



Study of Patriarchal Constraints and Psychological Impacts of Ismat Chughtai's "The Crooked Line"

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Abstract:

Throughout history the patriarchal ideology has influenced women's social, emotional, and psychological experiences, as it provided reinforcement to unequal gender roles and limited women's autonomy. *The Crooked Line* (Tedhi Lakeer) by Ismat Chughtai is a significant novel in the Urdu literature which critically analyzes how patriarchy works and its impact on women's identity and mental health. The writer applies the feminist approach of literary criticism to examine the limitations and psychology of the main character, Shamman, in the context of patriarchy. The study used a qualitative research design adopting a textual and thematic analysis approach to examine the role of institutions, including family, education, marriage, and cultural beliefs, and practices, in perpetuating gender discrimination and psychological distress. The analysis is situated within the feminist theories of Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett and Elaine Showalter which can be used to examine the formation of female identity and the nature of the patriarchy's power. The results indicate that women's educational, social and personal opportunities are restricted in patriarchal structures, which also result in emotionally repressive, lonely, insecure and conflicting identities. At the same time, the novel illustrates the significance of education, self-awareness and critical consciousness as active forms of resistance and empowerment. The study concludes that *The Crooked Line* is still a major feminist work of literature that reveals how patriarchy and psychological oppression are interrelated and is a call for women to be autonomous, self-respecting and free thinkers. Themes remain significant in modern feminist literary studies and gender discussions.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Psychological Impact, Feminist Literary Criticism, Women's Identity, Urdu Literature, Gender Inequality



1. Introduction

Patriarchy has long been recognized as one of the most dominant social systems influencing gender relations across the world. It refers to a hierarchical structure in which men hold primary authority in political, economic, social, and familial institutions, while women are assigned subordinate roles and denied equal access to opportunities and decision-making. Such a system perpetuates gender inequality by regulating women's behavior, limiting their educational and professional advancement, and reinforcing traditional expectations regarding marriage, motherhood, and domestic responsibilities. Although significant progress has been made in promoting gender equality, patriarchal values continue to shape social norms and cultural practices in many societies. Literature has played a crucial role in exposing these inequalities by reflecting women's lived experiences and questioning the ideological foundations of male dominance.

Feminist literary criticism emerged as an important theoretical approach to examine how literary texts represent women and how they either reinforce or challenge patriarchal ideologies. It argues that literature is not merely a reflection of society but also a powerful instrument for resisting gender-based oppression and redefining women's identities. Feminist critics such as Simone de Beauvoir (1949), Kate Millett (1970), and Elaine Showalter (1977) have demonstrated that women's subordination is socially and culturally constructed rather than biologically determined. Their theories provide valuable frameworks for analyzing literary works that explore women's struggles for identity, autonomy, and equality. Through feminist criticism, literature becomes a site where issues of gender, power, and resistance are critically examined.

Among South Asian women writers, Ismat Chughtai (1915–1991) occupies a prominent place because of her fearless portrayal of women's lives and her uncompromising critique of patriarchal society. As a leading member of the Progressive Writers' Movement, Chughtai challenged conventional literary traditions by addressing themes that were considered controversial during her time, including female sexuality, domestic oppression, class inequality, and women's education. Her writings departed from idealized representations of women and instead presented female characters as complex individuals with intellectual aspirations, emotional conflicts, and psychological depth. Chughtai's contribution to Urdu literature is particularly significant because she gave voice to women whose experiences had largely been ignored or silenced in mainstream literary discourse.

The Crooked Line (Tedhi Lakeer) is widely regarded as Chughtai's most accomplished novel published in 1945 one of the earliest feminist novels in Urdu literature. The



narrative follows the life of its protagonist, Shamman, from childhood to adulthood, depicting her struggle to negotiate a society governed by rigid patriarchal values. Throughout the novel, Shamman encounters discrimination within her family, educational institutions, and personal relationships. She is expected to conform to traditional notions of femininity that prioritize obedience, modesty, and self-sacrifice over individuality and intellectual freedom. However, unlike conventional female characters in earlier literature, Shamman refuses to passively accept these expectations. Her journey of self-discovery reflects the broader struggle of women seeking identity and independence within oppressive social structures.

One of the most remarkable features of *The Crooked Line* is its exploration of the psychological consequences of patriarchy. Chughtai demonstrates that gender discrimination extends beyond social restrictions to influence women's emotional and mental well-being. Feelings of loneliness, insecurity, emotional repression, frustration, and identity conflict become recurring aspects of Shamman's life as she struggles to reconcile her personal aspirations with societal expectations. The novel suggests that patriarchal oppression affects not only women's external circumstances but also their inner consciousness, shaping their perceptions of themselves and their relationships with others. By combining psychological realism with social criticism, Chughtai offers a nuanced portrayal of the emotional burdens imposed upon women by patriarchal institutions.

Previous studies on *The Crooked Line* have primarily focused on Chughtai's feminist ideology, her representation of female sexuality, and her contribution to the Progressive Writers' Movement. Scholars have also explored the autobiographical elements of the novel and its role in the evolution of modern Urdu fiction. While these studies have significantly enhanced the understanding of Chughtai's literary achievements, comparatively fewer have examined the interconnected relationship between patriarchal constraints and their psychological impact on women's identity and emotional development. This gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive analysis that considers both the structural mechanisms of patriarchy and their influence on the protagonist's psychological experiences.

The purpose of the present study is to examine the influence of patriarchal systems such as family, education, marriage and traditions on Shamman's identity and psychology in the novel *The Crooked Line*. It focuses on the feminist theories of Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett and Elaine Showalter as the theoretical framework in analysing the novel's depiction of gender, power and female consciousness. The feminist literary criticism will provide an analysis of the social institutional aspects of patriarchy while the psychological dimension of



patriarchy will be explored to show its impact on women's self-perception, emotional strength and ability to resist. The Crooked Line is an important study that helps feminist literary scholarship to underscore the ongoing significance of The Crooked Line in contemporary debates about gender equality and women's mental health. Written in the mid-20th century, the novel tackles themes that remain relevant to women in all cultures, such as the suppression of women's education, the repression of women's emotions, and discrimination against women. Chughtai not only challenges the patriarchal ideology but also supports women's right to education, independent thinking and self-determination in the process of struggle, resistance and self-discovery, Shamman's journey. Thus, The Crooked Line remains a seminal text in South Asian feminist literature because it has given insightful analysis into the complicated interplay between patriarchy, psychological experience and women empowerment.

2. Literature Review Patriarchy has been a major issue in feminist literary criticism because it influences the identities of women, their social statuses, and their psychological experiences in institutional mechanisms of power. According to feminist scholars, literature is not only a reflection of the patriarchal reality but it is also a very strong tool of questioning gender inequality and of advocating emancipation of women. Ismat Chughtai has carved a niche for herself in the South Asian literary canon for her fearless representations of women who refuse to conform to traditional gender roles and bride roles, and defy gender oppression. The Crooked Line (Tedhi Lakwer, 1945) has garnered a significant amount of scholarly attention due to its realistic portrayal of a female identity, emotional struggle, and the fight against gender domination. The literature review aims to provide a theoretical background and identify the gap in literature for this study by reviewing feminist theories, studies conducted on previous writings of Chughtai and existing studies on patriarchy and psychological oppression. In the 20th century, feminist literary criticism arose against the exclusion of women from literature and society. The Second Sex (1949) was one of Simone de Beauvoir's most influential writings in feminist philosophy. Beauvoir insists that women are not inferior to men, but that society has created them as the "Other" by its cultural traditions and patriarchal institutions. She says gender is socially constructed and that from a young age, women are taught to take a back seat. The Crooked Line, with its exploration of Shamman's role within a society with specific expectations for women in terms of their femininity, obedience, and home responsibilities, is particularly relevant. Beauvoir's theory describes how women are being defined in the patriarchal cultures by male-dominated values, which narrow the space of their freedom and individuality. Kate Millett's Sexual Politics (1970) also expands on the notion of patriarchy as a political and social system that legitimizes male supremacy by means of institutions, including family, education, religion and marriage. For Millett, the literature often reflects the patriarchal ideology, because it gives a passive and dependent image of women. She also notes, however, that literature can



also reveal a lack of equality in power and provoke a change in society. In *The Crooked Line*, Chughtai explores this power dynamic, challenging existing gender roles and the imbalances in power between men and women in familial and social interactions. Elaine Showalter (1977) coined gynocriticism, a movement that promotes the study of women's literature from women's perspectives, not from the male point of view. According to Showalter, women writers develop unique literary traditions which expose women's feelings, aspirations, and struggles. Chughtai's fiction is a good example of this since it makes the individuality of women its main focus while keeping their consciousness as a focus. She highlights the inner struggles, emotional strength, and mental growth of women, contributing to feminist literature. Later feminist theorists have extended these views to include aspects of culture, class and identity. Judith Butler (1990) suggests that what is known as 'gender' is 'performative' - that is, it is created through 'repeated social practices' and not through differences in biological systems. This theory allows for the explanation of Shamman's non-conformity to conventional femininity. Likewise, Sara Ahmed (2021) discusses how social institutions control women's emotions and actions, implying that women's experiences of emotions are influenced by power dynamics. Ahmed's interpretation gives us an idea of the psychological states of Chughtai's novel, in which feelings of loneliness, insecurity, and emotional repression are produced by the patriarchal control. South Asian feminist scholarship is also relevant and offers other viewpoints that are especially pertinent to Chughtai's work. Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid (1989) state that patriarchy in south Asian is connected with religion, class, caste and colonial history which makes the experience of women's different from the theories given by many western feminists. Nivedita Menon (2023) also argues that the feminist struggle in South Asia should focus on the everyday manifestations of discrimination that are part of the family, marriage, education, and culture. The introduction of these arguments provides a background to *The Crooked Line*, which characterizes patriarchy as a matrix embracing women's personal and social lives. Ismat Chughtai was one of the prominent poets of Progressive Writers' Movement who changed the face of Urdu literature by writing realistically about women and challenging conservative social norms. In 1936 the Progressive Writers' Movement was formed to promote social justice, colonialism, poverty and gender issues in the writing. Chughtai took these goals a step further and examined women's experience in particular, highlighting the often-unspoken truths of patriarchy. According to Rakhshanda Jalil (2020) Chughtai changed the face of Urdu fiction by expressing the sexuality of women, emotional dissatisfaction and injustice at home in a candid manner. She was not as romantic as some of her predecessors and instead concentrated on women's ability to resist and express themselves in the face of suffering. *The Crooked Line* has been read as an autobiography, feminist, psychoanalytical, and social realist work. The novel is often described as being a bildungsroman, a path of



intellectual and emotional development from childhood to adulthood, to which Shamman undergoes. adulthood. Her journey reflects the struggles of educated women attempting to reconcile personal aspirations with rigid social expectations. Studies have consistently identified education as one of the novel's central themes. Education provides Shamman with intellectual confidence and encourages her to question inherited beliefs, demonstrating that knowledge can become a means of empowerment. Nevertheless, researchers also acknowledge that education alone cannot eliminate patriarchal oppression because discriminatory attitudes persist within families, marriages, and broader social institutions.

Marriage constitutes another recurring focus in existing scholarship. Feminist critics argue that Chughtai challenges the traditional perception of marriage as the ultimate destination of womanhood. Instead, she portrays marriage as an institution that frequently restricts women's independence by assigning them domestic responsibilities while denying them equal authority within relationships. Such representations correspond closely with Millett's argument that marriage functions as one of patriarchy's most effective mechanisms for maintaining male dominance.

The psychological dimensions of *The Crooked Line* have also attracted scholarly attention. Researchers observe that Shamman's emotional struggles—including loneliness, anxiety, and frustration, insecurity, and identity conflict—reflect the psychological burden of living within a patriarchal society. Unlike conventional literary heroines, she experiences complex emotional dilemmas that arise from the conflict between personal aspirations and social expectations. Chughtai's psychological realism distinguishes her work from earlier Urdu fiction by emphasizing women's inner lives alongside external social realities. Her portrayal suggests that patriarchal oppression affects not only women's opportunities but also their mental well-being and self-perception.

Despite the considerable body of research on Ismat Chughtai, important gaps remain. Most existing studies emphasize her feminist ideology, treatment of sexuality, autobiographical influences, or contribution to the Progressive Writers' Movement. Comparatively fewer studies examine how patriarchal institutions such as family, education, marriage, and cultural traditions collectively produce psychological consequences, including emotional repression, identity conflict, and diminished self-esteem. Moreover, limited attention has been given to the relationship between patriarchal oppression and the gradual development of female agency through education, self-awareness, and critical consciousness.



The present study addresses these gaps by integrating feminist literary criticism with psychological analysis to examine the interconnected relationship between patriarchal constraints and emotional experience in *The Crooked Line*. Using the theoretical perspectives of Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, and Elaine Showalter, the research investigates how patriarchal institutions shape Shamman's identity while simultaneously influencing her psychological development. By combining textual analysis with contemporary feminist scholarship, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of Chughtai's enduring significance in feminist literary criticism and South Asian literary studies. It also demonstrates that *The Crooked Line* remains highly relevant in contemporary discussions of gender equality, women's mental well-being, and the continuing struggle against patriarchal oppression.

Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative research methodology** to examine the representation of patriarchal constraints and their psychological impacts in Ismat Chughtai's *The Crooked Line* (*Tedhi Lakeer*). Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for literary studies because it focuses on interpreting meanings, themes, and social experiences embedded within literary texts rather than measuring numerical data. Since the objective of this research is to explore how patriarchal institutions influence the emotional, psychological, and social development of the protagonist, an interpretive qualitative approach provides the most suitable framework for analysis. The study seeks to understand how Chughtai critiques patriarchal ideology through her characterization, narrative techniques, and thematic representation of women's lived experiences.

The research employs **textual analysis** as its primary method of investigation. Textual analysis involves a close and systematic reading of the novel to identify recurring themes, symbols, dialogues, character interactions, and narrative strategies that reflect patriarchal oppression and its psychological consequences. Particular attention is given to the portrayal of family relationships, educational opportunities, marriage, gender expectations, emotional repression, identity formation, and female resistance. This method enables a detailed examination of how literary language and narrative structure communicate the complexities of women's experiences within a patriarchal society.

The study is based on both **primary and secondary sources**. The primary source is Ismat Chughtai's *The Crooked Line* (translated into English by Tahira Naqvi), which serves as the principal text for analysis. The novel was selected because it is widely regarded as one of the earliest and most influential feminist works in Urdu literature, offering a realistic portrayal of women's social and psychological struggles. Secondary



sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, edited volumes, and research papers on feminist literary criticism, South Asian literature, gender studies, psychology, and Ismat Chughtai's writings. These sources provide the theoretical and critical context necessary for interpreting the novel and situating the study within existing scholarship.

The theoretical framework is grounded in **feminist literary criticism**, drawing primarily upon the theories of **Simone de Beauvoir**, **Kate Millett**, and **Elaine Showalter**. Beauvoir's concept of woman as the "Other" explains how patriarchal societies construct female identity through social conditioning and unequal power relations. Millett's theory of sexual politics provides a framework for understanding patriarchy as a system maintained through institutions such as family, education, and marriage. Showalter's concept of gynocriticism emphasizes the analysis of women's writing from women's perspectives, enabling a deeper understanding of Chughtai's representation of female consciousness, psychological conflict, and resistance.

The collected data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, which identifies recurring patterns and concepts within qualitative data. Themes including patriarchal family structure, educational inequality, marriage, psychological distress, identity conflict, emotional resilience, and resistance were examined in relation to the selected feminist theories. The interpretations were supported by textual evidence from the novel and compared with previous scholarly studies to enhance analytical depth and credibility.

Although literary interpretation is inherently subjective, the reliability of the study is strengthened through repeated textual analysis, the application of established feminist theories, and the use of authoritative academic sources. The research is limited to *The Crooked Line* and focuses specifically on patriarchal constraints and their psychological impacts. Other critical approaches, such as Marxist, psychoanalytic, or postcolonial analyses, fall beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the chosen methodology provides a systematic and academically rigorous framework for examining Chughtai's critique of patriarchy and her enduring contribution to feminist literary studies.

4. Results and Findings

The qualitative textual analysis of Ismat Chughtai's *The Crooked Line* (*Tedhi Lakeer*) reveals that patriarchy functions as a deeply institutionalized system that shapes women's social, emotional, and psychological experiences. Through the life of the protagonist, Shamman, Chughtai illustrates how patriarchal values are reproduced within family, education, marriage, and cultural traditions, significantly influencing female identity and mental well-being. The findings further demonstrate that although



patriarchal structures impose severe limitations on women's autonomy, education, self-awareness, and intellectual growth enable women to resist these oppressive systems. The findings are organized into five major themes.

4.1 Patriarchal Family Structure and Gender Socialization

The analysis identifies the family as the first and most influential institution through which patriarchal values are transmitted. From early childhood, Shamman experiences unequal treatment because of her gender. Female children are expected to remain obedient, modest, and emotionally restrained, whereas male children are granted greater freedom, authority, and opportunities. Such differential treatment reinforces traditional gender roles and teaches girls to accept subordination as a natural aspect of their lives. The novel also demonstrates that patriarchal ideology is maintained not only by male authority but also by women who have internalized patriarchal beliefs. Mothers and elderly female relatives often encourage girls to conform to social expectations regarding marriage, domestic responsibilities, and modest behavior. This finding suggests that patriarchy operates through cultural conditioning and socialization rather than through direct male domination alone. Chughtai portrays the family as the foundation of gender inequality, where discrimination becomes normalized and deeply embedded in women's consciousness.

4.2 Psychological Impacts of Patriarchal Oppression

A significant finding of this study is the profound psychological impact of patriarchal oppression on the protagonist. Throughout the novel, Shamman experiences loneliness, insecurity, anxiety, emotional repression, and identity conflict as she struggles to reconcile her personal aspirations with rigid social expectations. Her inability to express her emotions freely often results in feelings of frustration and isolation.

The analysis indicates that patriarchal restrictions extend beyond limiting women's external opportunities; they also affect their mental and emotional well-being. Constant criticism, social expectations, and unequal treatment create psychological pressure that undermines self-confidence and personal identity. Chughtai realistically portrays these emotional struggles, demonstrating that psychological suffering is not the result of individual weakness but a consequence of systematic gender discrimination. By highlighting Shamman's inner conflicts, the novel reveals the invisible emotional costs of living within a patriarchal society.

4.3 Education as a Source of Empowerment

Education emerges as one of the most significant instruments of empowerment in *The Crooked Line*. Unlike traditional patriarchal beliefs that prioritize women's domestic roles



over intellectual development, Chughtai presents education as a means of achieving self-awareness and independence. Through education, Shamman develops critical thinking, confidence, and the ability to question inherited social norms.

The findings suggest that education broadens women's perspectives by exposing them to new ideas and encouraging independent judgment. It enables Shamman to recognize gender discrimination and challenge patriarchal authority through rational thinking rather than passive acceptance. However, the analysis also indicates that education alone cannot completely eliminate patriarchal oppression. Even educated women continue to encounter social restrictions within family life, marriage, and community expectations. Therefore, education functions as an important step toward empowerment but must be accompanied by wider social and cultural change.

4.4 Marriage, Identity, and Emotional Conflict

Marriage is presented as another institution through which patriarchal values are reinforced. The findings reveal that women are expected to sacrifice their personal ambitions for family responsibilities, while emotional fulfillment and individual aspirations receive little importance. Traditional expectations encourage women to measure their success through marriage and domestic service rather than personal achievement.

For Shamman, these expectations generate continuous psychological conflict. She struggles to maintain her individuality while confronting social pressures that define women primarily as wives and caregivers. This conflict contributes to feelings of dissatisfaction, confusion, and emotional isolation. Chughtai challenges the conventional idealization of marriage by revealing its unequal power dynamics and its role in limiting women's autonomy. Rather than rejecting marriage itself, the novel advocates relationships based on mutual respect, equality, and emotional understanding.

4.5 Female Resistance and the Development of Agency

Despite the pervasive influence of patriarchy, the novel presents resistance as an essential aspect of women's identity formation. Chughtai portrays resistance not as dramatic rebellion but as a gradual process of intellectual and psychological development. Through education, self-reflection, and critical consciousness, Shamman gains the confidence to question discriminatory traditions and make independent decisions.

The findings indicate that female agency develops through everyday acts of resistance, including challenging social expectations, pursuing education, and asserting personal opinions. Chughtai suggests that genuine empowerment begins with self-awareness and



the courage to reject imposed identities. Although Shamman continues to encounter patriarchal obstacles throughout her life, her growing confidence demonstrates that women possess the capacity to redefine their identities despite oppressive circumstances.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study establish that *The Crooked Line* presents patriarchy as a multidimensional system operating through family, education, marriage, and cultural traditions. These institutions collectively shape women's identities while producing significant psychological consequences, including loneliness, emotional repression, insecurity, and identity conflict. At the same time, Chughtai portrays education, critical thinking, and self-awareness as effective means of resistance that enable women to challenge patriarchal authority and develop independent identities. The analysis confirms that *The Crooked Line* is not only a critique of gender inequality but also a profound exploration of the psychological consequences of patriarchal oppression. Consequently, the novel remains an important contribution to feminist literary criticism and continues to offer valuable insights into the relationship between social structures, mental well-being, and women's empowerment.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that Ismat Chughtai's *The Crooked Line* is a profound feminist critique of patriarchal society and its psychological consequences for women. Through the experiences of the protagonist, Shamman, the novel reveals that patriarchy operates not merely through individual acts of male dominance but through interconnected social institutions such as family, education, marriage, and cultural traditions. These institutions collectively regulate women's identities, limit their autonomy, and reinforce unequal gender relations. The study also highlights that patriarchal oppression extends beyond social discrimination to produce significant psychological consequences, including emotional repression, loneliness, anxiety, insecurity, and identity conflict. These findings support the central arguments of feminist literary criticism, which views patriarchy as a socially constructed system that perpetuates gender inequality through institutional practices and cultural norms.

One of the major findings is that the family functions as the primary site where patriarchal values are transmitted and normalized. Girls are socialized to become obedient, modest, and self-sacrificing, while boys are granted greater authority and freedom. This finding is consistent with Sylvia Walby's (1990) argument that the family is one of the principal structures through which patriarchy is reproduced across generations. Chughtai also illustrates that women themselves often internalize



patriarchal values and unknowingly reinforce traditional gender roles. This observation demonstrates that patriarchy survives not only through male dominance but also through cultural conditioning, where unequal gender expectations become accepted as natural social practices.

The study further confirms Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as the "Other." Throughout *The Crooked Line*, Shamman's identity is shaped by expectations imposed upon her because of her gender rather than her individuality. Society defines appropriate behavior, education, and future responsibilities for women, restricting their ability to make independent choices. Chughtai challenges these social constructions by portraying Shamman as an intellectually curious and emotionally complex individual who gradually rejects the roles assigned to her. This representation emphasizes that female identity is socially constructed and can therefore be questioned and transformed.

Another important finding concerns the psychological effects of patriarchal oppression. The analysis reveals that continuous discrimination and social control produce emotional insecurity, loneliness, frustration, and identity conflict. Chughtai portrays these psychological struggles with remarkable realism, demonstrating that patriarchal oppression affects women's inner lives as profoundly as their external circumstances. These findings extend previous scholarship by showing that the novel is not only a critique of gender inequality but also an exploration of the emotional and psychological burden carried by women living within restrictive social systems. Shamman's emotional development reflects the complex relationship between social oppression and mental well-being, making the novel relevant to contemporary discussions of gender and psychological health.

Education emerges as a significant means of empowerment and resistance. The findings indicate that education enables Shamman to develop critical consciousness, self-confidence, and intellectual independence. However, the novel also demonstrates that education alone cannot dismantle patriarchal structures because discriminatory attitudes continue to exist within family relationships, marriage, and society. Chughtai therefore suggests that genuine liberation requires both personal transformation and broader social change. Her emphasis on education reflects the Progressive Writers' Movement's belief in knowledge as an instrument of social reform while simultaneously recognizing the persistence of institutional barriers to gender equality.

Overall, this study establishes *The Crooked Line* as a landmark feminist novel that combines social realism with psychological insight. Chughtai presents women not as passive victims of patriarchy but as individuals capable of reflection, resistance, and self-



determination. By exposing the interconnected relationship between patriarchal constraints and psychological suffering, the novel encourages readers to question oppressive gender norms and recognize the importance of equality, education, and personal autonomy. Although written in the mid-twentieth century, *The Crooked Line* continues to resonate with contemporary feminist scholarship because many of the issues it addresses—gender discrimination, emotional repression, unequal opportunities, and the struggle for identity—remain relevant in modern societies. Consequently, Chughtai's work continues to make a significant contribution to feminist literary criticism and South Asian literary studies.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the representation of patriarchal constraints and their psychological impacts in Ismat Chughtai's *The Crooked Line* through the lens of feminist literary criticism. The analysis demonstrates that Chughtai portrays patriarchy as a deeply institutionalized social system that influences women's lives through family, education, marriage, and cultural traditions. These interconnected institutions shape female identity, restrict personal autonomy, and reinforce unequal gender relations. More importantly, the novel reveals that patriarchal oppression extends beyond social discrimination to affect women's emotional and psychological well-being, resulting in loneliness, insecurity, emotional repression, identity conflict, and diminished self-esteem.

The study further establishes that Shamman's journey represents both the struggle and resilience of women living within patriarchal societies. Although she experiences continuous discrimination and psychological distress, she gradually develops self-awareness, intellectual independence, and the confidence to question oppressive social norms. Chughtai presents education as a significant means of empowerment, enabling women to recognize gender inequality and assert their individuality. However, the novel also suggests that education alone cannot dismantle patriarchy unless accompanied by broader social and cultural transformation. Thus, Chughtai emphasizes that women's liberation requires both personal agency and structural change.

By applying the feminist theories of Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millett, and Elaine Showalter, this study demonstrates that *The Crooked Line* remains an enduring feminist text that critiques institutionalized gender oppression while highlighting the psychological consequences of patriarchal control. Chughtai's realistic portrayal of women's inner conflicts distinguishes her work from many earlier literary representations by emphasizing female consciousness, emotional complexity, and the search for identity.



Her narrative challenges traditional stereotypes and advocates women's right to education, self-expression, and independent decision-making.

In conclusion, *The Crooked Line* is not only a landmark work of Urdu literature but also a significant contribution to feminist literary studies. Its exploration of the relationship between patriarchal structures and psychological well-being continues to resonate in contemporary discussions of gender equality and women's rights. Future research may extend this study by comparing Chughtai's feminist vision with that of other South Asian women writers or by examining the novel through intersectional, postcolonial, or psychoanalytic perspectives to provide deeper insights into the complexities of women's experiences in literature and society.

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