



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

NEGOTIATING LEISURE IN THE EVERYDAY EXISTENCE OF FEMALE HOMEMAKERS: A SOCIOLOGICAL INSIGHT ON ISMAT CHUGHTAI'S *THE ROCK*.

Name of Author: Promita Roy.

Designation: Research Scholar

Department: Sociology

Organization: University of Calcutta, Kolkata, India

Abstract: The Sociology of Leisure has identified, patriarchal indulgence in leisurely experiences of women along with in other spheres of their lives. Ismat Chughtai's short story *The Rock* has been chosen as a unit of analysis in the present article to identify the domination of patriarchy even during the leisure time of homemakers. Content analysis has been applied to analyze the short story from two books translated from Ismat Chughtai's original work. Purposive sampling has been applied in the study to select the sample. The objectives of the present paper are: 1) to explore the fictional existence of a homemaker in the story *The Rock* and discern the crucial social exchanges during leisure through her experience. 2) to navigate through *The Rock* and recognize the multifaceted patriarchal nature of leisure in a conjugal relationship.

Index Terms- Leisure, Chughtai, homemaker, choice, patriarchy

I. INTRODUCTION

During a family (heterosexual, patrilocal family) tea-time in the evening, how often do we ask whose leisure is it? The husband with a meaningful affection looks at his wife while having tea and papad and she immediately gets up and goes to the kitchen to fry more papad. Ismat Chughtai in her short story *The Rock (Chatan)* portrayed such an instance, her narration of the leisurely hours in most of her short stories is conventionally unconventional – the activities may seem conventional but the underlying meaning goes deep down (Chughtai, 2013). The Sociology of Leisure identifies, women (across class, caste, sexuality etc.) at a disadvantageous position in leisure due to higher socio-cultural regulation by patriarchy (Roberts, 2013). Women's leisure is fragmented, they do not get the opportunity to enjoy long leisure hours. Leisure spaces are now being developed that transcend the heteronormative border and make way for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other identities (Roberts, 2013).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Pieper in his *Leisure the Basis of Culture*, considered leisure as an attitude that is specific to the mind and a condition that is experienced by the soul and that ensures the ability to comprehend the actual image of the world around (Pieper, 1998), to him, during leisure human beings are whole and that liberates them to let go. Sometimes to let go can also be a privilege especially if one is not an active agent in deciding upon the leisure hour or the leisure activity. The word holiday originally meant holy day as pointed out by (Pieper, 1998), those were the days that were kept aside for God and in a way those were the days kept aside to pray and rest. Only if one ends up asking if holiday has a homogeneous meaning and does it ensure everyone to have a leisurely comfort, the conventional picture of a happy holiday might come under scrutiny. While comparing work and leisure Pieper suggested, leisure is a mode of celebration that ensures the end of work, it is during leisure that a person may realise whether work was satisfying enough or not (Pieper, 1998). Leisure in its autonomy is capable of offering unique interpretations regarding human interactions in the micro level that may lead to contribute in the macro structure, in fact while noticing the minute details during leisurely human exchange one may identify the influence of the macro in the micro level. Who is looking at the window will determine what will be the perspective derived from the outside of the window. Leisure guides us to avoid disconnection with the reality by making way for comprehending the cultural milieu better (Pieper, 1998).

The Core and Balance Model derived from the Circumplex Model of Marital and Family Systems suggest, core activities like eating together, watching television together and balance activities like spending vacations together, going to events together, are leisurely activities that are capable of striking a balance between change and stability in a relationship and between family members (Stapley & Murdock, 2020). Chughtai's *The Rock*, differed from the theory, while the entire family was enjoying a swim, the husband mocked his wife and body-shamed her and later without repenting on his behaviour flirted with another woman (Chughtai, Vintage Chughtai, 2013).

III. METHODOLOGY

Content analysis that is the study of recorded human communications such as books, websites, paintings and laws is the intention of this study, it will only include analysis of the short story *The Rock* from two books translated from Ismat Chughtai's original work (Babbie, 2007). The story has been analysed to decipher the labyrinth of leisure in it, therefore it is the unit of analysis. Purposive sampling has been applied in the study to select the sample. *The Rock* has been chosen as the sample of the study because it serves the purpose of the present paper as the story majorly revolves around everyday leisure-time experience of the female homemaker. Attributes like gender and marriage enhanced the analysis of the content. The objectives of the present paper are: 1) to explore the fictional existence of a homemaker in the story *The Rock* and discern the crucial social exchanges during leisure through her experience. 2) to navigate through *The Rock* and recognize the multifaceted patriarchal nature of leisure in a conjugal relationship.

IV. ANALYSIS

Exploring the Fictional Existence of the Homemaker and Discerning the Crucial Social Exchanges During Leisure Through Her Experience

Ismat Chughtai's short stories do not revolve around leisure for the sake of leisure itself but the narration of leisurely time and how the characters indulge in leisure allows the reader to truly comprehend a deeper picture. Leisure time interaction between two friends from two different religions express the communal scenario imbedded in the cultural milieu. Leisure is dealt casually, it is considered to be a carefree time. It is interesting to note the actions of human characters during a carefree time when one has no baggage of staying composed. It is often during leisure that we encounter nonchalant behaviour that might create new concerns. Reiterating Pieper's view on observing leisure-time of individuals even during a serious period in history, it is promising to note Chughtai's short stories through a lens of leisure because even her characters have travelled through alleys of religion, sexuality, gender, marriage, class and so on. One can identify characters in Chughtai's stories who does not even have the privilege of something that they can call leisure. The way Chughtai portrayed leisure in some of her short stories, one may derive, in a heteronormative setting, leisure for men meant work for women. In a way it is a voluntary contribution of women to make the leisure of the men in the house more enjoyable if the interactions are taken in their face-values. While delving deeper, one may raise the concern, to what extent is it voluntary and whether patriarchy has sugar coated itself in the garb of voluntary (Menon, 2012). In the context of the characters portrayed by Chughtai, women in many instances were considered successful by their ability to please men, since they did not have the financial autonomy, they were made to engage in tasks that would stabilize their position in the family by fulfilling the man's needs. The consequences of satisfying the man at the cost of their own leisure was not always favourable for women. Leisure in its truest form is only possible when a person is with one's self as suggested by Pieper (Pieper, 1998). Leisurely opportunities subtly make way to fathom the underlying issues in a cultural context as one may notice in Ismat Chughtai's notable portrayals of intersectional characters. In Ismat Chughtai's short stories, for instance, in *Eternal Vine (Amar Bel)*, the women characters during their leisurely hours spoke about the marriage and issues related with it of their relative (Chughtai, Vintage Chughtai, 2013). In *A Morsel (Niwala)* women during leisure, as described by Chughtai were engaged in teasing Sarlaben, the protagonist to marry (Chughtai, Vintage Chughtai, 2013). Later, in Chughtai's work called *Profession or Peshwa* one may notice the legacy of attitude of the 'bhodroloks' and the Victorian men in a teacher who showed her unabashed hatred for her neighbours whom she perceived as sex workers (and therefore immoral women) because the sound of dancing and singing and loud laughter from the next door reached her (Chughtai, Vintage Chughtai, 2013).

Chughtai's portrayal of leisure time in *The Rock (Chatan)* is a quintessential instance of misogyny. In the short story *The Rock*, everytime leisurely experiences have been encountered by the characters, a patriarchal ambience has been sensed. The narrator of the story gives an account of her sister-in-law Shehnaz, who belonged to a liberal family and had received her education in a convent school. She was married off to the narrator's brother who was nine years older to her and he had intentions of moulding his modern playful wife, into a complete homemaker (Chughtai, Vintage Chughtai, 2013). Gaining success in his mission, his wife was a mother of four children and an overweight woman who stopped using make-up and only wore colours of her husband's choice. In four or five years the husband started looking much younger than his perfect homemaker who was nine years younger than him. During evening when everyone sat down for tea, Shehnaz was busy at the kitchen, frying papad for her husband. Around the same time he accidentally met a neighbour Shabnam, who was described as resembling a model for an American advertisement by the narrator (Chughtai, Vintage Chughtai, 2013). Shabnam and the narrator's brother became interested in each other even though Shabnam was absolutely opposite to his wife whose life and habits were designed according to his whims. He made the leisurely hours dreadful for his wife by commenting randomly on her body weight. Shehnaz managed to hide her anguish and started eating while others enjoyed their leisure. He divorced his wife suddenly without her prior knowledge or any conversation with her, he then married Shabnam. After seven or eight years to the marriage the narrator described Shabnam as *a sprinkle of dew that became a dome of flesh*, her husband remained the same *as solid as a rock* (Chughtai, Vintage Chughtai, 2013). At a leisurely outing when the whole family went out for dinner, the man and an Egyptian cabaret dancer started flirting with each other. Shabnam managed to hide her anguish and started eating. The first instance of leisure as portrayed by Chughtai in *The Rock* was when the family sat down for evening tea in the lawn. Shehnaz was in the kitchen frying papad because her husband liked them lightly browned, he *"glanced lovingly"* at her and she hurriedly went to the kitchen to fry more papad for him (Chughtai, Vintage Chughtai, 2013). Everyone else continued to have tea. The narrator in the story expressed, nobody could persuade Shehnaz's sister-in-laws to go to the kitchen once

they returned from college. Among the other sisters, Farida was entertaining her fiancé who had visited them and two other sisters were chatting with their friends while their brother waited for more papad. The narrator once disclosed that it was just a matter of time that they were spending their leisure like this in their parents' home. Love and care is used as an affection to make women do household chores while men have the privilege to sit back and relax. During leisurely hours women work for their husband and his family and it is explained as, it is due to their care and affection that they perform it and not due to any external coercion (Menon, 2012). The patriarchal force first compels women to mould themselves according to the whims and fancies of their husband, then they are shackled with the chains of love, affection and care and are expected to unconditionally take care of their husband and his family while undergoing a great deal of self-sacrifice.

Recognizing the Multifaceted Patriarchal Nature of Leisure in a Conjugal Relationship

During the evening leisure, Shehnaz's husband accidentally met their neighbour Shabnam and found her attractive right when Shehnaz returned with the papad she had fried for her husband, she saw others laughing and enjoying with Shabnam. The conversation during the leisurely hours took a different turn when Shabnam was shocked to learn that Shehnaz was the narrator's sister-in-law and not her mother. She was even more surprised to know that Shehnaz was educated and younger than her, she remarked that even if it is for love, she will never allow herself to turn into a *baby elephant* (Chughtai, Vintage Chughtai, 2013). The narrator along with her other sisters tried to defend their sister-in-law while the husband remained silent and later flirted with Shabnam who shamed his wife. Eventually, when Shehnaz was busy working in the pantry her husband and Shabnam enjoyed their leisure showing interest in each other. Shehnaz kept on working for her husband and his family and her husband enjoyed his leisure with Shabnam. On a different day during tea, Shabnam and the narrator's brother were busy being mischievous around each other. Shehnaz engaged in eating cake, fried potatoes, toast laden with butter and jam while other members of the family and Shabnam laughed and enjoyed the leisure. Eating with vigor in such a situation is a form of resistance that Chughtai portrayed through Shehnaz's character (Chakraborty, 2019). Here gluttony which is considered as unfeminine by the conservative cultural milieu, is a protest against the patriarchal setting which allows her husband to humiliate her in front of the family and flirt with another woman in her presence. On another day the entire family went for a swim in the ocean to enjoy the leisure. The narrator's brother disliked women in bathing suits but when he saw Shabnam wearing two tiny strips he enjoyed the swim with Shabnam (Chughtai, Vintage Chughtai, 2013). His conduct towards his wife Shehnaz was once again appalling this time that turned her leisure experience to be an unhappy one. He pushed his wife into the water and when she came out with her clothes totally wet, he ridiculed her for looking fat like *Gama the wrestler* in wet clothes that made her figure more prominent (Chughtai, Vintage Chughtai, 2013). The comments from her husband during the leisurely hours were saddening for her and when she tried to convey that she has given birth to four children, her husband had cut her short and taunted her saying that the four children belonged to him as well but at least he was not a *Dunlop tyre* (Chughtai, Vintage Chughtai, 2013). Shehnaz left the spot insulted while her husband enjoyed the swim unapologetically. She found her recourse in food. When she was about to have her apricot jam and cream, Shabnam mocked her saying that it was poison that she was consuming. Shehnaz continued to eat noisily and tried to resist other voices. She was perhaps trying to find autonomy during leisure albeit in presence of others. The day, Shehnaz's husband declared to divorce her, she was unaware, at home. Her husband was at a cricket match with Shabnam. When he returned home after his leisurely enjoyment, he declared to divorce his wife. He married Shabnam immediately after the divorce. After seven or eight years when the narrator and his brother had a family reunion, they went out to have dinner. The narrator commented, Shabnam "*looked permanently pregnant*" now while her brother was as unmoving and unchanged as a rock (Chughtai, Vintage Chughtai, 2013). At the dinner, the narrator's brother, now Shabnam's husband, was attracted towards the conventionally beautiful Egyptian cabaret dancer. Shabnam who was the mother of five children, noticed her husband flirting with the dancer with apprehension and found recourse in food to distract herself. Shabnam noticed her husband lighting a cigarette for the Egyptian cabaret dancer while she waited in angst. The dancer was in shock to find out that Shabnam was the wife of such a handsome man! Shabnam tried to hide her uneasiness and transformed her anxiety into zeal for food during that leisurely outing. She emptied a jug of cream over raspberries and vigorously started eating. She was now on the other side of the table when she discovered resistance in food during leisurely outing with her husband and his family, while her husband was busy flirting with another woman. The patriarchal dimension during leisure was portrayed by Chughtai in this short story. The husband was free to enjoy his leisure according to his whims and fancies even if that included insulting his wife albeit, to him it was just being funny. Both Shehnaz's and later Shabnam's leisurely hours were devastated beyond compensation. They compromised their leisure to serve their husband's leisurely demands in the beginning and later their husband made their leisurely experience dreadful by flirting with other women and mocking them in front of those women. Consumption of food during leisure became their way of resistance to hide their anxiety.

V. CONCLUSION

Feminist studies have explored resistance by women as a way of exercising agency through leisure practices (Parry & Fullagar, 2013). Feminist researchers who focused on leisure, fathomed it in everyday life situation in relation with social structures especially for women belonging to various social groups. They commented, leisure experiences are highly gendered and their nature vary in relation to lesbian women, mothers, married women, young girls and so on (Parry & Fullagar, 2013). Family leisure has its own share of complexities for women because of hidden labour of servicing for others and their leisure, in relation to a gendered ethic of care (Parry & Fullagar, 2013).

REFERENCES

- [1] Babbie, E. (2007). *The Practice of Social Research*. Belmont : Thomson Wadsworth .
- [2] Chakraborty, B. (2019). Eating Her Way through Crisis: Eating as an act of Defiance in Ismat Chughtai's *The Rock*. *Erothanatos*, 29-37.
- [3] Chughtai, I. (2013). *Vintage Chughtai*. New Delhi: Women Unlimited .
- [4] Chughtai, I. (2019). *Chughtai - The Essential Stories*. Gurgaon : Penguin Random House India.
- [5] Menon, N. (2012). *Seeing Like A Feminist*. New Delhi : Zubaan and Penguin Books India .
- [6] Parry, D. C., & Fullagar, S. (2013). Feminist Leisure Research in the Contemporary Era. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 571-582.
- [7] Pieper, J. (1998). *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*. South Bend: St. Augustine's Press.
- [8] Roberts, K. (2013). Sociology of Leisure. *Sociopedia.isa*.
- [9] Stapley , L. A., & Murdock, N. L. (2020). Leisure in romantic relationships: An avenue for differentiation of self. *Personal Relationships* , 76-101.

