

SACRED DUTY

Ismat Chughtai



Sacred Duty is a short controversial story by ISMAT CHUGHTAI. Her strong feminist ideology made her one of the most controversial and successful writers of her time. This short story tells us about the religious tensions at the time of partitions in early 20s. After partition there sustained religious conflicts between Hindus and Muslims.

This story tells us differences in Hindu Muslim religion, their beliefs, traditions, rituals, method of worshipping and many more. It also gives us slight idea of how people with even one generation gap can have differences in their perceptions when it comes to religion. It tells us how the next or the coming generation is taking religious differences as. It also gives us the idea of the patriarchal era that prevailed at that time and differences in male and female and the importance of male voice than that of females in almost every part of life. In this story we will see how the females of new generations are active in taking important decisions and are sharing equal space everywhere.. It also tells us how name of a person can

trick us about his religion. It also gave us the idea of how people are jealous and outshows ones religion and faith as superior than others and the feeling of envy for each others believes. After writing this moot literary piece, Ismat Chughtai got into many disputes over religious convictions.

Ismat Chughtai titled this short story as “SACRED DUTY” as it tells us what one is obliged to do after taking birth in a particular religion, how one is restricted to take almost every decision being confined in that particular faith. Here every decisions also include the most important decisions of one’s life e.i. getting married. Story also tells us what happens when one does not fulfill his sacred duty.

Writer uses two families from different backgrounds to demonstrate religious differences prevailing at that time. The two families are Sethji Trivedi’s family, an orthodox Hindu family who resides in Allahbad and the other is Siddiqi Sahib’s family, a respected Delhi based Muslim family . It shows a typical arranged marriage traditions in both the cultures and it also talks of the qualities that parents aspire to get in their son in laws and daughter in laws. The protagonist of the story are TASHAR TRIVEDI (son of sethji) and SAMINA (daughter of siddiqi sahib). They are childhood friends and also visit each other’s home frequently, so they got much time to know each other. They both fell in love with each other. Their parents shared good trumps with each other. Being friends, they never bothered much about religious differences. Both of the parents consider themselves progressive and unorthodox; allowing girls to get higher education and letting them marry whomever they pleased . they certainly belive in all of this . But we will see in this story how the case changes when it comes to their own children.

Siddiqi sahib and beghum both wanted their daughter to get married to a man of their doctrine and have quality of earning handsome money , looks doesn’t matter. They made all arrangements of their daughter’s marriage , and later found that she

eloped with her boyfriend with Tushar. Samina got converted into hindu and they got married according to Hindu rituals . Photos of conversion and marriage were leaked in the newspaper .

This is the first time in story where we could see how people impose their family culture on their next generations who reluctantly have to embrace that. They are considered as people with no thought , no ideas. They are to do what they are told without employing their own notions . They are treated as monkeys .

When siddiqi sahib and begum got to know about this they were cursing themselves for why they have relation with hindu family . The first thought that came to their mind was to go to Allahbad and shoot both of them for they blackened their faces . Thoughts of murder and revenge were coming in their minds . Then he thinks how things would have been different if he had accepted fine position in Pakistan but that time a feeling of patriotism came in his heart and thinks how can he leave his own country which gave him birth .

Like sethji they were also caste conscious when it comes to their own Daughter . It shows how much hypothetical they were . As siddiqi sahib thinks himself as progressive and unbiased and actually it was true but all this unbiasedness goes to hell when its his own daughter who married with a person whom she loves but only drawback was that he was a Non- Muslim. And it does matter a lot for a typical Muslim family .

Siddiqi Sahib did all his efforts to reconvert both of them in Islam and even was able to do that . By trick he took both of them to Delhi . Though his own daughter didn't want to agree him to reconvert her religion but Tashar agreed to the proposal and got converted into Islam . sahib did all this not only to get a son in law of their caste but also to outshow sethji and played tit for tat with him. Pictures of

reconversion and marriage according to muslim rituals were leaked in newspapers to apprise trivedis about this all because now it was the matter of ego and self respect of them and their culture.

This part of the story also shows that people not only considers their religion as the most superior one but also takes it for granted that other religions are inferior and rituals carried out in those religion are shit for them.

Here the children are so childish that they make wisecracks and comments on each other in that caustic environment . This shows that they are not much bothering about their religious contrast .And even they don't care by which religion they are being known . What they were craving for is love which they were not getting from both the sides instead they were forced to change their religion so as to be accepted by parents . They made unparalleled efforts to make their parents happy that but couldn't succeed and at last they gave up.

A part of the story also tells us how much gender biasness prevailed at that time as the presence of mothers of both was nowhere seen in whole story except those cameos. Also a very good example is cited in this story to show the condition of women at that time e.i. "one man's testimony is equal to that of two women" so this is what the status that women had at that time. But the other part of the story shows a powerful lady , Samina who showed courage to elope with a person whom she love and who is of different caste .

At last they both realized that they were made dance like monkeys on their tunes .They were made laughing stocks .They were upset of what their parent did to them . Both of their parents considered culture , faith and beliefs and status more important than a happy life of their children with someone they love . Because of this they ended up losing their children forever.

At last we see that they both ran off as they were fed up circling around that vicious circle of culture and traditions.

We could see them as more matured persons than that of their parents as they announced themselves as children of God and no one else, they belong to no religion , no caste and no traditions. They believe in God . Bhagvan , allah all are one for them . The whole story deals with the independence from family , both tashar and samina love their families but they don't want them to impose any more .

We see these children , how maturely they acted to the situation and resolve to live rest of their life with each other and with someone who doesn't care about your religion but who cares for you. At the same time the cost which parents were to pay of their insane and unmatured reactions was that they lost their children forever .

Here in this story parents considers that getting their children married in their religion is their sacred duty and while doing that they ultimately failed to fulfill their sacred duty to which they were obliged to . Here parents make wrong interpretation of what sacred duty is which their children were matured enough to grasp it in right way.

So this story briefly tells us the situation that prevailed after partitions .The Hindu Muslims tensions that existed at that time. This story was written at the time of partition so may be the conditions were worst at that time but it doesn't mean that the situations are better off now , still people have these orthodox perceptions in their minds and still have jingoistic feelings for their religion to extreme levels.

This story tell us what is now the duty of coming generations . It doesn't mean just getting involved in intercaste marriages and going away from parents. It means that one has the freedom to follow whichever religion they want and if want , no religion. Here no religion means just belief in God and nothing else. All religions lead ultimately to same God . This story tell us that new generation can fill this gap of differences in believes .

There are many other trivial issues which are being highlighted in this story like gender biasness , patriarchial era that prevailed at that time, differences in perceptions due to generation gap. As we see mothers in both the family take no initiative to speak up nor are they supposed to do so. This also gives the testimony of the presence of patriarchy at that time. But on the other side we saw samina who shares equal say everywhere . Even differences in the perceptions due to age gap leads to an another gap which can never be fulfilled .

Ismat chughtai got into many troubles after Writing such a controversial story at that time but she just wanted to convey a message to the society that people may belong to a religion but firstly they are the part of humanity and their first sacred duty is to respect each other's free will . No one can be casted as inferior on the basis their religion and creed. Everyone has the right to do what they want without any impositions and forces.