Very Strange Man) is about the brilliant producer cum director Dharamdev, his singer wife Mangala, and his love affair with Zarina who is also an actress. The lives of three people ended up destroying

nature. The main characters were easily recognizable; she smartly presented how power and money work in the film industry in her writing (Gupta, 2018). The story is told from the point of view of a young woman whose name is Shahzadi, who is pulled into the messy, glamorous world of Bombay cinema through her connection with Gul, a brilliant and creative film director. Shahzadi is shocked, fascinated, and slowly disillusioned by the people around her. Gul is presented as a strongly conflicted man, torn between his wife Najma (who is the symbol of loyalty, tradition, and emotional grounding) and his obsessive fascination with the younger actress Zareen. He wants to mould Zareen into a superstar and a probable version of his ideal woman. Gul's life was frozen in a loveless but socially respectable marriage with his life partner Najma yet has vanished into the background of Gul's life. He becomes obsessively mad about Zareen, whom he wants to make into his ideal woman.

In Ismat Chughtai's novel *Ajeeb Aadmi*, Anjali and Shammi are significant supporting characters. While they do not place main characters, such as Najma, Gul, or Zareen, they play important narrative functions and aid the main characters. Shammi is an extrovert, vibrant, and funny character in the Bombay film industry. She plays the role of comic relief, but also plays straightforwardly in many scenarios, not afraid to raise her voice. She comments on the insignificance of the film industry and male-female dynamics, often with biting humour. Unlike Najma or Zareen, Shammi does not fall into emotional traps, she knows well how to survive in a male-dominated industry without romantic delusions. Anjali is portrayed as a high-class, elegant modern woman who is composed, intelligent, and emotionally restrained. Her function in the story is more symbolic than

dramatic. Her interactions with Gul and others in the film industry reveal that she does not care about male validation, nor is she impressed by reputation or power. Both characters are portrayed as diverse female experiences in a fame-obsessed, male-centric world.

Colourism and discrimination against individuals with darker skin affect millions of professionals globally. Bollywood, India's largest and most influential film industry, has historically been both passively aware of colourism and actively engaged in upholding certain ideals and honour (Dueholm, 2024) While Bollywood is a significant component of India's renowned art scene, it consistently attempts to reflect Indian culture and its various influences. Cinema often illuminates diverse ideologies, with mainstream films playing a pivotal role in influencing and moulding public perceptions and thought processes. It can be argued that films serve as a reflective mirror of society rather than directly influencing it (Weng et al. 2021).

Women worldwide have excelled in various fields, yet in India, achieving the same status as men remains a daunting challenge due to societal structures. Bollywood, entrenched in a male-centric paradigm, has endeavored to depict women's issues pragmatically. "Sexual objectification" of women is prevalent in Hindi cinema, often manifested through "item numbers"—dance sequences included primarily to attract male audiences, with little relevance to the film's narrative. In Indian society, women are frequently constrained from asserting their positions and freely expressing their thoughts and are expected to conform to patriarchal norms (FERNANDES, 2024)

Film serves as a medium of resistance, voice, and a platform for cultural change. Contemporary directors such as R. Balki, Nagraj Manjule, and Vetrimaaran are challenging stereotypes by raising pertinent questions related to marginalization. Visual metaphors play a significant role in conveying complex meanings within narratives. Directors employ visual symbols, images, and other elements to encapsulate the essence, theme, and spirit of their stories. This study posits that through metaphoric representation and symbols, films provide insights into the social construction of gender and caste identities. Metaphoric expression involves describing an object or person by referring to something with analogous qualities. Johnson (1987) posits that "Metaphorical projection is one fundamental means by which we project structure, make new connections, and remould our experience." Metaphors serve not only as linguistic instruments but also as catalysts for action and thought. Characters and films employ metaphors to navigate through contrasting or similar scenarios (Zibin & Altakhaineh, 2023). Indian films have portrayed the realities of caste issues in India, addressing inter-caste marriage conflicts, untouchability, and tensions between upper and lower castes (Swamy, 2022).

Film studios of the time likely gave little thought, let alone gathered intelligence on the far-flung and diverse colonial audiences. In the film "Ajeeb Aadmi", the Bombay film studios are not just a workplace but also a symbolic space where roles are frequently performed. The division between crafted personality and real identity is especially observable in the females who must fit into roles such as glamorous models, obedient wives, and loyal poets. Zareen's rise to stardom is seductive, but it comes with the cost of being controlled and commodified. "Class

mobility" is real but conditional on compliance and performance. Gul, despite being successful, keeps spiritually and emotionally poor, after being successful in the studio theatre does not equal fulfilment. People such as Gul who is a director operate not only films but also the lifestyles and identities of the females around him.

In "Ajeeb Aadmi", the author explains how business destroys the creative mindset. Filmmaking, which should be a collaborative artistic pursuit, is instead depicted as a power struggle dominated by directors like Gul who use their power not to promote talent, but rather to commodify and own it. Zareen, a younger dancer who turned into an actress, was celebrated initially. But instead of getting support, she was used only for marketing purposes. Her artistic talents turned into a product, not a personal expression. Her success or failure was entirely controlled by Gul, who treats her as a property, not a collaborator. Gul is both a dictator and an artist, can recognize raw talent but fails to respect it. Chughtai explained very well how male directors destroy female talent. According to the author, women pay emotional and psychological costs in return for commercial success. It is a wider feminist allegory about how capitalist and patriarchal systems appropriate and destroy female creativity for male advancement. Gul's downfall is not tragic in a classical sense; he is responsible for his downfall. In the end, the writer concludes that females suffer, adapt or resist but the men remain unchanged.

Sone ki Chidiya – The Golden Bird as Gilded Cage

The film's title "Sone Ki Chidiya" resembles the plot as the golden bird means a quality source of wealth and prosperity. The plot of the 1958 Hindi film is based on a young girl's life story of exploitation. The main character of the film,

Lakshmi, was thrown to live with the family of a distant relative who was a married man, Danpat Rai with his wife, a son, Raghunath, with his wife and three children and another alcoholic and gambler, his younger son, Balram. She was treated as a maid-servant of the family. The alcoholic son of the family attempts to sell her to a goon against his debt but she manages to escape from there and dramatically gets a chance to play the role of a singer or actress in a theatre. Over time, she becomes a famous and successful actress with much wealth and falls in love with a journalist, Amar. When she decided to move along with him and his family, she came to know the harsh reality of being penniless through a signed contract by Balram. She also became overwhelmed with grief and mental breakdown, knowing that Amar was only attracted to her wealth and was not in love with her. The life journey of Lakshmi highlights how being an orphan with a bad financial condition can destroy morality and the means of living. Lakshmi was treated as a maidservant in return for food and shelter which showcased hypocritical societal standards criticizing middle-class morality. It also shows how close people, especially women, can be an instrument of abuse. The younger son was so morally depraved that it became inhumane to sell someone to clear a debt and for alcohol. Later, he also took advantage of her stardom and financial stability without caring for others. Chughtai has portrayed realistic experiences through the film with the shed of emotional, financial and sexual exploitation of women in both society and the film industry. It showcases the hard reality behind the glittery world of the cinema industry that includes only greed, profit and commodification of real talent. The character of Lakshmi evolves from a dominated and abused orphan girl to an independent and successful woman who seeks affection and self-

worth over fame. As a feminist writer, Chughtai portrayed the whole movie with critique, giving a way for the women to improve their situation.

"Sone Ki Chidiya" is not just a film with a dramatic storyline but also the "expressed perspective of the writer Ismat Chughtai as a feminist in the patriarchal society of India. Through portraying Lakshmi's life story, she wanted to showcase how a normal girl can be disrespected, dominated, abused and later exploited by her own family. This film explores how society objectifies and commodifies women by being inhumane and the film mirrors Chughtai's sensibilities regarding gender, social inequality and patriarchy in Indian society. Through portraying the character of Lakshmi, Chughtai took a moral responsibility to expose the discrimination and injustice towards women with no context, just to dominate (Mukhopadhyay, 2024) She created a sensible perspective throughout the film by addressing social taboos, women's suppressed desire, controlling life and domestic violence by the dominating and judgmental male entities. Lakshmi was forced to be an earner of the family that only values her earning potential or sees it as an economic asset. This reflects the domestic emotional unavailability and pressure on women with social expectations. The film "Sone Ki Chidiya" reflects the writer Ismat Chughtai's sensibilities through its dynamic and powerful portrayal of a woman battling against exploitation and reclaiming self-worth. Through Chughtai's bold and powerful feminine writing, the film explores the emotional trauma faced by the main character of the film, Lakshmi throughout her journey to success. Her emotional harassment by being treated as a commodity questioned her self-worth, becoming a past trauma she experienced from her own family. Lakshmi's struggle for independence reflects Chughtai's core insights into female agency, social

hypocrisy and gender bias. In the post-independence era of 1958, the movie also involves Chughtai's disillusionment of shown spectacles that left women behind in progress. Through Lakshmi, Chughtai raised her voice to gender inequality and male-dominated societal norms with deep empathy.

Lakshmi is a poor orphan girl who lives in a poverty-driven filthy family in the movie "Sone Ki Chidiya". The only person who treats Lakshmi with kindness is the father of the house. Balram, who is desperate for alcohol, sends her out on an errand and tries to sell her by kidnapping in return for money. However, she manages to escape from there and blunders onto the stage of a theatre. The manager rectified her singing ability and her beauty impressed a renowned director which led her to be chosen as a heroine for a film. Her entry into the film industry was not by her passion but her commodified beauty which can bring a lot of wealth and prosperity. The audience soon became attracted by her charming appearance which filled her with fame and wealth in a short period. The physical appearance or the charm was a tool for gaining more money for the family she lived in. Her family exploits her earnings and treats her as a source of money or asset. Soon, she is disillusioned with fame and realizes that her beauty is just a commodity to her family.

The term "fallen woman" trope was a critique from the writer Ismat Chughtai's perspective, showcasing her sensibility to feminism. The 'fallen woman' typically addresses a widow or desperate, abandoned woman who is portrayed as a moral or societal failure. The main character of the film, Lakshmi, struggles a lot for her success and fame, but unfortunately, is treated as an asset by her own family without even accepting her as a family member. During the time of her struggle in

the film industry, she fell in love with a journalist named Amar who also had eyes on her wealth and prosperity seeking his future in the film industry through Lakshmi. In this context, Lakshmi is exploited by social abuse and exploitation not by her choice. Her fall was the fall from innocence and observing reality that also exploited her mental health. Chughtai critiques the social terms such as 'fallen woman' that are subjectified to impurity and scum. The term 'fallen woman' addressing Lakshmi, does not make her image fall but it was her expectation and luck which has crushed her by the commodification placed upon her.

In the film “Sone Ki Chidiya”, the director prompted the film context with the impactful use of lighting, song, and mise-en-scène to depict the entrapment of the characters through the scenes of both emotions and tragedy. In the black-and-white era of Bollywood, the use of low and sober lighting, melancholic music or soothing songs defines the characters and scenes with different plots. The music or the sound effects that play in the background play a vital role in expressing and making the audience understand the emotions and feelings of the characters (Rahman et al., 2022) lyrics of the songs directly connect the conveyance of the characters through singing out with different expressions and emotions. Therefore, comes the mise-en-scène that ultimately represents the context of the scene, visually engaging different walls or fences demonstrating different places and other things such as candles, cages and so on that have a particular significance to the scene.

The film industry in India or Bollywood back then was rising, becoming the 'golden era' from the early 1940s to the late 1960s. The 'Glamour as violence clothed in velvet' is a criticising metaphor for the film industry that is fascinated

with glamour and often involves violence in a velvety way. The members of the industry present the dazzling charm, luxurious lifestyle and wealthy appearance. Glamour in Bollywood symbolises charming presence, success and fame. The 'velvet' texture of the cloth represents the smooth cover of the darker aspects of the industry such as exploitation, abuse and mental harassment or violation. In the context of the film, Chughtai demonstrates the emotional strategy of Lakshmi in her stardom era. The way Lakshmi suffered and struggled to be successful does not only include her screen appearance and continued efforts but also the exploitation by the producer, director and managers of the film industry. She was appreciated for her beauty, glamour and extravagant life, but in reality, she lived alone with a lot of stress which brought on a mental breakdown. The phrase here comes with a meaning that defines the shown glamorous velvety life that covers the violence in her life both psychological and professional.

The phrase "golden bird" defines a bird of gold as a source of wealth, prosperity and success. The film "Sone Ki Chidiya" itself presents the same inner meaning of the phrase, portraying the struggle and stressful journey of Lakshmi towards success. The movie is studied as both aspiration and imprisonment in a literary context. The metaphor "golden bird" symbolises a successful and wealthy life with fame and fortune. It is an aspiration to many other people as Lakshmi is a symbol of hope and escaping from pain and suffering can lead to success and fame.

Throughout the whole movie, Lakshmi is commodified and exploited by her distinct relatives and the film industry later. The people used her as an asset like a bird of gold, being a source of wealth. But she was caged by her expectations, denied personal freedom and emotional suffocation caused by all the people in her

life. Unfortunately, Lakshmi became a medium of commodity with her charming appearance and got abused by her family symbolising imprisonment even though she was successful and wealthy. The stardom that elevates her also imprisons her. She wanted to escape from her cage of fame, to know her self-worth and find true love. The luxury and achievement become a velvety disguise for her mental and economic violence. The metaphor thus expresses Ismat Chughtai's critical view of how women are often trapped and commodified by manipulation, especially in a patriarchal society. In this way, "Golden Bird" becomes a haunting reality of a dream exposed by Chughtai's feminine concern to the women about agency, freedom and the cost of fame in a world of social hypocrisy.

In the film "Sone Ki Chidiya", the loss of innocence and ethical erosion are central to the life journey of the main character Lakshmi, through the machinery of fame. The storyline of the whole film depicts the journey of a poor orphan girl becoming a star in the cinema industry. The core character of the film, Lakshmi, has purity, innocence and trust in others as well as the adopting family members. She entered the film industry having hope and talent, but becoming a movie star and attaining success, made her an asset to be controlled, marketed and benefited. Her family members prioritised her wealth over her, caring nothing about her or accepting her as a family member. These actions showcase how fame often buries the values of a human. Getting betrayed, abused and exploited by them over time breaks her trust and destroys her innocence. Being a famous actress in the film industry, she continues her glorious image towards the outer world, neglecting her social, and mental independence and emotional needs. Even her love life was just a harsh commercial relationship tested by ethical compromises.

Double Exposures Comparative Thematic Analysis

In the film "Sone Ki Chidiya", directed by Shaheed Latif and written by Ismat Chughtai, a feminist writer portrays the dominant patriarchal society over women through the life journey of the film's main character, Lakshmi. Throughout the whole film, the struggle of Lakshmi portrays how female characters subvert or succumb to systematic pressure. The film explores how women navigate and resist or continue to bear the systematic pressure in a male-dominated society, both physically and mentally. The first part of the film portrays Lakshmi, an orphan girl who was thrown by her relatives to another distant relative who also refused to accept her and give shelter as she was parentless. She was being treated as a maidservant in return for food and shelter. The younger alcoholic son of the family wanted to sell her at any cost that fulfilled his debt and continued his alcoholism. However, she managed to escape from that. Being homeless, there was no choice for her father to be subverted or succumbed to by her distant relatives. Despite situations of resistance, Lakshmi often felt manipulated, first by her distant relatives and later by the film industry as they objectified her. After escaping from her family, she entered the film industry to live a life of her own choice but she experienced disillusionment with her fame and stardom that highlights how women are only commodified by her beauty and achievements. Ultimately, her life as well as the woman's life are frequently controlled by the patriarchal society that uses their strength and talent to control her freedom and financial stability.

Chughtai, an Indian Urdu feminist writer has always portrayed the reality of women's life strategy in the male-dominated system (Jabbar, 2025). Rather than idolizing the woman's strength and talent, she chose to portray the comprehensive

life journey, abuse, resistance and discrimination faced by every single woman in the patriarchal society. Being emotionally vulnerable, women often desire to escape reality and lead a life of freedom that is snatched by society itself. The writer, Chughtai has not symbolised her but portrays her struggleful life seeking love and selfhood that is like many other women in our society. She portrayed the character of Lakshmi who was resisted and suppressed by many structural violence to amplify a critique of the societal dominating conditions. In the era of glamour and modelized women in cinema, Chughtai reflects the woman as Lakshmi who is strong but vulnerable. Her approach shows a male-centric recital where the actions of women evolved. In the film "Sone Ki Chidiya", the story revolves around Lakshmi, the protagonist of her own story. Through the lens of Chughtai, the reality of a woman's personal conflicts and professional life is explored by criticizing the broad patriarchal mindset of people. Even the success mirrored the exploitation and commodification of her beauty and efforts. The struggle and stressful life journey of Lakshmi to her stardom, financial stability, emotional support and freedom to live depicts the real stories of women as a survivor in the discriminated world.

The theme of the dual lives of actors and actresses is properly demonstrated in the film "Sone Ki Chidiya" through the lens of the writer Ismat Chughtai. The film highlights the sharp distinction between the glamorous and luxurious public image and the private despite exploitation. Chughtai's perspective and workstyle reveal a glittery delusion of the film industry by exposing the amount of exploitation, and physical and psychological effort it takes to succeed as a woman through the character of Lakshmi. Entering the film industry, Lakshmi was named 'Neelam'

and achieved great success working with famous actors such as Raj Kapoor and successful directors of the industry. She lives the life of a successful movie star as she was loved, admired and celebrated by her fans but this public stardom has no impact on her personal desirable life. She built another form of herself being happy to the outer world to hide her affectionless personal life that is constructed with past traumas and emotional loneliness. The film critiques how the world of cinema showcases itself as a place of art, productivity and acquisition of talent hiding its darker aspects of systematic exploitation, especially for women. While Lakshmi's acting talent and screen appearance are celebrated, the rewards are tasted by her dominating distant family members who do not even accept her as a family member. The romanticized characters she played on screen had no single glimpse into her personal life as she was also exploited by her partner, Amar, a journalist, who was attracted to her wealth only, not in love with her.

Chughtai had broadened the critique of patriarchal societal systems in the film “Sone Ki Chidiya” demonstrating the role of men in the character of both enabler and abuser. The narrative of the film plays a vital role in understanding the patriarchal status quo which is also preserved in the film industry as well as in society. Through her lens and perspective, she portrays male characters with different complexities and psychological inequality. Lakshmi's guardian who should accept and protect her, exploited her as an asset who would bring wealth and prosperity, except Danpat Rai, the head of the family was included. He accepted Lakshmi as a family member and wanted to guide her through tough times. In opposition, the other members of the family abused her with physical and mental trauma. Specifically, the younger gambler and alcoholic son of the family

abused her by managing to sell her for money to continue his alcoholism. The abusive mindset was so inhumane that it left the audience sympathetic to Lakshmi. Later, the male-dominated system in the film industry also demonstrated abusive male characters including the producers, directors and managers of 'heroine' Lakshmi. They represent how the authorities exploit her charm and stardom for benefit without caring a little for her well-being. The character Amal initially addresses his empathy for Lakshmi's emotional pain and traumas. However, his love for Lakshmi was conditional as he refused her for her public profession, being judgemental and controlling. Chughtai's perspective of male characters in the film shows how love, guardian hood and partnership are equipped to maintain the patriarchal status quo.

To explore Ismat Chughtai's narrative authority versus the voyeurism of cinema through her written novel and film, "Sone Ki Chidiya" and "Ajeeb Aadmi", the distinct perspective and real characteristics of the storyline are significant. This is investigable to understand her critique and presenting sensational agency of female characters. In contrast, the Hindi cinema of that time was rising with rich Indian culture and tradition making the 'Golden Era' of Bollywood or Hindi film industry (Davids, 2023). It mainly prioritises the male perspective and female characters are just a side role of male ones rather than integrating with the characters. In "Sone Ki Chidya" the storyline lingers around the female protagonist, Lakshmi, who was exploited by her own family and the film industry later. This gaze offers the emotional resistance and struggle of Lakshmi. Chughtai writes with sympathy over Lakshmi's experience and critiques the exploitation that society caused her. The film participates in voyeurism by portraying her struggle and commodified life on the

film screen. In the context of the film “Ajeeb Aadmi”, the literature gaze through Chughtai’s writing explores the obsession to stardom, seeking advantage and betrayal that centres women in the film world. She critiques male obsession and the fame advantage of women. As a film, the male character portrays his toxic desire to consume the female characters that show women suffering and breaking down in silence in a glamorous world.

The whole study involves the critique of the feminist writer Ismat Chughtai on the patriarchal system and dominating tendency over women over the years, both in professional and personal life (Rani et al., 2024) Chughtai used literature to showcase the reality of women in society by portraying their challenges and experiences including desire, freedom, authority and struggle to adjust to the patriarchal norms. Unlike the glamorous and entertaining on-screen visuals, the literature allows any perspective or gaze to be explored in depth, complexities and narrative control. Chughtai's female characters in stories or novels like 'Lihaf', 'Sone Ki Chidiya', 'Ajeeb Aadmi' and others explore the female desire and dissatisfaction in their life being dominated and ignored, both mentally and psychologically. This segment claims the typical female objectification in visual culture, whereas the literature reveals dominant narratives re-centring the female voice. The literature acts as an expression of female subjectivity, resistance and redefinition. Through female perspectives, Chughtai redefines the female experiences over male experiences through a female-centric storyline and subversive method but portraying sympathy, feelings and autonomous thinking.

Conclusion -Ismat Chughtai has implemented the critical disclosure of female experiences and perspectives, exploring the core insight on female representation

in a male-dominated society. Through the films "Sone Ki Chidiya" and "Ajeeb Aadmi", Chughtai expressed critique towards the exploitative and commodified nature of success, authority, fame and financial precedence. While her stories linger around women, full of desire, suffering and resistance, the cinema showcases the same characters as visual objects through a male perspective or gaze. Through her lens into the back screen of the film industry, she exposed the glorious world of stardom and fame as a delusion that contains various exploitation, mental trauma, commodification and the silencing of female characters. Her writing reclaims the female characters as passive desires who grasp fame, love and identity on their terms. Both the works of Ismat Chughtai, "Sone Ki Chidiya" and "Ajeeb Aadmi" critique the illusion of stardom by portraying the female characters both as victims and perpetrators. That critique gaze of Chughtai turns a complex female perspective into consumable visual cinema. Ultimately, Chughtai's writing aspect serves as a bold and powerful act of rewriting stardom to deconstruct it and reclaim the self in the process.

In daring to probe the troubled inner lives of women closer to home here, women who prefer performative creations like cinema over the more introspective medium of literature Ismat spring boards not just into a literary revolution but one over cinematic history as well. So it stands to reason that her bold storytelling in Sone Ki Chidiya and Ajeeb Aadmi would be interventions forcibly introducing the female voice in spaces that have soundly relegated it in echoes and mumbles, in quivers or shrieks of restlessness. Facing the lustrous appearance of stardom, Chughtai unravel the multi-faceted lies which drive the machinery of entertainment

business, and expose the ways wherein women are purchased, played around with, and finally thrown away.

Both films focus on the female lead's journey, deviating from typical Bollywood portrayals. These women are complex and human, not idealised victims or changed by romance. The protagonists navigate patriarchy as agents negotiating their path and reclaiming their identities. Their stories reflect a nuanced critique beyond simple victim-perpetrator dynamics.

Chughtai's feminist perspective critiques gender exploitation and challenges cinematic aesthetics. By exposing the illusion of fame and glamour, she questions the foundations of Hindi cinema. The golden bird metaphor in "Sone Ki Chidiya" represents a society lacking freedom and individuality. Women's rise to stardom often means losing their true selves, showing that the glitter of fame hides inner fragility.

This metaphorical framework is even more problematic when seen through the lens of #MeToo, and by extension the larger feminist movements to follow in their footprints around the world. Women across the film industry have shared painful narratives of their experiences with powerful men, as if Chughtai had prophesied their fictional stories. Her lens was at least several decades ahead of its time, predicting the eventual public reckoning with abusive and silencing systems of the creative industries that frequently kept women silent. What she was telling them are not just historical stories in a shell they are the blueprint for understanding the social and emotional consequences of women striving with dreams wrapped up in patriarchal system.

Chughtai's characters evolve from passive to resistive, challenging patriarchal structures and reflecting feminist awakening in *Ajeb Aadmi*. The protagonist transitions from victimhood to questioning and reclaiming agency, emphasizing the ongoing fight for voice and space relevant today.

Writing for Chughtai was not merely an exercise in entertainment; it was an act of defiance. Her work blurs the boundaries between art and activism, with her vivid depictions of women's pain, psychological trauma, and resistance making her voice extraordinarily pertinent for our time. Her narratives are not crafted to appeal to the male gaze but are purposefully unsettling, provocative, and illuminating the darker facets of society. They compel readers and viewers to confront uncomfortable truths about gender, power, and visibility, creating a legacy that is both uniquely hers and universally relevant.

Chughtai's stories challenge conventional notions of empowerment, suggesting that true power lies not in wealth, fame, or male approval, but in women's ability to shape their own narratives. Parker's characters often find themselves entangled in corrosive personal relationships or abusive workplaces, yet their experiences are portrayed through more than just the lens of victimhood. These women navigate the complexities of their exile, expressing individual agency in subtle, subversive ways.

Contemporary Indian cinema shows a discernible shift towards more authentic representations of women's stories. Films like *Lipstick Under My Burkha*, *Thappad*, and *Gangubai Kathiawadi* resonate with Chughtai's pioneering work, addressing themes of agency, heritage, objectification, and resilience. Despite this progress, few modern pieces match the audacity of Chughtai's portrayals. Her

contributions should be celebrated both literarily and critically, serving as both critique and pedagogy. Through her work, she encourages readers to perceive women beyond superficial societal narratives, boldly presenting radical truths.

Chughtai's insistence on the personal as a political act is paramount to her importance. As Audre Lorde articulated, "We can no longer afford to believe that our personal lives are our own," emphasizing that personal suffering, particularly violence such as rape that silences and terrifies us, holds political significance. Women—whether actresses, lovers, wives, or artists—experienced life between public scrutiny and private anguish. Their stories propose that genuine empowerment derives not from rejecting hardship, but from redefining one's truth and selfhood. At the end of the day, "Sone Ki Chidiya" and "Ajeeb Aadmi" are not just stories about women in cinema but narratives of courage against injustice. They remind us that literature and film have the power to change society. Ismat Chughtai's work tackle's themes like commodification, silence, and identity reclaiming, reshaping narrative aesthetics and focusing on marginalized perspectives. Her writing remains influential in feminist criticism, highlighting gender inequality and exploitation in the film industry. In "Ajeeb Aadmi" and "Sone Ki Chidiya", she reveals the harsh realities behind cinema's glamour, exploring female subjectivity within patriarchal norms. Her critiques expose women's suppression and objectification, presenting unfiltered characters and realistic storylines.

The films reflect the issues faced by women today, resonating with movements like #MeToo in Bollywood. Chughtai illustrated the mental and psychological suffering of women trapped in the exploitative film industry. Famous actresses later shared

similar experiences, echoing Chughtai's characters and advocating for bravery and resistance. Her work underscores that these issues persist, emphasizing the power of candid storytelling to reclaim dignity and drive change.

Ismat Chughtai's works show that art transcends beauty or entertainment, becoming a tool for social change. Her narratives give voice to silenced women, portraying them as resilient and strong against societal dominance. She presented raw depictions of women's pain, challenging the industry's neglect. Chughtai's legacy of creating 'women's art' continues to inspire, demonstrating that writing should be courageous and truthful, making literature a refuge of authenticity.

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