

M.A. (ENGLISH)

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PAPER-VI : LITERATURE AND MULTI-CULTURALISM

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UNIT I

STUART HALL

“NOTES ON DECONSTRUCTING THE POPULAR”

Ques. What does deconstructing mean? What does the title suggest?

Ans. The first part of Stuart Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" is an historical account of the development of British popular culture in late 19th and early 20th centuries. This period, according to Stuart Hall, saw some deep cultural changes in urban working classes with the appearance of cultural industries products and technologies. Hall holds that this period is characterized by questions which remain relevant to this day regarding the relation between corporate produced culture and the image of popular culture as belonging to the masses.

In the main part of "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" Hall is discussing the problematic meaning of the word "popular" in "popular culture". Hall analyzes two common understandings of this concept. The first meaning of "popular" is the one of wide circulation and commerciality. Subscribers of this view often tie popular culture with manipulative consumerism and regard it as falsification and even

degradation of authentic working class cultural content and tradition. Stuart Hall only partially accepts this view for on the one hand it views working class members as easily manipulated passive consumers while on the other hand seeking an "authentic" or "original" working class culture which does not really exist. Hall prefers a more dynamic and changing description of popular content and forms.

The second definition of popular culture scrutinized by Hall is the one which views popular culture as all the cultural activities of "the people". This definition is in fact a massive inventory list of various cultural and leisure activities. Hall is critical of this perspective as well for its essentialist view and it being based on the binary distinction between "the people" and the "elite".

Towards the end of "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" Stuart Hall offers another definition of popular culture which stresses its dynamic nature and constant tension and struggle. Hall understands popular culture as an ongoing process, similar the concept of Hegemony offered by Gramsci, in which relations of control and subordination are constantly shifting and certain cultural forms gain and lose support from institutions. Preferred or marginalized cultural content and forms are not fixed, according to Hall there is a constant movement and interchange between them as a result of shifting power relations, the assimilation of popular content into "high culture" and vice versa. What Stuart Hall is essentially offering in "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" is a neo-Gramscian view of the power relation between high and popular culture, with a more mutual perspective of the assimilatory take originally offered by Gramsci who thought the high hegemonic culture assimilates and sterilizes popular culture.

Stuart Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" initially appeared in *"People's History and Socialist Theory"* (1981) – a collection of essays concerned with socialism in its British contexts. Therefore Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" relies on British popular culture and its significance to the lower working class. But since Hall is attempting to deconstruct stereotypical connections between popular culture and the working class, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" has theoretical

value in relation to the understanding of popular culture as a modern phenomenon in industrialized countries.

Stuart Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" works within the tension between the perception of popular culture as something that emanates from the working class and therefore has something authentic about it, and the understanding of popular culture as an exploitative, commercial and mass communication based ally of modern capitalism. Hall's Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" criticizes views that regard popular culture as an authentic expression of the working class and as a site for cultural resistance. Hall favors a more dynamic approach which views popular culture as changing field and as a site for struggle between different social forces over the meaning and value ascribed to popular culture.

"Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" opens with an historical account of the development of British Popular culture. Stuart Hall then proceeds to discuss the meaning of the term "popular" in the phrase "popular culture". Hall is offering three different definitions of "popular" in relation to culture, and his main point in "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" is to try and point to the complexity of the relation between cultural products and content associated with "the common people" and the products and content of the culture industry. Hall points to the power relation that determine both high culture and popular culture as opposed concepts, while criticizing any attempt for an essentialist view of culture in general and popular culture in particular, and any steady association of content and cultural products with a specific social class.

UNIT II

JHUMPA LAHIRI

“MRS. SEN’S”

Ques1. Theme of isolation and loneliness in Mrs Sen’s.

Ans. “Mrs. Sen’s” depicts a relationship between two lonely and isolated people: Mrs. Sen (a woman who has immigrated to the U.S. from India for her husband’s job) and Eliot, the American boy she cares for after school. Outside of each other, Eliot and Mrs. Sen lack community and connection. Mrs. Sen knows few people in America; her husband Mr. Sen works constantly, and the only other person she speaks to regularly is the man who sells her fish. As the only child of a single mother with a demanding job, Eliot also seems to be without friends or family. Although Eliot and Mrs. Sen enjoy each other’s company as a respite from isolation, the two never grow close in the months they spend together—and in the end, they part ways forever. By showing Mrs. Sen and Eliot failing to diminish each other’s isolation, the story suggests that loneliness is a natural condition from which a person can never expect relief.

Throughout the story, Lahiri emphasizes the characters’ near-total isolation. Aside from each other, Eliot and Mrs. Sen are connected to almost nobody. Eliot has his mother, but she works long hours, and Mrs. Sen has Mr. Sen, who is likewise rarely home. Both Mr. Sen and Eliot’s mother seem emotionally distant. Beyond their personal lives, Eliot and Mrs. Sen lack community where they live—and with the tourist season over, their seaside town is mostly empty. Lahiri repeatedly emphasizes how isolating this is: the bus has few passengers, many stores are closed for winter, and

all of the children have left the beach where Eliot lives. The only sense of community exists among people with whom Eliot and Mrs. Sen have no connection, such as college students and elderly residents of nursing homes. Mrs. Sen contrasts the loneliness of America with the community she had in Calcutta. She describes Indian women preparing food together and talking late into the night. In America, she finds it difficult to sleep “in so much silence.”

While Eliot and Mrs. Sen’s friendship somewhat relieves their loneliness, they never become close, indicating that their isolation is entrenched. Eliot and Mrs. Sen enjoy spending time together while she’s looking after him. Eliot finds his mother’s beach house cold, and the beach is “barren and dull to play on alone.” He’s glad to go to Mrs. Sen’s warm apartment, where he enjoys watching her cut vegetables and talking with her. Mrs. Sen also likes having Eliot as a companion, and she looks forward to seeing him each weekday. When she picks Eliot up from his bus stop, he always senses that she’s “been waiting for some time, as if eager to greet a person she hadn’t seen in years.” Despite these indications that Mrs. Sen and Eliot enjoy their companionship, they never fully connect with or understand each other. Eliot notices that Mrs. Sen is lonely and misses home, but he doesn’t talk about it with her. When Mrs. Sen asks him, “Eliot, if I began to scream right now at the top of my lungs, would someone come?” he says, “They might call you [...] But they might complain that you were making too much noise.” This is typical of his interactions with Mrs. Sen: her anguish is clear, but Eliot lacks the emotional maturity to respond to it. Likewise, Mrs. Sen intuitively Eliot’s loneliness—at one point, she asks him, “Do you miss your mother, Eliot, these afternoons with me?”—but they never discuss his feelings or needs. Even though they see each other every day, Eliot and Mrs. Sen never connect enough to completely alleviate their mutual loneliness.

Throughout the story, Lahiri indicates that the future will be just as lonely as the present for Eliot and Mrs. Sen. Mrs. Sen believes that loneliness and separation are the conditions that she and Eliot must live in permanently. She thinks that Eliot's isolated upbringing is preparing him for this future in a way that her social, community-filled childhood failed to prepare her. She tells him that "when I was your age I was without knowing that one day I would be so far. You are wiser than that, Eliot. You already taste the way things must be." The story implies that neither Eliot nor Mrs. Sen will have a more connected community or family in the future. Mrs. Sen forecasts a lonely end for Eliot when she asks if he would ever put his mother in a nursing home. Eliot replies that he might, but that he'd visit her every day. Mrs. Sen denies this possibility: "You say that now, but you will see [...] you will miss one day, and another, and then she will have to drag herself onto a bus just to get herself a bag of lozenges." This prediction indicates that Mrs. Sen thinks that distance and practicalities prevent people from connecting in the long term—and, because of this, loneliness is often permanent. It is, perhaps, an unavoidable aspect of the human experience, particularly in insular American towns like the one where the story is set (as opposed to the Sens' more community-oriented culture in India).

Throughout the story, Mrs. Sen's isolation is reinforced by her inability to drive. She's afraid of driving with other cars on the road, and her lack of mobility means that she can't connect with the outside world. The story concludes with her first attempt to drive by herself, during which she gets into a minor accident with Eliot in the car. Her failure at driving is emblematic of her inability to reach out to others and function socially in the U.S; Lahiri implies that Mrs. Sen won't drive again, which means that she'll never be able to form connections. And after the accident, Eliot stops going to Mrs. Sen's and spends his afternoons alone instead. The severing of

Mrs. Sen and Eliot's relationship at the end of the story predicts their lonely futures, leaving them in the isolation—which Lahiri suggests is ultimately inescapable.

Ques2. Theme of femininity,gender roles and culture.

Ans . “Mrs. Sen’s” depicts the relationship between 11-year-old Eliot, his mother, and Mrs. Sen, the woman Eliot’s mother hires to babysit Eliot while she’s at work. The two women play very different domestic roles: Mrs. Sen does more traditionally feminine tasks like cooking, while Eliot’s mother fulfills the role of breadwinner outside the home and has little time for these duties. Eliot’s mother is like many American women, in that she raises her son without familial support and works outside the home. Mrs. Sen, by contrast, only recently emigrated from India, where family and community support are more central to the culture. In the U.S., however, Mrs. Sen plays the role of a typical American housewife, and she does her domestic tasks alone; both she and Eliot’s mother feel disconnected from others and unhappy with their roles. Through its depiction of Mrs. Sen and Eliot’s mother, the story suggests that both of these versions of femininity—that of the modern career woman and that of the housewife—are equally restrictive, isolating, and unfulfilling. Instead, a lifestyle that focuses on family and community is more conducive to happiness.

From the beginning, it’s clear that Eliot’s mother is worn out and emotionally disconnected, despite embodying an American ideal of the woman who “has it all” with both a career and family. Eliot’s mother takes care of Eliot and supports him financially without help from family or Eliot’s father, who lives far away. Instead, she pays Mrs. Sen to take care of Eliot after school. She doesn’t seem to have any friends to help, either.

When her neighbors have a party she isn't invited, and eventually "she looked up their number in the phone book and asked them to keep it down," which suggest she doesn't know her neighbors and hasn't made connections in her community. Furthermore, despite being each other's only connections, Eliot and his mother aren't close—largely because she has to spend so much time at work. Mrs. Sen finds this sad, saying to Eliot, "You must miss her. When I think of you, only a boy, separated from your mother for so much of the day, I am ashamed." But Eliot and his mother are accustomed to separation, both emotional and physical. That Mrs. Sen can't drive is unimaginable to Eliot's mother, because she works "in an office fifty miles north, and [Eliot's] father, the last she had heard, lived two thousand miles west." In the rare moments when they are together, Eliot's mother is usually so exhausted from work that they don't spend much quality time together. When she gets home from work, Eliot's mother usually orders pizza for dinner rather than cooking and leaves him to put away the leftovers while she smokes a cigarette. This exhaustion shows how wearing it is for Eliot's mother to do the overwhelming job of raising a child on her own—it prevents her from fully enjoying her life or having meaningful relationships.

As a housewife, Mrs. Sen occupies a completely different role than Eliot's mother—but she, too, is overwhelmed, unhappy, and isolated. Mrs. Sen spends most of her time completing domestic tasks alone, or with only Eliot for company. She has no connections in the United States other than her husband, but she spends little time with Mr. Sen because he works long hours as a professor. Mrs. Sen seems to feel undervalued by him: when Mr. Sen says that he won't go to the market to buy fish for her, she says, "Tell me, Eliot. Is it too much to ask?" Mrs. Sen dislikes the isolation of being a housewife in the U.S., but Mr. Sen and Eliot's mother both expect Mrs. Sen to

take on more independence by learning to drive. Mrs. Sen, however, has no desire to drive anywhere by herself—she merely wonders, “Could I drive all the way to Calcutta?” Mrs. Sen clearly wants to return to her old life, where she could rely on her family and community to help her.

While Mrs. Sen is unhappy as a socially isolated and undervalued housewife in the United States, she found doing similar domestic tasks in India much more fulfilling because she was part of a community—and this, the story implies, is the ideal way to live. Mrs. Sen often tells Eliot stories about her home in India and how connected she was to people there. She tells him that in India, if you “raise your voice a bit, or express grief or joy of any kind, and one whole neighborhood and half of another has come to share the news, to help with arrangements.” In addition, when the Sens lived in India, Mrs. Sen was able to cook with other women, rather than alone. At home, she tells Eliot, “all the neighborhood women to bring blades just like this one, and then they sit in an enormous circle on the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night.” Working communally and having connections made Mrs. Sen happy. In the U.S., however she must work without the help of a community, much like Eliot’s mother.

The only happy role for women presented in the story is the one that Mrs. Sen had in India, when she performed domestic duties communally with other women rather than in isolation. As such, the story suggests that Mrs. Sen’s former lifestyle in India—a version of femininity that’s very different from both the American career woman or the American housewife—is a more natural and fulfilling way to live.

UNIT-II

JHUMPA LAHIRI

2) INTERPRETOR OF MALADIES

Ques 1. Write summary of Interpretor of Maladies.

Ans. The Das family is in India on vacation, and Mr. Das has hired Mr. Kapasi to drive them to visit the Sun Temple. The family sits in the car, which is stopped near a tea stall. Mr. and Mrs. Das are arguing about who should take their daughter, Tina, to the bathroom, and Mrs. Das ultimately takes her. Ronny, their son, darts out of the car to look at a goat. Mr. Das, who closely resembles Ronny, reprimands him but does nothing to stop him, even when he says he wants to give the goat a piece of gum. Mr. Das tells Bobby, the younger of their two sons, to go look after Ronny. When Bobby refuses, Mr. Das does nothing to enforce his order.

Mr. Das tells Mr. Kapasi that both he and his wife were born and raised in the United States. Mr. Das also reveals that their parents now live in India and that the Das family visits them every few years. Tina comes back to the car, clutching a doll with shorn hair. Mr. Das asks Tina where her mother is, using Mrs. Das's first name, Mina. Mr. Kapasi notices that Mr. Das uses his wife's first name, and he thinks it is an unusual way to speak to a child. While Mrs. Das buys some puffed rice from a nearby vendor, Mr. Das tells Mr. Kapasi that he is a middle-school teacher in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Mr. Kapasi reveals that he has been a tour guide for five years.

The group sets off. Tina plays with the locks in the back of the car, and Mrs. Das does not stop her. Mrs. Das sits in the car silently and eats her snack without offering any to anyone else. Along the road, they see monkeys, which Mr. Kapasi says are common in the area. Mr. Das has him stop the car so he can take a picture of a starving peasant. Mr. and

Mrs. Das quarrel because Mr. Das has not gotten them a tour guide whose car has air-conditioning. Mr. Kapasi observes that Mr. and Mrs. Das are more like siblings to their children than parents.

Mr. Kapasi tells the Dases about his other job as an interpreter in a doctor's office. Mrs. Das remarks that his job is romantic and asks him to tell her about some of his patients. However, Mr. Kapasi views his job as a failure. At one time, he had been a scholar of many languages, and now he remains fluent only in English. He took the interpreting job as a way to pay the medical bills when his eldest son contracted typhoid and died at age seven. He kept the job because the pay was better than his previous teaching job, but it reminds his wife of their son's death. Mr. Kapasi's marriage was arranged by his parents, and he and his wife have nothing in common. Mr. Kapasi, seduced by Mrs. Das's description of his job as "romantic," begins fantasizing about Mrs. Das.

When they stop for lunch, Mrs. Das insists that Mr. Kapasi sit with them. He does, and Mr. Das takes their picture together. Mrs. Das gets Mr. Kapasi's address so that she can send him a copy of the picture, and Mr. Kapasi begins to daydream about how they will have a great correspondence that will, in a way, finally fulfill his dreams of being a diplomat between countries. He imagines the witty things he will write to her and how she will reveal the unhappiness of her marriage.

At the temple, Mrs. Das talks with Mr. Kapasi as they stare at friezes of women in erotic poses. Mr. Kapasi admires her legs and continues to dream about their letters. Dreading taking the Dases back to their hotel, he suggests that they go see a nearby monastery, and they agree. When they arrive, the place is swarming with monkeys. Mr. Kapasi tells the children and Mr. Das that the monkeys are not dangerous as long as they are not fed.

Mrs. Das stays in the car because her legs are tired. She sits in the front seat next to Mr. Kapasi and confesses to him that her younger son, Bobby, is the product of an affair she had eight years ago. She slept with a friend of Mr. Das's who came to visit while she was a lonely housewife, and she has never told anyone about it. She tells Mr. Kapasi because he is an interpreter of maladies and she believes he can help her. Mr. Kapasi's

crush on her begins to evaporate. Mrs. Das reveals that she no longer loves her husband, whom she has known since she was a young child, and that she has destructive impulses toward her children and life. She asks Mr. Kapasi to suggest some remedy for her pain. Mr. Kapasi, insulted, asks her whether it isn't really just guilt she feels. Mrs. Das gets out of the car and joins her family. As she walks, she drops a trail of puffed rice.

Meanwhile, the children and Mr. Das have been playing with the monkeys. When Mrs. Das rejoins them, Bobby is missing. They find him surrounded by monkeys that have become crazed from Mrs. Das's puffed rice and are hitting Bobby on the legs with a stick he had given them. Mr. Das accidentally takes a picture in his nervousness, and Mrs. Das screams for Mr. Kapasi to do something. Mr. Kapasi chases off the monkeys and carries Bobby back to his family. Mrs. Das puts a bandage on Bobby's knee. Then she reaches into her handbag to get a hairbrush to straighten his hair, and the paper with Mr. Kapasi's address on it flutters away.

Ques2. Write charactersketch of Mr. Kapasi.

Ans. Mr. Kapasi believes that his life is a failure and longs for something more. In his efforts to lift his existence out of the daily, monotonous grind it has become, Mr. Kapasi develops a far-fetched fantasy about the possibility of a deep friendship between himself and Mrs. Das. This fantasy reveals just how lonely Mr. Kapasi's life and marriage have become. His arranged marriage is struggling because his wife cannot recover from her grief over the loss of their young son or forgive him for working for the doctor who failed to save their son's life. His career is far less than what he dreamed it might be. He uses his knowledge of English in only the most peripheral way, in high contrast to the dreams of scholarly and diplomatic greatness he once had. In his isolation, he sees Mrs. Das as a potential kindred spirit because she also languishes in a loveless marriage. He imagines similarities between them that do not

exist, yearning to find a friend in this American woman. Not surprisingly, the encounter ends in disappointment. When Mrs. Das does confide in him, he feels only disgust. The intimacy he thought he wanted revolts him when he learns more about Mrs. Das's nature.

In both of Mr. Kapasi's jobs, as a tour guide and an interpreter for a doctor, he acts as a cultural broker. As a tour guide, he shows mostly English-speaking Europeans and Americans the sights of India, and in his work as an interpreter, he helps the ailing from another region to communicate with their physician. Although neither occupation attains the aspirations of diplomacy he once had, Mrs. Das helps him view both as important vocations. However, Mr. Kapasi is ultimately unable to bridge the cultural gap between himself and Mrs. Das, whether it stems from strictly national differences or more personal ones. Mr. Kapasi's brief transformation from ordinary tour guide to "romantic" interpreter ends poorly, with his return to the ordinary drudgery of his days.

Ques3. Write charactersketch of Mrs. Mina Das.

Ans. Mrs. Das's fundamental failing is that she is profoundly selfish and self-absorbed. She does not see anyone else as they are but rather as a means to fulfilling her own needs and wishes. Her romanticized view of Mr. Kapasi's day job leads her to confide in him, and she is oblivious to the fact that he would rather she did not. She persists in confiding even when it is clear that Mr. Kapasi has no advice to offer her. Mrs. Das is selfish, declining to share her food with her children, reluctantly taking her daughter to the bathroom, and refusing to paint her daughter's fingernails. She openly derides her husband and mocks his enthusiasm for tourism, using the fact that they are no longer in love as an excuse for her bad behavior. Although Mrs. Das has been unfaithful, she feels the strain in her marriage only as her own pain. She fails to recognize the toll her affair takes on her husband and children. Rather than face the misery she has caused, Mrs. Das hides behind her sunglasses and disengages from her family. Likewise, when her attempt at confiding in Mr. Kapasi fails, she leaves the car rather than confront the guilt that Mr. Kapasi has suggested is the source of her pain.

Mrs. Das embodies stereotypically American flaws, including disrespect for other countries and cultures, poorly behaved children, and a self-involvement so extensive that she blames others for her feelings of guilt about her infidelity. She is messy, lazy, and a bad parent. She has no concern for the environment or her effect on it and drops her rice snacks all over the ground, riling the local wildlife. She represents what is often called the “ugly American,” a traveler who stands out in every situation because of her expansive sense of self-importance and entitlement.

Ques4. What is the theme of Interpreter of Maladies?

Ans. The Difficulty of Communication

Communication breaks down repeatedly in “Interpreter of Maladies,” often with hurtful consequences. Mr. Kapasi, who is the interpreter of maladies, as Mrs. Das names him, has lost his ability to communicate with his wife, forcing him to drink his tea in silence at night and leading to a loveless marriage. He has also lost his ability to communicate in some of the languages he learned as a younger man, leaving him with only English, which he fears he does not speak as well as his children. Mr. and Mrs. Das do not communicate, not because of a language barrier but because Mrs. Das hides behind her sunglasses most of the time and Mr. Das has his nose buried in a guidebook. The children do not listen to their parents, nor do they listen to Mr. Kapasi about the monkeys. All these frustrated attempts at communicating with one another lead to hurt feelings. The Kapasis are trapped in a failing marriage. The Dases are openly hostile to each other. The Das children run rampant over their parents and everyone else. And Mr. Kapasi and Mrs. Das are unable to reach a level of friendship that they both may have sought, if only they could speak with one another openly. When Mrs. Das loses Mr. Kapasi’s address at the end of the story, it marks the termination of the possibility that they could reach out to each other and the definite end to all communication between them.

The Danger of Romanticism

Every time a character in “Interpreter of Maladies” fails to see the truth about another person, the results are in some way harmful. The main conflict of the story centers on two people who romanticize each other, although in different ways. Mr. Kapasi sees Mrs. Das as a lonely housewife who could be a perfect companion to him in his own loneliness. He misses or ignores cues that she may not be interested in him for his own sake because, at some level, he wants her to be this companion. He sees many details about her, such as her bare legs and Americanized shirt and bag, but he passes over others, such as the way she dismisses her children’s desires and her selfishness with her snack. Such unflattering details do not fit with his conception of her. Likewise, Mrs. Das wants Mr. Kapasi to become a confidante to her and solve her personal and marital difficulties. She views him as a father figure and helper and misses or ignores indications that he may not fit those roles. For example,

she doesn't notice that he is uncomfortable with her personal revelations and presses him for help even when he explicitly tells her that he cannot give it to her.

Besides romanticizing one another, the characters also romanticize their surroundings, resulting in insensitivity and danger. Mr. Das, for example, photographs the Indian peasant whose suffering he finds appropriate for a tourist's shot. He sees only what he wants to see—an interesting picture from a foreign land—not the actual man who is starving by the roadside. Even when Bobby is surrounded by monkeys, in genuine distress, Mr. Das can do nothing but snap a picture, as though this scene is also somehow separate from reality. Throughout their trip, Mr. Das fails to engage with India in any substantial way, preferring to hide behind the efficient descriptions in his guidebook. His romanticized tourist's view of India keeps him from connecting to the country that his parents call home.

Culture Clash

Central themes of all of Lahiri's work, "Interpreter of Maladies" included, are the difficulties that Indians have in relating to Americans and the ways in which Indian Americans are caught in the middle of two very different cultures. We learn quite a few details about where the Das family fits into this cultural divide. Mr. and Mrs. Das were both born and raised in America, although their retired parents have now moved to India to live. The Dases visit every few years, bringing the children with them. They are Indian but not of India, and their dress and manner are wholly American. Although Mr. Kapasi recognizes some common cultural heritage, the Dases are no more familiar with India than any other tourist. Mr. Das relies on a tourist guidebook to tell him about the country through which they are traveling, and Mrs. Das could not be more uninterested in her surroundings if she tried. Although India is their parents' home, Mr. and Mrs. Das are foreigners. Mr. Das even seems to take pride in his status as a stranger, telling Mr. Kapasi about his American roots with an "air of sudden confidence."

Though Mr. Kapasi and the Dases do share an Indian heritage, their marriages reveal the extent of how different their cultures really are. Mr. Kapasi believes that he can relate to Mrs. Das's unhappy marriage because he himself is in an unhappy marriage. He seeks this common ground as a way to find friendship and connection. However, the connection fails because the marriages are so vastly different. Mr. Kapasi's parents arranged his marriage, and he and Mrs. Kapasi have nothing in common. By contrast, Mrs. Das fell in love with Mr. Das at a young age, and although their union was encouraged by their parents, her marriage was not arranged. Mrs. Das's comments about her and Mr. Das's sexual behaviors during their courtship shock Mr. Kapasi, who has never seen his wife naked. Furthermore, Mr. Kapasi is offended by the concept of infidelity in Mrs. Das's marriage. This lack of understanding reflects a differing understanding of duty and family between the two cultures. The two marriages may both be unhappy, but the causes, remedies, mistakes, and results of that unhappiness have no overlap whatsoever. Mr. Kapasi's fantasy of forging a friendship with Mrs. Das is shattered even before he sees his address slip away in the wind. The cultural divide between him and Mrs. Das is, from his view, simply too vast.

UNIT-III

CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

HALF OF A YELLOW SUN

Ques1. What is the theme of Half Of A Yellow Sun?

Ans. War

The Nigerian Civil War (or the "Nigerian-Biafran War") started on 6 July 1967 and ended on 13 January 1970.^[5] The war broke out due to political and ethnic struggles, partly caused by the numerous attempts of the southeastern provinces of Nigeria to secede and form the Republic of Biafra. Political conflict between the Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa and Fulani people erupted into two deadly military coups. The Igbo tried to break away from Nigeria to become the Republic of Biafra, but were met with little support. From 1968 onward, the war fell into a form of deadlock, with Nigerian forces unable to make significant advances into the remaining areas of Biafran control. The Nigerian government cut off humanitarian aid to Biafra, resulting in hundreds of thousands of civilians dying from starvation and disease. Many lives and resources were lost during the war, including Adichie's grandfathers; and even today there are still tensions between the different ethnic and religious groups of Nigeria.

The story in *Half of a Yellow Sun* centres on the war, and Adichie has said that important for her research was Buchi Emecheta's 1982 novel *Destination Biafra*. Adichie grew up in the aftermath the war: "The need to write about it came from growing up in its shadow. This thing that I didn't quite understand was my legacy. It hovered over everything." She has stated she believes that many of the issues that caused the war remain today. She further commented that the war is talked about "in uninformed and unimaginative ways", and that the war is as important to the Igbo people her book features today as it was then. Because none of the major political events were changed in the book, Adichie said that the book contained "emotional truth", and that the book showed the war had a significant impact upon the people of Nigeria.

Politics and identity in post-colonial Africa

The social gatherings at Odenigbo's house are full of debates on Africa's political future. Here, the usefulness of various forms of African governance are discussed amongst the Nigerian intelligentsia. One particularly noteworthy debate involves Odenigbo defending the tribe as the ideal unit for African, as other characters stress the need for pan-Africanism or nationalism. He is quoted as proclaiming: "the only

authentic identity for the African is the tribe...I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his white. But I was Igbo before the white man came."

Role of Westerners in post-colonial Africa

Although there is a clear reference to Western influence in the Biafran War, a more subtle examination is found in Richard's character. Richard, although with good intentions, tries too hard to be part of first Nigeria, and later Biafra. His fascination with the culture and his wish to be part of Biafra leads to him speaking for Biafrans by attempting to write two novels, one about the art, and the second one about the Biafran war. Richard is unable to complete either, and concludes that these are not his stories to tell. However, he is effective when he writes about the war for the Western press, which actually helps Biafra's cause. Adichie herself has said in an interview, that "maybe [Richard's character] is my subtle way of slipping in my politics that maybe it's time that Africans wrote about Africa."^[4]

Relevance of academia in everyday life

Many of the main characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun* are professors, including Olanna and Odenigbo. Odenigbo regularly hosts fellow professors from Nsukka University for political discussions on the weekends. Over the course of the novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun* seems to criticize both these professors and their opinions. It does this by juxtaposing the high-minded political opinions of Odenigbo and his companions from the "Early Sixties" sections against the political realities of the "Late Sixties" sections. The novel also uses the same professors from the "Early Sixties" sections and puts them in the "Late Sixties" sections. Also, Kainene's business mind helps her successfully run a refugee camp, whereas Olanna and Odenigbo seem ineffectual. Adichie seems to emphasize the reality of action over the ephemeral nature of opinion.

Modus operandi of Western journalism

Half of a Yellow Sun is heavily critical of the Western media's coverage of the Biafran War. The rule of Western journalism is obvious when Richard meets with the foreign journalists: "Richard exhaled. It was like somebody sprinkling pepper on his wound: Thousands of Biafrans were dead, and this man wanted to know if there was anything new about one dead white man. Richard would write about this, the rule of Western journalism: One hundred dead black people equal one dead white person." Since it is clear that white journalists have a greater influence, Madu asks Richard to write about the war for the Western press: "They will take what you write more seriously because you are white. If you really want to contribute, this is the way that you can. The world has to know the truth of what is happening, because they simply cannot remain silent while we die."

Women empowerment

Although *Half of a Yellow Sun* does not have the conflict between a woman and patriarchy typical of feminist novels, it does show the agency of women. In one of the pivotal moments, Olanna is disappointed by Odenigbo's betrayal and goes to Kano to seek comfort from her family there. Aunt Ifeka says: "You must never behave as if your life belongs to a man. Your life belongs to you and you alone." Later on, even after forgiving Odenigbo, she confronts him about his betrayal and does not accept him justifying his actions by blaming his mother. On the other hand, when Olanna's father cheats on her mother, Olanna's mother does not confront him about it. She only asks Olanna to tell her father to do it more subtly.

Marriage

Marriage is a recurrent theme in *Half of a Yellow Sun*. For the most part of the novel, Olanna and Kainene both live with men without it being a question of marriage. Olanna refuses to get married many times at first, fearing that marriage would "flatten [their bond] to a prosaic partnership." It is only during the war, when Odenigbo is invited to a town meeting in Abba and Olanna is not, that they talk again about marriage. Olanna accepts, but the wedding is done hastily and is interrupted by an air raid. Although Richard never asks Kainene to marry him, he does mention his wish for her to be his wife many times. Arize who is poor and uneducated, admires Olanna for postponing marriage but waits eagerly for a husband herself: "It is only women that know too much Book like you who can say that, Sister. If people like me who don't know book wait too long, we will expire." Adichie seems to be saying that marriage is a pragmatic choice and women who don't need to get married might choose not to even when their boyfriends are willing.

Ques2. Write the art of characterisation in *Half A Yellow Sun*.

Ans. Ugwu – The novel starts and ends with Ugwu. He is a village boy from Opi who later becomes a servant in Odenigbo's house. Under Odenigbo and Olanna's guidance, Ugwu is able to continue his education and his literary skills progress throughout the novel. He tries to maintain contact with his mother and sister, Anulika, back in his home village, and is constantly looking out for his mother's health and wellbeing. His free time is often dominated by his love interests, which include Nnesinachi, Eberechi, and Chinyere. His life is violently interrupted when he is forcibly conscripted into the Biafran Army. There, he witnesses and participates in gruesome battles and a rape he was pressured into committing.

Odenigbo – Odenigbo starts the novel as Professor of Mathematics at Nsukka University. His strong opinions result in some characters labeling him as a "revolutionary". He favors socialism and tribalism to capitalism and Pan-Africanism or nationalism. After the war forces him to vacate his position at Nsukka University, Odenigbo becomes active in the war cause under Manpower Directorate. His personal life is dominated by his relationship and later marriage to Olanna. He is the father of Baby, though Amala, not Olanna, is Baby's biological mother. Odenigbo also has a strong, albeit turbulent, relationship with his mother. "Mama" affects his

relationship with Olanna, and Mama's death starts Odenigbo down a path of alcoholism and depression.

Olanna – Olanna is one of three characters through which the novel is told. She is the daughter of Chief Ozobia and twin of Kainene. Olanna was raised in Nigeria, and later attended university in the United Kingdom. She is described as “illogically beautiful,” and her appearance often dictates how others treat her. For example, her parents try to offer sex with her as a bribe to help secure business deals. Consequently, her connection with her parents is weak and she gravitates towards her Aunt Ifeka and Uncle Mbaezi in Kano. Mohammed is her ex-boyfriend and Odenigbo is her husband, and she is the adopted mother of Baby. Professionally, she is a Professor of Sociology at Nsukka University before the war begins. She later works as a school teacher in Umuahia and finally helps her sister care for refugees in Orlu.

Kainene – Kainene, Olanna's twin, seems to be at first very different from Olanna. She is the type of strong-headed woman, independent, cold, very calculated. Kainene lives in Port Harcourt, where she runs her father's business. Her father, very proud of her, tells one of his friends that she is “not just like a son, she is like two”. In the beginning of the war, she is a war profiteer. However, after she witnesses the war's cruelty, she changes completely as a character and instead of running her father's business, she runs a refugee camp. She remains fearless and in the end decides to trade with the enemy, putting her life at risk.

Richard Churchill – Richard is an English writer who comes to Nigeria to explore Igbo-Ukwu art. At first he associates with other expats, especially Susan who becomes his girlfriend. However, once he meets Kainene at one of the parties Susan drags him to, he becomes fascinated with her. Richard moves to Nsukka where he teaches at the Nsukka University and attempts to write a book about the Igbo-Ukwu art. Olanna invites him to be part of Odenigbo's circle of intellectuals. Richard is glad to witness Biafra's birth, thinking it would actually make him Biafran. He starts writing a book about the war, but soon realizes that it is not his story to tell. Adichie has said in an interview that the idea of Richard came from Frederick Forsyth, a staunch supporter of Biafra: “Richard isn't at all like him, of course, but just the sense of an Englishman who became more Biafran than Biafrans themselves, was really an idea that came from him, Forsyth.”^[4]

Ugwu's aunty – Cleaner at Nsukka University, she introduces Ugwu to Master Odenigbo.

Anulika – Anulika is Ugwu's sister. She is preparing to get married before the war, but a war-time tragedy changes her plans.

Nnesinachi – Ugwu's first crush from his village of Opi. Ugwu and Nnesinachi reconnect after the war.

Ugwu's mother – Ugwu's mother suffers from illness in Ugwu's home village of Opi. She seeks treatment in Nsukka with Odenigbo's help. Ugwu often worries about her during the war.

Miss Adebayo – Yoruba professor at Nsukka University. Sexual tension between Miss Adebayo and Odenigbo create an awkward relationship between Miss Adebayo and Olanna. As the war starts to break out, Miss Adebayo's ethnicity creates a gap between her and other professors.

Dr. Patel – Indian Professor at Nsukka University. Dr. Patel is a friend of Odenigbo and Olanna.

Professor Lehman – American Professor at Nsukka University. Professor Lehman's views are often criticized by Odenigbo.

Professor Ezeka – Professor at Nsukka University who later becomes Director of Mobilization in the Biafran Army.

Okeoma – A friend of Olanna and Odenigbo in Nsukka. Okeoma is a renowned poet, as one point called, “the voice of our generation.” He cites Olanna as his inspiration. Okeoma later becomes an officer in the Biafran Army and stops writing poems.

Edna – Olanna's neighbor in Nsukka. Edna is an African-American woman with strong opinions on racial and gender injustice.

Jomo – Jomo works as the gardener at both Richard's house and Odenigbo's house in Nsukka. He is one of Ugwu's first friends in Nsukka and is also often feuding with his rival, Harrison.

Harrison – Richard's houseboy. Harrison's talkative nature at first annoys Richard, and later gets him into trouble.

Chinyere – Works in a house near Master's in Nsukka. Maintains late night visits with Ugwu until the war starts.

Mama (Odenigbo's mother) – A village woman from Abba. She is opposed to the relationship between Odenigbo and Olanna because they are not officially married (no bride price paid yet) plus Olanna is an unnatural woman.

Amala – A village girl who works for Mama, Odenigbo's mother. To break up Olanna and Odenigbo Mama makes Amala sleep with Odenigbo. Amala gets pregnant but after giving birth, she refuses to take the child and sends her back to Mama.

Chief Okonji – Friend of Olanna and Kainene's parents. Chief Okonji claims a romantic interest in Olanna, but is thoroughly rebuffed by Olanna.

Chief Ozobia – Prominent businessman in Lagos and father to Olanna and Kainene. Chief Ozobia manipulates his daughters for financial benefit. He also keeps a mistress, and eventually leaves Nigeria during the war.

Olanna and Kainene's mother – Chief Ozobia's wife and mother of Olanna and Kainene. She does not have a strong relationship with her daughters, and her marriage with Chief Ozobi might be described as a pretense.

Uncle Mbaezi – Olanna's uncle, he is the brother of Olanna's mother. He lives with his family in Kano where he founded the Igbo Union Grammar School.

Aunty Ifeka – Uncle Mbaezi's wife. Aunty Ifeka gives guidance to Olanna, who isn't very close to her own mother.

Arize – Olanna's cousin, she is Uncle Mbaezi and Aunty Ifeka's daughter. Arize is eager find a husband and get married. Like her parents, she looks up to Olanna.

Mohammed – Olanna's ex-boyfriend. He is a handsome Hausa man. Even after she leaves him for Odenigbo, they remain on good terms and she frequently visits him until the war starts. During the war, he writes her letters but they feel very distanced.

Baby – Olanna and Odenigbo's daughter. Amala is Baby's birth mother, but refuses to keep her. When Olanna sees her, she decides to adopt her. Baby's real name is Chiamaka, which means "God is beautiful." Kainene picked it but it is rarely used.

Susan Grenville-Pitts – Initially Richard's girlfriend. She lives in Nigeria but mainly associates with other expatriates or upper class Nigerians. Her racism towards Nigerians as well as her possessiveness towards Richard emerge periodically throughout the novel.

Major Madu – Lifelong friend of Kainene. Major Madu serves in first the Nigerian army and later in the Biafran army. He and Richard's relationship is strained due to the uncertainty of Madu's role in Kainene's life.

Special Julius – Army contractor. He becomes a frequent visitor of Odenigbo when they are in Umuahia.

Ekwenugo – Member of the Science group in the Biafran army. Ekwenugo meets Olanna and Odenigbo in Umuahia.

Mrs Muokelu – Co-teacher with Olanna at Umuahia. Olanna finds Mrs. Muokelu as manly and slightly judgmental. Mrs. Muokelu eventually stops teaching and starts trading across enemy lines.

Okoromadu – An old acquaintance of Olanna's, Okoromadu helps her get emergency supplies for baby in Umuahia.

Eberechi – Ugwu's love interest in Umuahia. Eberechi is exploited for her parents' benefit.

Alice – Odenigbo and Olanna's neighbor at their second place of residence in Umuahia. Alice seeks refuge in Umuahia after being tricked by an Army Colonel. She is known as a recluse and avid pianist. Mystery shrouds her relationship with Odenigbo.

Father Marcel – Helps coordinate refugee relief with Kainene in Orlu. Father Marcel is later accused of impropriety by some of the refugees.

High-Tech – A young soldier and leader of Ugwu's reconnaissance unit. High tech's name refers to his commanders claiming he is more useful than a "high technology spying gadget".

Ques3. Write the summary of Half A Yellow Sun.

Ans. *Half of a Yellow Sun* takes place in Nigeria in the 1960s. The book begins when Ugwu, an Igbo boy from a bush village, goes to Nsukka to work as a houseboy for Odenigbo, a professor and radical. Odenigbo is in love with Olanna, the beautiful daughter of a wealthy Nigerian. Olanna moves in with Odenigbo and meets his friends, who argue about politics every night. Ugwu becomes an excellent cook and goes to school. Meanwhile Richard, a white Englishman in Nigeria, leaves his girlfriend Susan when he falls in love with Kainene, Olanna's sardonic twin sister. Richard moves to Nsukka and befriends Odenigbo and Olanna. Odenigbo's mother "Mama" visits and calls Olanna a witch, which upsets her greatly. Olanna and Odenigbo start trying to have a child.

The narrative jumps a few years ahead, when the Nigerian government is overthrown. The Northern Hausa blame the Igbo for the coup. There is then another coup, and this time many Igbo soldiers are killed. Olanna now has a child she calls "Baby," and she takes her to Kano to visit her relatives. The violence against the Igbo becomes a pogrom, and Olanna's relatives are

brutally murdered. She escapes on a train to Nsukka and sees a woman carrying her daughter's severed head in a basket. Meanwhile Richard watches Igbo civilians being murdered at the airport. Colonel Ojukwu, the Igbo leader, announces that Southeast Nigeria will secede and become the Republic of Biafra. All the characters are overjoyed at this.

Nigeria then declares war on Biafra to annex it. Britain and Russia supply arms to the Nigerians, who advance against the confident Biafrans. Nsukka is evacuated, and Olanna, Odenigbo, Ugwu, and Baby move to the cities of Abba and then Umuahia. Their living situations get progressively worse as the war continues and Biafra's food and money runs out. Odenigbo and Olanna get married, but there is an air raid during the reception. The narrative is sometimes interrupted by a book called *The World Was Silent When We Died*, where an unknown author describes the larger political forces at work in the war.

The story returns to the early sixties, to the time before the war. Olanna goes to London, and while she is away Mama visits Odenigbo with a girl named Amala. Odenigbo sleeps with Amala, and when Olanna returns home she finds out. She moves out and gets very depressed. Olanna learns that Amala is pregnant with Odenigbo's child. She gets drunk one night and seduces Richard. Richard and Olanna both agree not to tell Kainene, though Olanna soon tells Odenigbo.

Olanna and Odenigbo get back together. Olanna decides to adopt as her own Amala's child, which is a girl and unwanted by Amala and Mama. Olanna names the child Chiamaka but calls her Baby. Kainene then finds out about Olanna and Richard, and she stops speaking to Olanna. She burns the manuscript Richard was writing but doesn't leave him.

The story returns to the late sixties. The situation in war-torn Biafra rapidly declines, and there is starvation and violence everywhere. Nigeria blockades all aid to Biafra, and most foreign countries ignore the conflict. Richard starts writing articles about the suffering Biafrans, and Kainene runs a refugee camp. Odenigbo's mother is killed, and he gets depressed and starts drinking.

Kainene finds Olanna and, her perspective changed by the war, forgives her. The sisters grow close again. Ugwu falls in love with a girl named Eberechi, but then he is forcefully conscripted into the army. He fights some battles and then takes part in the gang rape of a bar girl. He is badly wounded in a subsequent battle, and everyone thinks he is dead. Umuahia falls to the Nigerians and Olanna's family moves in with Kainene. They find Ugwu in a hospital and take him home. Children start regularly dying of kawashiorkor, a disease of starvation and malnutrition.

One day Kainene crosses enemy lines to find food if possible, and doesn't return. Richard and Olanna search for her frantically but find nothing. Finally Biafra surrenders and Nigeria is reunified. Olanna's family returns to Nsukka to find their house looted and all their savings liquidated. Ugwu returns to his village and learns that his sister was gang raped by soldiers. He starts writing about his experiences, and it is revealed that he is the author of *The World Was Silent When We Died*. Kainene's disappearance remains a mystery.

UNIT- IV

ISMAT CHUGHTAI

1) A MORSEL

Ques. Write the summary of A Morsel.

Ans. - A morsel is a story about a single employed woman Sarlaben who works continually and has time for anything else.

Her neighbours and friends were very worried for her as her father and mother had passed away and left her without finding a boy. They see her as a burden and so want her to get married. However, Sarlaben never worried about her marriage and never even gave time to think about it. Yet with the constant asked questions to do with marriage, creates a strong need in her mind for a life partner. They tell her that an unmarried woman is treated as a thing of pity. A divorcee or a widow gets more respect in the society than the girl who has crossed a marriageable age. Even a successful career or a comfortable living condition does not seem to resolve the issue. Telling her that marriage will ensure her a safe future. One day while on her way to work, she meets a boy on the bus who takes her seat. Later, he gets up and offers her the seat. Day by day they meet on the bus and every day he offers her the seat and stands all ride long. This news is later spread among the town and her neighbours start testing her with him. They tell her to try to talk to him and tell her that he will be perfect to be his soulmate. Sarlaben is shown as an outsider who does not care about her appearance and they tell her that she has to change in order to get in a relationship with the boy. Under the pressure of her friends and neighbours, who in this story function as an extended family, Sarlaben listens to their advice in order to catch the man. She prepares herself to catch a man's eye and thus his hand in marriage—two goals that previously had no importance for her but which, due to the influence of

her surroundings, she now deems important. Against her wishes, she is dressed by her friends. Later when she arrives at the bus stop, she is surprised as he ignores her but the truth was that he did not recognize her.

Ques. What is the theme of A Morsel?

Ans. Themes

Toxic gender stereotype

Character Vs society

The conflict portrayed in the story is character vs society. In this conflict, Sarlaben who is somewhat of an outsider, at odds with the society she live in. She is different from most and so she struggle to fit in with society's expectations.

Chughtai uses an employed single woman, Sarlaben, as a means to display how social attitudes towards unmarried women can shake even the most independent woman and cause her to change herself in order to end her undesirable status. Sarlaben does not view her existence as dismal as her friends and neighbors do; she is satisfied with work in the hospital.

Marriage

A very important theme in this work is that of marriage. Chughtai portrays marriage as an oppressive institution that validates female subservience. Marriage plays a very important role in this story. Sarlaben was a educated women with a job. However, the society does not give value to a woman's success but marriage. Sarlaben is told by her neighbors and friends again and again to think about getting married. These act as the voices of the society.

Oppression

Oppression is perhaps another important theme of this story. The author talks about the evils of oppression of women. The oppression by

society upon Sarlaben is clearly portrayed. Where people around act worried as her marriage age is passing and she is one who does not even think about it. As girls are supposed to be thinking about this their whole life. The story also shows how some are not happy and see her as a burden in their colonie regardless of her good qualities.

Global issue

The story shows how women very badly treated by men and this was seen to be common and not seen as a problem. Sarlaben had regular talk with her neighbours named Ramwia about how she was feeling and asked about if her husband has once again exploited her. Ramwia acted as the voices of the society and made it obvious to the reader that this was not an issues but rather very normal. Here the author adds irony as how big of a problem this was yet the society worried about women getting marriage rather at looking at what it has done to some which is ignored

Evidence

Every night he came home drunk and pummelled her until her bones rattled, and in less than a month he was gone, making off with her silver bracelets and nose-ring. Ramwai sulked for a few days, cursing him as she walked around with a limp. But, despite her bitter experiences, the thought of a wedding never failed to excite her

Domestic Violence

Objectifying women

Chughtai presents strong criticism for a community which promotes that the way to entice a man is to turn a woman into a tempting morsel. She shows that this mentality not only objectifies women but also reduces men to passive drones, who need to be stimulated by external factors to form a relationship with women. Sarlaben is told to change her appearance and dress up only to prepares herself to catch a man's eye. and thus his hand in marriage—two goals that previously had no

importance for her but which, due to the influence of her surroundings, she now deems important. Against her wishes, she is dressed by her friends. Against her wishes, she is dressed by her friends in a “pink nylon-georgette sari which had been embroidered with sequins, ... a lot of cream was applied to her face, Sarlaben has been changed from the woman she truly is into a physical object to be evaluated only by her appearance. She is described as “a pliant toy in their hands.

UNIT- IV

ISMAT CHUGHTAI

2) THE VEIL

Ques. Write the theme of THE VEIL.

Ans. *Lifting the Veil* is a title which carries implications spanning across western and eastern traditions. Consider the image of the veiled bride, a female figure condemned to lifelong possession. The veil is lifted to reveal the bride, for the pleasure of the male gaze. But in this collection of short stories, Ismat Chughtai turns that trope on its head.

It is the veil over *our* eyes which is lifted revealing rich, complicated lives. Originally written in Urdu, these stories yank us into an ungainly world which straddles colonial occupation and a sudden awakening into a South Asian subcontinent divided by deep wounds, into newly independent nation states. Perhaps well-described as an unassuming feminist, Ismat Chughtai grabs at the beauty and ugliness of life in heaping measures with two strong female hands shaped by the storytellers who surrounded her.

Women and the female gaze are central to these stories, but nothing feels contrived. Chughtai simply invites readers to experience these rich microcosms of life which, despite their small physical spaces, reflect so deeply the internal and external struggles of their historical context.

In all their glory, the women of her stories commit such shocking acts as earning money, swearing, and having sex. Sometimes, the characters feel so over-the-top in their archetypes – like the crone or the whore – that even harrowing circumstances can descend into something almost slapstick.

In ‘The Homemaker’, live-in-maid Lajo relishes in her promiscuity even as her lust-struck employer Mirza tries to tame her. When he finally gets her to submit, he begins treating her as society accepts a wife to be – leaving her alone at home and beating her for her disobedience. It’s hard to make a toxic spiral comical, but in the end Lajo sheds the skin of a pure and decent wife.

‘The Quilt’ is one of Ismat Chughtai’s most well-known works because the story was charged in the High Court of Lahore for obscenity, for its depiction of lesbian sex. We get to read her own reflections during this bizarre experience in, *In the Name of those Married Women...* which is the closing piece. With no intention of repenting, she is more excited for the trip to Lahore. Meanwhile, people are begging her to apologize and her male contemporaries are, for the most part, raging. How could she write something so shameless? It’s alright when *they* write about sex, but she’s a woman!

Ismat Chughtai wrote what she saw as the truth and therefore wasn’t ashamed of ‘The Quilt’. Shame is a theme which runs rampant throughout the stories and I thoroughly enjoyed her approach to it in *Vocation*.

An unnamed female narrator wastes a lot of energy casting judgements on her neighbors whom she is certain are sex workers, aka courtesans. It’s clear that the narrator is dissatisfied with her life and like most decent and chaste women, was probably raised to fear female sexuality.

So it is funny and painfully relatable – for any woman who’s ever been judged... – to watch her wrestle with her confusion while trying to maintain a sense of superiority, to be the better kind of woman. They must be too lazy to do anything else or they were violated by men and thus felt too besmirched to hold a respectable job. Most of these stories were written in the 1940s, but they should be required reading for anyone interested in South Asian literary fiction. Ismat Chughtai has been described as one of the pillars of Urdu literature, but her fearlessness in storytelling spans across cultures. I’m grateful for the existence of a powerful book like *Lifting the Veil*.

