

Docile or Not-So-Docile Women: A Foucauldian Reading of Ismat Chughtai's "Gainda," "Gharwali" and "Chui-Mui"

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Abstract

Ismat Chughtai is one of the most celebrated South Asian women writers from the past century. Hence, most of the scholarship based on her few female characters from a select few stories largely deals with analysing the nature of female desire and sexuality. In this paper, we have extended the focus from sexual repression to the analysis of the power-paradigm in the space called *zenana* (domestic space) and its role in producing docile bodies. By using a Foucauldian framework in her lesser-explored short stories, namely, "Gainda" (transl. "Gainda"), "Gharwali" (transl. "The Homemaker"), and "Chui-Mui" (transl. "Touch-me-not"), we aim to explore the themes of surveillance, norms, and punishment and how these play a role in training individuals to be obedient to power structures and institutions. Moreover, we want to explore whether they always produce homogenised bodies or if there is a space for individual agency.

Keywords: Chughtai, sexuality, punishment, surveillance, discipline, Foucault

Introduction

Ismat Chughtai is one of the most distinctive and prominent voices of Hindustani literature from twentieth-century India. When she was writing, a few things were parallelly taking place—the anti-imperialist struggle against the British Raj, the partition of India and Pakistan, the transformation from a colony to an independent nation, and the rise of the progressive writers' movement. Her short stories have explored themes like homosexuality, women's body and agency, desire, violence, and trauma, and she is one of the few women writers to do so in that

period. The work she produced was highly controversial as it questioned the norms and moral value system of the society. Because of her unique voice, her work has grabbed a lot of attention from readers and scholars alike. Sheelalipi Sahana looked at the "material agency" found in her stories and how the materials and objects contained within a household assist in creating a private society primarily for women in the gendered space of home. The intersectionality of caste and gender and the manifestation of it in a Dalit household explored by Chughtai in her story "Do Haath" (Two Hands) has been analysed and questioned by Kazim. The themes of resistance and desire in "Lihaaf" were explored through feminist ethnographic reading (Sen), and Chanana elaborated on the understanding of repressive structures of sexuality in the writings of Chughtai.

However, despite the girth of scholarship, there are two primary reasons why Chughtai is rather under-researched. First, most of the scholarship looked at Chughtai from the feminist or gender studies lens and not many other frameworks have been applied to study her works. Secondly, only a few famous stories like "Lihaaf" and "Do Haath" are often worked and reworked, and her other works are rather untouched compared to the former. These two points combined establish the necessity to relook at Chughtai in the current age, where her work can provide immense knowledge on how we understand power in domestic spaces and sexual interactions.

Having said that, in this paper, we shall focus on some of the lesser worked-on short stories of Chughtai and analyse them from the Foucauldian perspective, which has remained relatively under-researched. The aim is to look at the formation of "docile bodies" through the reading of Chughtai's "Gainda," "The Homemaker," and "Touch-me-not," and understand how obedience was manufactured by the patriarchal regime in colonial and postcolonial India in terms of the expression of female sexuality. While we explore it, there are three questions that we want to look into: *How are docile bodies manufactured? Are these bodies homogenised in nature, or do they react to the processes differently? Is the process of turning individuals into docile bodies linear, or are each measure interrelated and often coincide in praxis?*

Foucault and the Idea of Docile Bodies

Individuals are capable of being trained and disciplined into becoming obedient and, hence, unquestioning of the order and norms in a society. The same act of "becoming obedient" is

possible within microstructures like family or relationships between two people. The individuals who become obedient in this way were called “docile bodies” by Michel Foucault in his work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. He defines it as “those that have been subjected to the subtle coercion of a power that is both external and internal to them, a power that seeks to transform them into useful and obedient subjects” (Foucault 136). Further elaborating on this idea, Foucault writes, “the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (Foucault 25). One significant idea that emerges from it is the transformability of a body through external actions. It is this transformability that is often used to convert bodies into docile bodies through the application of external means. The regulatory nature of power creates a prison for the body to function with rules and laws being imposed on it. Any deviation from the rules results in the disciplining of the body. Discipline is, in fact, “the specific technique” deployed by the power which not only views human bodies as “objects” but also “as instruments of its exercise” (Foucault 170). The relevance of the act of disciplining is totally dependent on its assertion on bodies. Only through this performance of discipline does it get any meaning.

The three prominent instruments of creating obedient, docile bodies are surveillance, normalisation, and punishment. Surveillance is the process of manufacturing the idea of being watched, generating the fear associated with being watched and, hence, the discipline that comes with it. While discussing the ultimate goal of discipline, Foucault writes, “the ideal point of discipline would be a situation in which the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; where the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; where the apparatus of forces which produces the obedience of the subjects operates automatically” (Foucault 201). This automation of surveillance does not require any specific set of eyes or cameras to produce itself; rather, it self-reproduces itself, rendering fear into the subjects. The idea of who is watching you becomes irrelevant. In such a situation, what matters is that you are being watched. The second instrument is the normalisation of certain knowledge in a way that it exerts power. For Foucault, “normalisation...is a type of power that has as its target population to be characterised by “norms” and to be made up of ‘normal’ individuals” (Foucault 183). These normalised knowledge in due course of time become the

“truths” and hence, irrefutable. Only by abiding by these norms can one become normal and, hence, useful to society. If an individual challenges the norms, often, punishment is used as a disciplining tool. Foucault believed that “punishment must...be applied in such a way that it makes it possible to bring useful effects with a minimum of coercion” (Foucault 222). Borrowing from him, we would like to assert that the act of punishment is also a mechanism of education where it is categorically told to the individual how the person has been disobedient and what disobedience can cost. The “useful effects” of punishment is the process of relearning the norms. Without relearning, the bodies become obsolete to the ones who exert the power.

In the next section, we shall look into how these three tools are understood and explored in the stories of Chughtai in relation to sexuality.

Surveillance to Discipline

“Gainda”—this short story by Ismat Chughtai begins with the depiction of the young narrator and her childhood play-mate Gainda constructing their own shack—a beautiful space enclosed by the dense shrubbery, to play their favourite game “*dulhan-dulhan*.”¹ The game mimics the adult experience of the cultural custom of nuptial night, and thus, Chughtai introduces one of the important subjects that this story deals with- sexual curiosity in children. Sexuality, for Dorfman (while elaborating on Foucault’s criticism of Freud), is preceded by power. The power in the story “Gainda” is explored through the regulation of the childhood sexuality of the protagonist Gainda, and the narrator. A surveillance system is imposed through institutional power on their bodies in the form of omnipresent discourse around childhood sexuality with an aim to restrict the performance of sexuality.

The culturally dominant narrative around “childhood innocence” in India often equates innocence with asexuality, and hence, the discursive milieu is centred around the complete denial of child sexuality and the need to foist a surveillance system in order to protect innocent children from the corrupting power of sex. This regulatory body has encouraged a kind of self-surveillance in these young girls as they construct a confined space to play the bride in order to guard themselves against the ubiquitous gaze of elders. The need to play the game stealthily is realised by the two as they are well aware of the consequences and the thrashing they will receive if anyone sees them playing the bride. This awareness is also demonstrated when they are

located by the elder brother of the narrator, and “in panic Gainda flings away her dupatta and plonks herself on the ground” (Chughtai 1). The narrator states that their “hearts were beating wildly.” This shows their awareness of the need to suppress their urge to engage in any act or play that aligns with the adult sexual script. The account of the sexual self-discovery of Gainda and the narrator offers an overview of the cultural norms around child sexuality and reveals that exploring one’s sexuality requires an escape from the omnipresent observances. This escape from the established institutions is evident in another short story by Chughtai— “The Homemaker,” as the unique positionality of the protagonist, with respect to social institutions, acts as the driving force of the plot.

The attempts to tame the sexually liberated Lajo—the protagonist of the story “The Homemaker,” propels the plot of this short story. The narration begins with the depiction of Lajo, an orphan located on the periphery of the social institutions. Her positionality pushes her into oblivion regarding the traits of decent women as dictated by society. Devoid of any security, her survival is ensured by the space she seizes through her body, and hence, “when she grew up, her body proved to be her only asset” (Chughtai 79). Her entry into the household of Mirza as his domestic help initiates the frictionous interrelation of power and sexuality as the central theme. The narrative predominantly deals with deconstructing the power relations in a man-woman relationship while exploring the sketch of a woman character who is fiercely vocal in her sexual demands.

The steadily increasing fondness towards Lajo in unwed Mirza yielded a strong desire to possess her and increased suspicion towards his neighbours. Chughtai presents a complex representation of masculine desire accompanied by aggression as well as fragility initiated due to sexual jealousy. Mirza’s anxiety is symptomatic of the cultural implications around sexuality. His fear of cuckoldry stems from the understanding of norms around power and sex in a relationship as a continuous practice necessary to maintain the hierarchical order conventional to a household. Surveillance turns out to be an important measure in the procedure of taming Lajo. This course of action begins with denying her access to public spaces, such as the market and his shop, by commanding her to “not come with (his) lunch anymore” (Chughtai 85) at his shop. However, on “the day she didn’t bring lunch to the shop, Mirza’s mind would be assailed by suspicions” (Chughtai 86). Resultantly, “he began to drop in at odd hours to spy on her”

(Chughtai 86). Hence, the idea of omnipresent eyes following her throughout, in both domestic and public places, was foisted upon Lajo to tame her.

The other stratagems adopted by him to curb her sexuality and convert her into a “decent woman” included imposing self-surveillance through the institution of marriage. This custom of a monogamous relationship was enforced in order to restrain her sexual appetite, and this is explicitly evident when Lajo questions the need for marriage; the annoyed Mirza responds by hurling abusive words such as, “Why? Want to have flings with others?” (Chughtai 87). Thus, the panopticon gaze of the institution called marriage is probed by Chughtai. To integrate a self-surveillance tendency in order to accomplish the procedure of taming Lajo, her sexuality is constricted within a “tight-fitting churidar pyjamas”² by imposing a ban on her free-flowing lehngas³. Thus, “Mirza’s constant chastisement had put restrictions on her freewheeling ways, and eventually she was tamed and reformed” (Chughtai 89). Self-surveillance inculcated by her relieved Mirza as “now he didn’t feel any urge to get back home in a hurry” (Chughtai 89).

Self-surveillance as an effective apparatus is also employed to make the protagonist of “Touch-me-not” realise the expectations she is required to meet as a wife. Her continuous miscarriage gives rise to the fear of being deserted by her husband. “She knew that another miscarriage would be her husband’s ticket to a second marriage.” (Chughtai 97). The necessity to carry out this conjugal duty pushes her into destructive self-disciplinary practices. She disregards her health and body as she opts for a difficult pregnancy after continuous miscarriages. Moreover, her situation worsens due to her lack of financial autonomy and hence the realisation that a marital relationship is the only means to ensure her survival. Therefore, “she was desperately looking forward to the delivery which would make her life secure.” (Chughtai 97). Her need to align with the norm by being a good wife is fuelled by the fear of consequences and the realisation of her lack of self-sufficiency. This gives rise to a constant practice of self-disciplining in order to align with the expectations of the husband. Hence, surveillance in this conjugal relationship is maintained through the omnipresent gaze of the non-attending partner.

Normalisation as Oppression

The succinct narrative of the story “Gainda” revolves around the life narrative of the chief protagonist Gainda, a fifteen-year-old widow and mother of a child born out of wedlock, a

lower-caste girl who serves the upper caste, wealthy, and affluent people in order to secure her two meals a day. This narration of her life is perceived and shared by the “I”—the narrator and friend of the protagonist. The constant presence of Gainda in the confessional account of the narrator is employed as a device to establish the normalised regime of knowledge where rustic sensuality and sexual attractiveness, often equated with immorality, are conferred on the women of lower social order like Gainda. In contrast, the narrator, who represents the women of respectable caste and class, is confined within the sense of shame and silence leading towards the forced erasure of their sexual desires.

Normalising regimes of power play a central role in the process of interiorization of acceptable sexual and behavioural conduct by an individual. However, the story provides various instances where the incomprehensibility of understanding the norms by the chief young characters is employed as a tool to question the structurality of the established norms and conventions. The act of smashing glass bangles on the death of her husband led Gainda to ponder over the question, “Who should a widow dress herself for?” (Chughtai 2). Due to her young age, she is not able to believe in the conventions firmly, but the gradual process of interiorization of the norms is reflected by her repetitive statements, such as “A wife wears sindoor or bangles for her husband only” (Chughtai 3). The game of the two girls, that is, dressing up as married women by parting their hair and applying brick-powder as *sindoor*,⁴ challenges the idea of dressing up just for the sake of the husband as an established norm. As per the norm, the performance of sexuality for a woman is entirely dependent on the presence of the husband, and hence female sexuality has no autonomy. This digression in the story is an attempt by the author to normalise pathologized identity by asserting the independent nature of women’s sexuality.

Her expectations from the narrator’s brother to conform to the norms of being a father by displaying paternal love and affection towards her son reflect her inability to comprehend the set norms and conventions around the birth of her child and the reasons for the punishment hurled upon her. Gainda and her friend are not able to discern the reasons for the unconventional behaviour she was subjected to, as it gets revealed through their conversation around the care and pampering received by another pregnant lady. “When bahu had that coal-black baby... Tons of ghee and jaggery had been forced down her gullet” (Chughtai 11), whereas Gainda “was beaten

to a pulp and abandoned without food” (Chughtai 11). The questions and expectations that arise from the innocence and naivety of the characters resist the established norms.

Like “Gainda,” *The Homemaker* too highlights the procedure of reinforcing the institutions and norms that label women from lower social strata, such as scheduled caste, scheduled tribe, economically underprivileged, or religious minority, as sexually promiscuous. Furthermore, the anonymity around the birth history and identity of her parents pushes Lajo to the brink of normative spatial practices and conventions. In this Madonna–whore dichotomy underwritten by the patriarchal regime of power, her distinct positionality at the spatial boundaries of domestic vs public space is used by the author to transgress and resist the norms. She uses the norm that provides women with exclusive control over the domestic space in the absence of a man. The story vocalises this norm through her as Lajo says, “A house does not belong to a man. He is more like a guest” (Chughtai 82). Hence, at the house of unwed Mirza, who spends most of his day at his general store, mosque, and visiting courtesans, the house of the Mirza, “without a mistress was as good as hers” (Chughtai 82). Here “was the queen.” This control she exercises over his household is further asserted through the material agency (Sahana) found in household objects, such as the earthen picture, sparkling lantern, and vessels in the kitchen. Besides being the undisputed mistress of his house, her disillusionment with the institution of marriage stems from the awareness that her truth does not align with the norm, as “she was not fit to be anyone’s bride” as “only virgins got married, and she could not remember when she had lost her virginity” (Chughtai 88). Her awareness of how society viewed her as a morally corrupt and degraded individual gave her the freedom to be unconventional and exercise her agency. Thus, in this story, the pathologized identity of the protagonist is used as a powerful weapon by the author to highlight the authoritarian regime imposed to suppress and tame the sexuality of women by confining them either within a domestic space through the institution of marriage or by treating them as a commodity and denying them dignity in public space such as market.

Through the sketch of Lajo as a woman who does not surrender to the helplessness that emerges out of the survival needs of the human body, Chughtai employs the hypersexuality of the character as a tool to resist the metanarrative that outlines the course of life of a woman. Her multiple sexual relationships are centralised around her sexual appetite and never indicate the

loss of liberty over her body in a power-oriented man-woman relationship. Her sense of agency in a sexual relationship where norms assign a man the task to control the sexuality of a woman is described by the narrator as, "...It was wonderful if it was a cash-down proposition; if not it was sex on credit. And if someone could not pay even on credit, it was sex on charity" (Chughtai 79). The only asset possessed by Lajo is her body, and she does not lead it to be anatomo-disciplined. Not as resistance to the norms, but Lajo breaks the norms by turning her divorce from Mirza to her advantage. She successfully asserts the independent nature of her sexuality by breaking the confines imposed by Mirza through the institution of marriage, along with securing her position as the mistress of his house. More than resisting the norms, the story is strongly anti-conventional in its design.

The dexterity at household chores helps Lajo to assert the "material agency" as well as yields into the consciousness of her financial autonomy. Otherwise, the financial constraints imposed on a woman are instrumental in aligning a woman's conduct in accordance with patriarchal norms. Such attempts to domesticate a woman are brought forth through the portrayal of the protagonist of "Touch-me-not." In the unequal power relation of *bhabijan*⁵ and *bhaijan*⁶ of the narrator, the absentee husband maintains his dominance by imposing social customs and norms over his wife. The invisibility of a male body in this story is used to extend the connotations attached to "sexuality." The term "sexuality" categorically evokes meanings related to body and intercourse. Through the behavioural choices made by the protagonist, Chughtai, in this story, has deliberately extended the connotations attached to sexuality to include cognitive, emotive, and behavioural aspects of an individual's development. The fear that stems from her inability to maintain for herself induces what can be called a hyper-normalised behavioural pattern in the protagonist. Her pregnancy and safe parturition of a healthy child will ensure her a secure life. Even "if the father of the newborn lacked interest, the grandfather would certainly provide for her maintenance" (Chughtai 97). In order to make ends meet, she undergoes difficult pregnancies one after another, a strenuous train journey from Delhi to Aligarh, and a self-imposed silence where choices around her body are informed by dominant patriarchal norms meant to ensure that the name of her husband stays alive through their progeny.

Punishment to Enforce Obedience

While defining “normalisation,” Ladelle McWhorter provides a succinct explanation of the procedure of evaluating someone with respect to norms. She equates the normalising power with the disciplining power, and states that “normalising disciplines also generates and deploy techniques for disciplining deviation to bend an individual's developmental trajectories back to a normal developmental path” (McWhorter 317). The story provides various instances where such techniques are hurled upon Gainda to crush her attempts to embrace her sexuality as she dares to break through the norms of widowhood by parting and braiding her hair and challenging the convention of “Who should a widow dress herself for?” (Chughtai 2).

The choice of the punishment or disciplinary mechanism differs depending on the locationality of the individual in the disciplinary regime. McWhorter further explains that “normalising regime of power/knowledge continually produces a residual/ residue: a set of individuals who cannot be assimilated into a given disciplinary system and thus for whom a new set of disciplinary mechanisms must be devised” (McWhorter 317). This dichotomy of core vs residue is explicitly portrayed through the choice of punishment meant for the narrator's brother and Gainda. The two individuals did not conform to the same norm of not restraining their romantic and sexual interest in each other despite their caste and class differences. The act of giving birth by Gainda implies breaking the norm of sexual abstinence imposed on a widow. Her pregnancy is evidence of the performance of her sexuality, and thus, this deviation from the norm is followed by punishment and disciplining measures. The intersection of caste and class differences further complicates the situation and thus pushes Gainda further away from the core.

The punishment hurled upon her and her child is an attempt to annihilate the residue. In the state of pregnancy, “she was beaten up for months together!” “She was beaten to a pulp and abandoned without food” (Chughtai 11). The child was cursed by *Bahu* (a woman from the narrator's family) as she said, “...why didn't he die and leave them in peace” (Chughtai 11). The “residual” in this regime was brutally ostracised, whereas the “core” of the regime, as told by *Biwi* (a woman who represents the authority), was sent off to Delhi immediately as he was a studious boy infiltrated by a “low-caste bitch” (Chughtai 9). Thus, the punishment unfurled on the “core” serves as an illustration of a disciplining strategy to bend his developmental

trajectories and make him return to the established norm, whereas ostracization was the new mechanism of the punishment devised for the “residual.”

This polarised construction of core vs residue is apparent in “The Homemaker” as well, where Lajo, who inclines towards the periphery of this normalising regime, is made to undergo a different set of disciplinary mechanisms. The punishment hurled upon her can be broadly categorised into two, as per the different normalising regimes of power governing them. The construction of her identity that arises from her birth- story makes her vulnerable to treatment aimed at seizing her dignity. The constant subjection to violent treatment makes her develop immunity towards brutality to the extent that she internalises this violent subjection as a norm. The narrator shares that she was accustomed to violent treatment as “she was to being beaten and turned out” (Chughtai 80). Her hypersexuality is largely demonised, and hence, a fear is generated around explicit sexual expression of an individual being a causative agent for further deterioration of the norms and social expression.

The second form of violence and punishment hurled upon her are sequential of the efforts made by Mirza to confine her within the core of the normative regime. Mirza’s efforts to imprison her by taming her overtly sexual conduct with other men go along with instilling the knowledge of new norms and disciplining measures. Through the various disciplining measures adopted by Mirza to tame his wife, such as restricting her access to public space, confining her within the household, enforcing his choice of clothes over her body, hurling physical violence and emotional neglect, abandoning her sexual needs indicates how the norm around conjugal relationship lacks emotions, love, and human sentiment. Through a forced marital relationship, Mirza successfully disciplines and tames her as these were the two essential attributes attached to women of decent birth who safeguard the honour of their family and husband. At the transformative end of the story, Lajo successfully manages to safeguard her integrity as well as her desires. She breaks away from the repressive chain of *nikaah*⁷ and then divorces and feels overjoyed when she comes to know of the invalidity of her marriage with Mirza due to her being an illegitimate child. Furthermore, she voluntarily resumes her work as Mirza’s domestic help. This end of the story, where breaking the claustrophobic confinement imposed through the institution of marriage yields a peaceful and contented relationship between two individuals, needs to be relooked as a new trend that may lead to the expansion of norms. The story, through

its depiction of human suffering at the hands of established conventions and institutions, prioritises questioning the ontology more than the epistemological existence of the normalising regime of power and knowledge.

Along with inventing the different mechanisms of disciplining on the basis of the locationality of an individual towards the core or periphery, maintaining the distinction between the two in order to indicate the exclusion of the groups that are categorised as residual also act as a punishment strategy. This distinction generates the fear of being pushed towards the periphery and facing elimination from the social structure. Moreover, as different, harsh, and often brutal punishments are hurled on the residual, the fear of punishment, instead of actual punishment, presents itself as an alternate instrument to ensure the continuance of normalising discipline. The fear of punishment as a disciplining strategy is used to constrain the agency of the protagonist of the story “Touch-me-not.” The consequences of not aligning with the norms by fulfilling all the conjugal duties assigned to a wife are conveyed to the readers through the portrayal of the fear-ridden protagonist of this story. Voiced through the narrator, it is revealed that “lying in her bed, *Bhabijan* seemed to hear the shehnai of Bhaijan’s second marriage” (Chughtai 96). The fear of abandonment yields a non-institutionalised dominance of one partner over another. Moreover, in this case, the act of neglecting one’s wife receives institutional support by norms and customs and, hence, equates the act of deserting as punishment. The severity of the consequences is intensified by another fear of not being able to keep for oneself, a result of the confinement within domestic space. As told by the narrator, “She didn’t learn needlework because of lack of interest in it, and the little she had studied was long forgotten. In the absence of a provider, she could resort to one thing only—that is, to render the same service to everybody which was, so far, exclusive to her husband” (Chughtai 97). The fear of being pushed towards residue by getting involved into prostitution ensures dominance of patriarchal regime of power/knowledge in a marital relationship as this fear generates self anatamo-disciplining habit in the protagonist.

Conclusion

Docile bodies are manufactured through surveillance, normalisation (aligning to the norm established as truth) and punishment. The analysis of three of Chughtai’s short stories through this Foucauldian understanding brings forth a few critical insights. The three characters that were

studied all reacted in a different manner when they were forced to undergo the process of forming docile bodies. Lajo asserted her agency when she finally broke free from the constraints of marriage and resisted the process of becoming a docile body. Gainda found her escape from the constant docility through her friendship with the narrator, whereas in “Touch-me-not,” the protagonist succumbed to the idea of docility and transformed herself into one. This shows how the process of manufacturing docile bodies may generate different outcomes depending on the individuals. There is space for contestation and assertion even when the individuals are amidst the process. As shown, the outcomes of this process are not homogenised and can well be polar opposites. In her stories, surveillance, normalisation of knowledge and punishment do not always have a clear distinction in praxis. In “The Homemaker,” the enforcement of the dress code by Mirza is a disciplining action that is not only a punishment in itself but can impose surveillance as well as force her to align with the norms. One action can activate all three processes of transforming an individual into a docile body.

Furthermore, in “Touch-me-not,” the idea of punishment yielded the same effect as the punishment itself. Therefore, an action is not always required to activate the processes, as the fear of the imagined stages is enough to convert a person into a docile body. In this essay, we have looked at how Chughtai’s women were attempted to be transformed into “docile bodies.” Similarly, there is ample scope for further research on how heterosexual male, as well as queer bodies, are brought into docility in the stories of Chughtai that need our serious attention.

Notes

1. The literal meaning of the word “Dulhan” is bride. In the text, “dulhan-dulhan” indicates a game played by young girls to enact the conventional behaviour of an Indian bride.
2. Pyjamas: trousers
3. Lehengas: skirt-dress
4. Sindoor: vermilion powder applied by married women in India in the middle-parting of hairs
5. Bhabijan: sister-in-law
6. Brother
7. Wedlock

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