

VOICES BEHIND THE VEIL: MAPPING THE JOURNEY OF INDIAN MUSLIM WOMEN THROUGH LITERATURE AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

*This paper conducts a comparative literary analysis of *A Life in Words* by Ismat Chughtai and *Zeba: An Unveiling* by Anees Jung to explore how Muslim women authors employ contrasting narrative modes, autobiography and prose fiction, to create and narrate their life narratives. By placing the authors' generic and representational choices under critical examination, the book reveals how each text negotiates identity, agency, and embodied life in opposition to specific configurations of a socio-political and cultural order. Based on autoethnography and feminist literary theory, the research illustrates how the authors navigate constructs of identity, desire, resistance, and the public-private split of the female self. Based on the argument in the paper, it is not merely individual works of storytelling for Chughtai and Jung but powerful socio-cultural texts that shed light on the changing place of Indian Muslim women. The longer quotes from the text allow a close reading of how these texts reflect their era, resist patriarchal limitations, and establish a canon of literary resistance.*

Keywords: Indian Muslim Women, Autobiographical Fiction, Ismat Chughtai, Anees Jung, Feminist Narrative, Cultural Identity, Resistance, Postcolonial Literature, Gender Studies, Autoethnography

INTRODUCTION

Amongst the vast expanse of Indian literature, Muslim women's voices have been muted, stereotyped, or absorbed in predominant cultural discourses. Yet, when Muslim women pick up the pen to write about their lives in the form of memoirs, autobiographical fictions, or testimonial narratives, though a rare occurrence in itself, they forge a distinct space of literature and politics that retrieves subjectivity. This essay explores two such seminal texts: Ismat Chughtai's *A Life in Words* and Anees Jung's *Zeba: An Unveiling*. Though divided by time and tone, the two authors express the multifaceted realities of a Muslim woman in India. Their texts show how literature becomes a space of reflection, criticism, and subversion that enables them to move beyond the limitations set by patriarchal, religious, and societal constructs.

To frame this question appropriately, the inquiry adopts autoethnography and feminist critical discourse as critical frames. Autoethnography is a research method that uses personal experience ("auto") to describe and interpret ("graphy") cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices ("ethno"). Autoethnographers believe that personal experience is infused with

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