ENG439 Midsem Submission

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***I(i) Kenan Malik observes that “The avoidance of cultural pain has therefore come to be regarded as more important than the abstract right to freedom of expression” in multicultural societies at present. Given that ours is a multicultural society, discuss the possible impact if Ismat Chughtai’s Lihaaf were to be published in present-day India.***

In present day India, *Lihaaf* would have faced a lot of opposition and criticism for three major causes. Firstly, homosexuality though legalized, is considered taboo and unacceptable in mainstream society. A still-prominent section of the society, which finds homosexual relationship unacceptable, would have alleged that a text such as *Lihaaf* corrupts the reader with such fantasies. Secondly, one might argue that such a text corrupts a reader with the illegal and unacceptable idea of paedophilia.

However, the most important and nuanced impact in multicultural India might be due to the religious connotations. Modern-day India is characterized by heightened tension between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority, thanks to massive cultural differences and political majoritarianism. In such a context, the underlying fact that *Lihaaf* depicts the scenes from a Muslim family wouldn’t have gone unnoticed.

The mainstream narrative in India prejudices Muslim culture as being patriarchal, homophobic and allowing incestuous relationships.

In my opinion, the Muslim liberals would have taken an offence to *Lihaaf* and argued that *Lihaaf* reimposes and thereby, propagates each of these prejudices of the mainstream narrative against the Muslim minority culture. It might be interpreted as an attempt to typecast the Muslim culture and community.

On the contrary, Islamist radicals might have argued for the inappropriateness of the (so-called) ‘corrupt’ influences like homosexuality and paedophilia, in Muslim culture. They would have taken offense on description of such indulgences by a Muslim woman and considered it a question on their fundamental beliefs.

Interestingly, unlike when *Lihaaf* was actually published, in the modern day, obscenity in the story would probably have been the least of all concerns due to changing standards of obscenity.

***II. Choose ONE of the following texts and prepare a defence against the ‘offence’ it is accused of. It is not compulsory to take specific laws into consideration while answering this question.***

***(ii) Draupadi --------- Gruesome descriptions of rape; portrays the Indian army in a poor light.***

Firstly, there is no explicit mention of the Indian army but so much is interpreted from the character named ‘Senanayak’ and mention of ‘liveries.’ In my opinion, the ambiguity is intentionally maintained, so as to refer to the state in general and how it oppresses the vulnerable sections of the society; instead of alleging the army in particular. Secondly, more prominent themes of the story are the feminist theme and the state vs oppressed theme, and it is unfair to take a very narrow and selective interpretation of the story. Thirdly, even if the story is interpreted as showing the Indian army in bad light, I would argue that Indian army must not be put in a position beyond reproach. In a healthy society, all institutions of the state must be open to criticism and there is nothing so ‘holy’ about the Indian army either. Lastly, these incidents aren’t far from reality, but is the unfortunate reality in Naxal regions of Chattisgarh and North-East. Then, why should they not be talked about?

With regard to the gruesome description of rape, first we tackle the legality of the accusation. The description of the rape is clearly not lascivious or appealing to prurient interests (as would be illegal under Section 292); nor does it provoke the reader to commit such a crime or calls for any such action (as would be illegal under Section 153). The description instead represents the pain and agony of a rape victim. Therefore, it does not violate any law in its spirit or text.

Now, we confront the question of why the visual description is necessary. I think the description of rape is exactly why the story is so riveting and powerful. It makes the reader uncomfortable and empathize with the pain and agony of a rape victim.