



UNRAVELING GENDER AND METAPHOR IN SHORT STORIES OF ISMAT CHAUGHTAI

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Abstract

Ismat Chughtai is an Indian short story writer who shot to the limelight for her unabashed portrayal of women's identity and sexuality in her writings, at a time when such topics were considered a taboo in India. Ismat used various literary techniques and devices to portray the Indian woman. This paper aims at unraveling how she has utilized metaphors to describe the sorry plight of Indian women and depict the ills of patriarchal Indian society providing an insight into the macro-level implications it offers, of Indian culture and norms. The discussion of this paper is focused on finding out the meaning of these frequently used metaphors, how they were used and what possible gender issues were involved.

Keywords: Metaphor Analysis, Metaphor, Gender

Introduction:

Metaphorical expressions in literature go much beyond facilitating the readers to encompass what the writers want to convey. Through an implicit comparison a metaphor infers one thing to another (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Metaphors have their roots in the culture and the society in which they are used. So they reflect many cultural aspects as well. Mey (2001:203) states "metaphors are always charged with high pragmatic explosives". Metaphors were believed to be linguistic device for figurative embellishment of straightforward language but the ongoing research has now taken the new dimension and now they are believed much more than a rhetorical too. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue that metaphors are not just a poetic or rhetorical tool; they are part of our conceptual system. They allow us to understand one aspect of a concept in terms of another and our use of metaphors reflects our conceptual structure as mind is truly metaphorical in nature.

Cognition is not the only thing behind the use of metaphors but some cultural motivation is also there and their usage shows the beliefs and attitudes which are held by a particular community and thus they vary from culture to culture and time to time (Deignan 2003, MacArthur 2005). This cultural specificity makes metaphors a useful tool for transmission and perpetuation of social beliefs. Depending upon the culture and the community, most of the



metaphors are not neutral in their evaluative stance but are ideologically charged or biased towards gender, things, institutions and situations (Nunberg, Sag & Watson 1994, Moon 1998). Thus, these metaphors reflect cultural values and conventions withheld by a community (Deignan 2003, Maalej 2004).

For the last few decades metaphors are being taken by the linguists as figure of thought rather than language ornaments of some kind. Researches on metaphors have taken up different aspects of metaphor usage and kinds in various contexts and domains. Various identified domains as sources of metaphors include food, time, and animals. Desirable and undesirable properties of animals are in the background when humans are metaphorically referred as animals. This may reflect abuse, hatred, fear or affection. Some of these may reflect semantic derogation, particularly, when they are gender based or more properly gender biased.

The metaphors are used by us consciously or unconsciously to understand and to convey our perception of a situation or a person. Going through the pages of Ismat's short stories we come across a host of striking and meaningful metaphors presenting women in the guise of foods, animals, supernatural creatures, plants and such other things.

The ideas of the modern linguists go against the traditionally held belief of metaphors not as linguistic device but linked with thought and reason. Keeping in mind the social force of metaphor in relation to the world and ourselves (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999, Gibbs 1999) and the role of language as a channel of our ideas and beliefs (Sperber 1996, Saville-Troike 2003), this paper is a preliminary exploration of the use of metaphors by Ismat Chughtai for gender representation and how negative images of women are presented to expose the gender bias present in the society and culture of the author.

Indian society has been a male-dominated one and has affected the Urdu language spoken there and resultantly in the formation and use of metaphors, we find hostility and prejudice towards women in the social discourse. Women have been shown as lower form of existence or if linked with some supernatural creatures even then it does not convey appositive value. Food metaphors have been widely used globally to put down women and if we take their derogatory intention only a few are directed towards men. Man is presented as the consumer of the food material of different kinds denoting the women.

Despite a large number of studies conducted in the area of metaphor no attempt has been made to investigate the metaphors in Urdu language. The available literature also indicates that



very few, if any; studies have explored the gender and metaphors in Indian culture or in local varieties of several languages spoken in India. Such a gap provides strong motivation to investigate this area of research. This study is intended to analyze metaphors used by IsmatChughtai in her short stories. IsmatCughtai played a vital role in the development of Urdu short story with her creative expressions. Boldness and unconventionality are her hallmarks. More specifically, the study addressed metaphors related to gender and their usages to praise or degrade physical or behavioral characteristics of women.

Literature Review

Metaphors reflect human values and the way people think about individuals and their relations, originating from the social context and the surrounding environment. Metaphors analysis has received a great deal of attention since the beginning of the 20th century. The view of metaphor has changed a lot from merely a figurative device. In the literary context metaphors represent the establishment of comparison by transferring a name of one thing to another and this has been a normal practice in all the communication made by the people all over the globe. One of the most simple and traditional definition of metaphor is offered by Bloor,

At its simplest, metaphors are seen as a tool for representing one entity or event in the terms of some other related entity without explicitly stating a likeness. Metaphors have sometimes been presented as a poetic device which can add interest, wit or complexity to a text.(Bloor and Bloor, 2007:69).

Yet another explanation for metaphors is offered by Lakoff and Johnson who say:

For most people, metaphors are a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish – a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Metaphors are pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature. (Lakoff and Johnson,1980: 3).

As our conceptual thinking and metaphors are linked together, the usage of metaphors may provide an insight into how women are portrayed in the minds of the writers and how do



they want their readers to perceive. Culture has a deep influence on the use and formation of a metaphor and the metaphors are culturally rooted. So, some of the metaphors can only be understood by a certain community only and may be in some specific period of time also. This is due to “source domain”. Wu (2008: 124) believes an exact source concept never exists in other culture the way it exists in another culture and there may exist variation in its interpretations.

Pedraza (1998) and Ribas and Todolí (2008) focused on the whole array of metaphors for women as different objects, women as dolls, women as merchandise, women as garbage and so on. These metaphors project women as artificial and superficial molded and designed to serve the needs of the user the man. Pedraza (1998) in the research on Spanish metaphors draws the conclusion that when metaphors are linked with some objects like a doll, it reflects masculine mind about the ideal of femininity, so reinforcing a stereotypical view of the female person and the masculine idea of what femininity should be.

The animal metaphors according to Kövecses (2010) are frequently understood in terms of (assumed) properties of animals and in this way they help understand human behavior through animal behavior.

López-Rodríguez (2009:78) believes that the world view or the picture of reality is formulated by the people through metaphors as they are charged with ideological components. In this way they serve as a mechanism to introduce, spread out and reaffirm folk beliefs. Hence the use of certain metaphors reflects gender difference in terms of animal imagery to degrade a particular social group, rendering it inferior or marginalizing it.

Hsieh (2001) studied metaphors in German and Chinese and reached the conclusion that this usage reflects cultural peculiarities and are constructed with regard to appearance, conduct and the characters of certain animals and these metaphors were positive, negative or neutral.

FernándezFontecha and Jiménez Catalán (2003) concentrated on the word pairs fox/vixen and bull/cow and their Spanish counterparts zorro/zorra and toro/vaca with the data from dictionaries to investigate the semantic derogation of the related animal metaphors and concepts. Their findings revealed that in mapping from source to target domain, the main metaphors towards female revealed worse qualities than those connoted by the metaphors of the male terms.

In another study, Shih (2006) analyzed animal-based metaphorical expressions of the Chinese Zodiac applied to men and women in Mandarin Chinese. The study also found that in general, the use of these animal metaphors conveyed negative connotations for women.



In a more recent study, Irene López Rodríguez (2009) conducted a study on animal images used for women in both English and Spanish. She indicated that women in both languages were placed in an inferior social role through the use of animal imagery. She believes that these animal metaphors impose patriarchal views about the role of women in society.

Nadim (2000) has studied the sociological perspective of the use of animal in Shirazi proverbs. He concludes that attributes of animal are drawn upon the humans with the association similar features. Hsieh (2001) explored the cultural particularities of German and Chinese societies in the use of animal metaphors and analyzed their semantic and pragmatic functions. Another interesting study was made by Halupka-Resetar and Radic (2003) in Serbia about the metaphorical use of animal names in addressing the people and how that expressed their implicit attitude which was abusive as well as affectionate thus this usage serves semantic purpose.

Hsieh(2008) made a comparison of animal and plants metaphors exploring the cognitive level of their usage showing that animal metaphors refer to active while plants metaphors are static expressions.

Shen Dan (2008) studied metaphors in ideographical and non-gender Chinese language and mentions that this language expresses gender-related messages linguistically and metaphors bear negative sexual and moral overtones to describe women. In contrast, male counterparts don't have such referring terms.

Rodriguez (2009) shows in a comparative research that the speakers of English and Spanish often understand gender differences in terms of animal imagery. In both the languages, metaphors, present women in the guise of chickens, bitches or vixens. This offers a window on the role given to women in these societies which consider women as inferior and subordinated to men.

Gender representation through food imagery is widespread and it benefits from the suggestive shapes and texture of food items. Food metaphors are also a universal linguistic phenomenon. The metaphoric projections related to women and food can be found in all cultures showing women to be acceptable or adequate on how well they look, taste and are accessible. Women and food are presented as something passive and ready to be consumed by the consumer-the male.

In *Carnal Appetites* (2000) Elspeth Probyn has argued for a theory of food connecting eating with sexuality and the related gender prejudices associated with food. Emma Healey in



Lesbian Sex Wars (1996) discusses if fruit can symbolize the female body, the peeling, opening and eating of fruit offers endless metaphors. Crumpacker (2006) in a study concludes that understanding the physical qualities of the food is necessary to grasp existing metaphorical similarity between the food and the body. Parasecoli (2007) believed physical features of food like softness, hardness, smell and shape serve as dimensions to determine their appropriateness for their use as metaphor as a whole or referring to a particular part of the body.

Goatly (2007) analyzed the food metaphors for women in English and found various derogatory references towards women like "tart", "lollypop", "peach" and declared "food metaphors constructing humans as desirable are disproportionately used of females."

Dan (2008) states, language is so socially constitutive, it therefore gives rise to important issues its power and function setting up influential ideological effects and helps produce unequal power relations between gender categories.

Metaphors not only reflect human values but they also show how the individuals think about the people around them. They are deeply embedded in the social context. The study of the relevant literature revealed that different studies have explored the representation of gender through metaphors with different perspective. The available literature also indicates there is no study on IsmatChughtai, the feminist literary giant of Urdu. Such a gap provides a strong motivation to investigate this area of research. Accordingly this study is intended to analyze the animal and metaphors used to represent gender.

Methodology

Data of the study comprised of the metaphors used in the perspective of gender in the short stories "Bandi"(bondswoman) and "Bhabi" (Sister-in-law) by IsmatChughtai. The data were analyzed qualitatively using the Lakoffian framework (1980; 1989). For the purpose of discussion and analysis, each of the selected figurative expression was translated. Additionally, capitals were used to denote the metaphors following the convention of cognitive linguistic research articles.

Analysis

The analysis of the data revealed various expressions used by the writer reflecting pragmatic derogation against women. This usage shows the ages old socio cultural trend of the society in which Ismat survived and tried her level best to contest the prevailing conventional beliefs and prejudices. The data was analyzed under the animal and food related expressions.



Animals

Animals are commonly used in metaphors representing their features, characteristics and behavior to convey certain meanings and the choice of these served as a vehicle to transmit stereotype images of women is very effective due to the way the metaphors work.

1. بہتوتہیہیہاللہمیانکیگاے۔

(She was the COW of God)

Indian society treats women not more than a stupid and dull being and for this comparing them with a simple cow has been a common practice.

2. نہ جانے یہ منہ زور سانڈ نی کہاں سے پکڑ لائے۔

(God knows from where they caught this BULL.)

Here the comparison of woman to fierce bull pertains to the attitude of the lady who does not confirm to the social laws of the society which wanted to see the women only in subordinate and docile role. Here it is noteworthy that it is in total opposite to what women are usually referred to as a cow, but still this can't be taken as a positive attribute.

3. امی نے ان کو مارنے کے لیے اس چھپکلی کیوں بھیجا۔

(Why did mother send this LIZARD to kill him?)

Comparing women to a lizard here refers to the tiny stature of the woman who is quite insignificant to match the man for whom she has been sent.

4. یہ چپکی بوئی چھپکلی دیکھ کر ان کے رونگھٹے کھڑے ہو گئے۔

(He was at his wits end to see this FLAT LIZARD)

Here again the use of lizard for woman points out the insignificant value of the woman.

5. وہ کوئی چوبیا یا بلی تھی۔

(As if she were a CAT or a MOUSE.)

Female rat or cat comparison reflects the traditional insignificance, worthlessness and lesser value attributed towards women.

6. بیوقوف گدھی کہیں کی۔ (She was a dumb JENNY.)

Ass or jenny socially represents stupidity in Indian culture. Although stupid has been uttered yet to intensify the meaning metaphoric usage of jenny has been given as well this aims to present the idea that women are stupid and dull beings.

7. کیا چوبیا سمجھا اسے۔ (Were they taking him for a MOUSE?)



Rat is culturally regarded as something unimportant and insignificant. Here a male character has been taken as a rat which is one of the common metaphors for a coward in Indian society.

8. گدھا کہیں کا۔ (You are an ASS.)

Usually stupidity of person is shown through the metaphoric usage of ass, also it is also used for stubbornness but here it is referring towards stupidity only.

شیر جو پل دو پل پہلے زور شور سے گرج رہا تھا دیک کر واپس لوٹ گیا۔
9. وہ

(The LION that was roaring while ago retreated cowardly.)

Here man has been compared with a lion which is a traditional symbol for men showing their power and authority.

کچھ دنوں سے وہ بطخ کی طرح چوڑے چوڑے پیر مارتی دوڑتی آتی۔
10.

(She used to come for the last few days with her wide DUCK feet.)

The bulky stature of a duck and the healthy woman has been compared here and this has been consciously done to refer to the ugly style of movement of the duck and fatness which is undesirable.

11. حرامی پلا جن ربی ہے۔ (You are giving birth to a bastard PUPPY.)

Severe criticism has been directed towards the illegitimate child and as it is the line uttered by a lady so the sex of the unborn child is being taken as a male and calling it a dog is actually shifting the blame towards the father of this illegitimate child.

12. حلیمہ مورنی طرح کوک ربی تھی۔ (she was singing like a PEAFAWL.)

Beauty of the women and the beauty of peafowl and the singing of it is the source of comparison and this seemingly positive attribute is negative as it makes woman something which is for male to enjoy the beauty and the song so delimiting the purpose of women just as something to be enjoyed and as source of entertainment only.

13. ان کا بس چلتا تو ہاتھ ڈال کر سنبولے کو نوچ کے پھینک دیتیں۔ (Had it been possible she would have plucked that SNAKELET and threw it away out of her womb.)

Giving birth to an illegitimate child is something worst that can be expected from an unmarried woman in India. The desire to get it aborted is there and the unborn child is taken as snake which has been religiously and culturally referred to the serpent that seduced Eve and the same was done by the man who developed illegitimate relations resulting in the form of that illegitimate child in the womb of the woman.



اسے بوبو ایسے گھور رہی تھی جیسے چیل جھپٹا مارنے سے پہلے اپنے شکار کو تکتی ہے۔14.
(Bobo was looking at her as an EAGLE targeting its prey before swooping.)

Eagle stands for agility and fast attack, here the jealousy of the two women has been represented who were after the same man.

گوری بی اسے کتے کی طرح دھتکارتی تھی۔15. (Gori used to snub him as if he were a DOG.)

Dog culturally stands for something unworthy and sometimes its loyalty as considered praiseworthy yet no one would like to be referred to a dog despite all of loyalty. Here it is being used a derogatory term for a disliked and unworthy person.

سروری دنبہ ہو رہی ہے ہم اس سور کو بہت ماریں گے۔16.
(Sarwari was getting fat like a LAMB. I will beat that boar.)

Fat lamb is symbolically used for something ready for the slaughter to serve the appetite and especially that of a man as culturally men are taken as having a lust for the meat. A woman has been compared to male boar just to refer disapproval and dislike.

گائے بھینس نہیں میرے بچے کی امانت دار ہے۔17. (She is not a COW or a BUFFALO; she is the trustee of my kid.)

Indian society takes women as cows or buffalos who are stupid and cater for the need of milk and meat of the male. They are taken as valuable possession due to the benefits they provide. They can be bought and sold and move from place to place serving the need of the possessor. Here a male member consciously challenges this notion and consider her to be the trustee of his child. Ironically here again a woman has no worth of her own it is her reproduction ability that is providing her worth. So if she has some value is not that of her own but the value of the next generation which is in her womb.

(بہابھی) Sister-in-law

ایک دہلی پتلی ناگن سی لڑکی۔19. (She was a slender female SERPENT.)

یہ ناگن انہیں ڈس کر بے سدہ کر دے گی۔20. (This female snake will turn him senseless after biting.)

In literature we find many metaphors which compare women to snakes due to beauty and their poisonous nature. This, too, is a negative presentation of women as being harmful to the sacred men.



21. میں تو کسی کو خوش کرنے کلیے ہاتھی کا بچہ نہ بنوں۔ (I would never become a baby ELEPHANT to please any one.)

Though it is the size of the elephant that is serving as source of comparison yet this reflects the seeds of revolt from women to show and be what they actually like themselves to be.

22. لڑتی ہوئی چھوٹی سی پشمی بلی معلوم ہوتی۔ (While fighting she looked a small furry CAT.)

The comparison of women to cats seems to be a universal trend and here the same comparison is there. The littleness, dependency, beauty and being a source of pleasure for men is embedded in this metaphor.

In all these expressions it is observed that all the expressions showing derogation against male are less in number than those directed against women. Superior and positive stereotype attribute to men, whereas the inferior and negative ones attribute to women. In all this animal imagery women are belittled and powerlessness seems to be pivotal concept mirrored through these expressions which reveal semantic imbalance against female. The use of animal metaphor is a way to belittle women by referring her as bitch, snake and cow. Even if the women are called with positive terms like bull in example 2, that shows not congruent with the expected norms of the society. When animal metaphors refer to men they reflect them with physical power, and prowess as in example 9. An important feature noticed is that the negative features attributed through the use of some metaphors for men covertly applaud them. Thus the image reflecting man as cruel, self-conceited, avenger, awe-aspiring or lazy, tend to portray him as strong, free, powerful and enjoying authority and this all sets the stage to reckon him as the protector and supporter of women. Again the reason of existence of such metaphors should be sleeked in the culture and religion of Indian society, which grants an absolute authority to men to do as their wish and impose easily their decisions upon women. Superior and positive rigid verbal stereotypes attribute to men, whereas the inferior and negative ones attribute to women. The use of these metaphors reflects the patriarchal models.

Food

Metaphors play a pivotal role in the way we make sense of the world. Food is no doubt an important social phenomenon an integral part of the culture and a part or means of reflecting identities and they also serve as an instrument of cognition. Food based metaphorical constructions present a new way of regarding the process of creating and using a metaphor.



These metaphors exploit the expressiveness of language to build the desired image to convey or reflect the particular social ideology. Flicking through the pages of the writings of Ismat one encounters a host of repeated metaphors presenting women in the guise of foods and there is an array of metaphors that designate women and their body parts as food in a derogatory way with negative connotations.

23. جی چاہتا ہے تمہیں کھا لوں جیسے پکا ہوا دسہری جی نہیں بھرتا۔

(I wish to eat you up you are like fully ripened sweet MANGO.)

24. پانی کا چھلکتا کٹورہ روز پیو روز پیاس تازہ۔ (A glass full of WATER.....you drink daily thirst is unquenched.)

The idea of comparing woman to glass of water here in a way presents the need which is to satisfied often and it still persists but it also shows the worthlessness and insignificance as well.

25. نارنگی نہیں نامراد یہ تریوز۔ (Not this ORANGE but this WATER MELON.)

Body parts are often used to describe food depending upon the texture, color, form, etc. Here the womb of pregnant woman has been referred to as melon due to size.

26. پانی کا سا لطف روز پی کر بھی پیاس نہیں بھجتی۔ (Enjoyment of WATER and remains unquenched even if you drink daily.)

The relation of men and women has been that of user and the material here. Comparing woman with water makes it something easily available, worthless and yet ever to enjoyed. This idea of availability goes hand in hand with unimportance as well.

27. ما حضر کچھ اس ڈھنگ سے پیش کیا جاتا ہے کہ رغبت نہیں ہوتی۔

(The MEAL is served in a manner that it is unappetizing.)

Again in insulting manner women are termed as 'meal" and that, too, need to be presented nicely to the man, the consumer. Here it can be interpreted that women need to be transformed so as to be desirable and appetizing enough to serve man's choice of food or good enough to eat.

28. دو آتشہ بن کر چھا گئی ہے۔ (She got on his nerves like a heavy WINE.)

29. کئی من گرم گرم گوشت کا پہاڑ مجھ سے لپٹ گیا۔ (A hot heavy big mountain of MEAT embraced me.)

30. امر شہد ریت کا تودہ ، لہراتی ہوئی بجلی۔ (She was like) immortal HONEY, heap of sand a moving charge of electricity.)

31. مکھن کا ڈھیر تھی۔ (Bhabi was a heap of BUTTER.)



The metaphor making is not an individual phenomenon of perception and experience rather it is a product of collective social and cultural cognition process. If in any culture we find metaphors of food relating to women, it is a reflection of common belief system of that society which takes women as consumable and nourishing stuff. In all these metaphors we see that women have been presented as food and the man as the consumer. In example 23 the concept has been propagated that the "food" must be attractive to serve the "appetite" and the "presentation" of this "food" must be nice enough. Sexual partner as food and sexual appetite with food is not unique to Urdu language as food and eating are frequently interlinked linguistically and culturally throughout the world. These types of metaphors are quite common in a variety of cultures and languages across the time and location. These metaphors of food encode and their usage reflects the dominant male-oriented ideological positions and the consistent belittling of women.

These metaphors of food only perpetuate the notion that women are not as unique and valuable as men. Metaphors showing women as food reaffirm the idea that women's function is no other than satisfying men, their cravings, entertain them and amuse them. How innocuous these metaphors may appear yet they have the potential to psychologically and emotionally influence the people and are a contributory factor of regarding women as something to be consumed and enjoyed. In a way it is simply who feeds whom and who decides what to eat. Ironically enough there was not a single example of expression used for men referring them to some food item. The metaphorical expressions studied reveal not only the way society views women in particular, but more generally how the society conceptualizes women as inferior. The analysis seems to suggest that although the language system makes available to language users tools for talking about women and men in the same way, language usage tends to unfavorably depict women more often than men and it is this practice of the society that Ismat has presented in her writings.

Conclusion: Figurative expression of any language are motivated and influenced by the experiences and ideology of the community which uses the language. Ismat, regarded amongst the pioneers of voices challenging the patriarchal and gender biased social and cultural setup of India aptly used the metaphor scheme to propagate her stance on the condition of the women of her times and her skill is revealed to study the language mechanism and patterns followed by her.



With her deft and skillful usage of metaphors she has been quite successful to show how the social status of women was jeopardized. These metaphors used unusual collocations which reflect the prevalent negative associations. These derogatory linguistic representations of women shows stereotyped beliefs and attitudes about women, all of these contribute to the construction of gender and perpetuation of unequal power relations, subordinate position in society. They are reflection of beliefs and attitudes of society towards women. The negative connotations and derogatory uses of figurative expressions provide evidence of the universal conceptual system about women. The existence of such expressions in the areas where Urdu language is used shows the absolute authority of men. Though some of these expressions seem harmless on surface but very actually they are very noxious when paid attention. They are accepted as natural or sometimes funny as well due to their abundant usage. In reality they perpetuate the notion that women are not as unique and valuable as men, as lower form of existence. These figurative expressions are the active agent in the construction of gender showing the power structure of the society and provide a fertile site and it is easy to speculate on the patriarchal psyche of Indian society of Ismat's time and it will not be wrong to say that these figurative expressions not only made her writing meaningful and attractive but provided her a chance to discuss, contest and subvert gender ideology and inequality.

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