Page 111
Opar di... the lot of you: The gibberish in the original here is: 'Opar di gur gur di annexe di bedhyana di moong di daal of di Pakistan and Hindustan of di dur fitey munh'.
Wagah: The territory of Pakistan ends at the border at Wagah.

Page 112
Over there... Toba Tek Singh: The last sentence of the story is translated by Tahira Naqvi as follows: 'In the middle, on a stretch of land which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh' (*Stories About the Partition of India*, ed. Alok Bhalla , vol. 3, New Delhi: Harper-Collins, 1994).

SUGGESTED READING

Bhalla, Alok ed., *The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1997.
Flemming, Leslie A., *Another Lonely Voice: The Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, Lahore: Vanguard, 1985.
Kumar, Sukrita Paul, 'Literary Modernism and Some Partition Stories', *The New Story*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study in association with Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1990.
Manto, Saadat Hasan, *Partition: Sketches and Stories*, trans. and ed. Khalid Hasan, New Delhi: Viking, 1991.
Wadhavan, Jagdish Chander, *Manto Naama: The Life of Saadat Hasan Manto*, trans. Jai Ratan, New Delhi: Roli Books, 1998.

ISMAT CHUGHTAI
(1915–91)

Ismat Khanum Chughtai was born in Badayun (Uttar Pradesh) in a large middle class Muslim household. A rebel right from her childhood days, she was more interested in the activities of boys than in the conventional pastimes of girls of her age. It was her eldest brother, Azim Beg Chughtai, also a writer, who encouraged her to read. Born in an age when girls, especially Muslim girls, were discouraged from studying, she had to overcome many challenges before she got her BA and BT (Bachelor of Teaching) degrees. She worked as head mistress of various schools in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh, and later as Superintendent of Schools in Bombay. In 1942 she married her long-standing friend, Shahid Lateef, a film director. In 1943 she gave up her job for a full-time career in writing and a long association with the film world. *Garam Hawa*, a film based on one of her stories, received the National Award for the best film on national integration for the year 1973. Among various other awards, she received the Padmashree in 1975 for her versatile contribution to Urdu Literature. She died on 24 October 1991 in Bombay. Even in her death she was dogged by controversies when, according to her wishes, she was cremated instead of being buried in the traditional Muslim manner.

Chughtai began her career at a time when women wrote in the romantic and sentimental vein. However, she was influenced by the realism of Russian Literature, and by the radicalism of Rashid Jahan, the bold and revolutionary Urdu writer. Although Chughtai was briefly associated with the Progressive Writers' Movement, she was never confined within the narrow definitions of organized movements. Yet she displays a deep sympathy for the oppressed and her writing presents a radicalism that strikes at the very roots of society. Most of her stories revolve around the exploitation of women and their economic and psychological problems. Her novel *Terhi Lakir* (The Crooked Line, 1943) is a portrayal of the vicissitudes

that a girl faces when she tries to live her life on her own terms. Chughtai also successfully captures the vanishing world of Muslim middle class India, hitting out ruthlessly at its hypocrisies, its hollow religiosity, its superstitions and ritualism, its contradictions and double standards. The unconventionality of Chughtai's themes is matched by powerful narration. Varying her tone between sympathy and irony, she manages to find a narrative style that is balanced between humour and cruelty. Rejecting the ornamental feminine style of her predecessors, Chughtai developed an individual, colloquial one, using the simple, earthy language of the common people, especially women, with its curses and abuses, its special turns of phrase and idioms, its metaphors and similies. This colloquial style is very difficult to capture in translation.

Some of Chughtai's better known works are her novels, *Masooma* (The Innocent Girl, 1964) and *Ziddi* (Stubborn, 1940); and *Chui Mui* (Touch-Me-Not, 1952) which is a collection of short stories. Chughtai's first story, *Gainda* (Marigold) was published in 1939 in *Saaqi*, an Urdu magazine. Her boldness in probing the harsh realities of her social milieu prompted readers to assume that it was a man writing under the name of a woman. When *Lihaf* (The Quilt) was published in *Adab-e-Latif* in 1942, it immediately created a furore and Chughtai had to face extremely hostile reactions. For a long time she had to struggle with the label of obscenity and was dismissed as someone who wrote only about sex. She was even charged with obscenity by the Imperial Crown Court in 1944. The judge, however, did not find the story to be obscene and the charge was dropped. This early notoriety was very hard to live down for Chughtai. It was her economic security based on her comfortable earnings in the film world, combined with her persistence, that enabled her to continue writing, despite the reluctance of the critics to evaluate and accept her.

'Lihaf' deals with sexual frustrations and unconventional sexual relations. It is the story of Begum Jan who is a victim of social circumstances, and of a young, precocious girl who attempts to come to grips with a reality that she cannot understand. The 'quilt' in the title is a metaphor for secrecy and concealment as well as a trope for the narrative. The writer uses the consciousness of the young girl to present a situation which is never spelled out but is nevertheless conveyed in all its complexity to the reader. What the adult writer wants to communicate about the relationship being conducted under the quilt is concealed by the bewilderment of the young narrator and we see only its frightening shadow.

LIHAF (THE QUILT)

Every winter when I pull the lihaf over me, and the shadow it casts on the wall sways like an elephant, with a sudden bound my mind begins to race and scour over the past. What memories revive in me!

I don't propose here to tell you a romantic tale about my own lihaf. Indeed, no romance can be properly associated with a lihaf. Come to think of it, a blanket may be less comfortable, but its shadow is never so frightening... as the rocking shadow of a lihaf on the wall. My story dates from the days when I was very young and used to spend the whole day getting into fights with my brothers and their male friends. I sometimes wonder why the devil was I so quarrelsome in those days. At the age when the other girls were securing admirers, I was busy fighting every boy or girl that came my way.

That was the reason why, when Mother went on a visit to Agra, she left me for a week in the care of her adopted sister. Mother knew very well that there wasn't a single child, not even a mouse of a one, to quarrel with in that house. A nice punishment for me! Well, so it came about that I was left with Begum Jan, the same Begum Jan whose lihaf has burnt itself into my memory and is to this day preserved in it like a scar from a red-hot iron. Begum Jan's poor parents had given her in marriage to the Nawab Sahib because, although somewhat 'advanced' in age, the Nawab was a very pious man. No prostitute or street woman had ever been seen in his house. He had gone on the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca himself, and had helped many others to perform this holy service.

But the Nawab had a mysterious hobby. It is common for people to have a craze for pigeons or for cock fights and so on. The Nawab detested such silly interests. His only pleasure was to have students around him, young, fair-faced boys with slim waists, whose expenses were generously borne by the Nawab Sahib himself.

After marrying Begum Jan, and installing her in his house along with the furniture, the Nawab Sahib totally forgot her presence, leaving the frail young Begum to pine in loneliness.

It is difficult to say where Begum Jan's life begins; at the point when she made the first mistake of stepping into this world, or when she became the wife of a nawab and was tethered to her canopied bed; or when the boys invaded the Nawab Sahib's life and sumptuous dishes and rich sweets began to be prepared for him, and she felt she was rolling on a bed of live coals as she watched from the chinks in the drawing room door and saw the boys in their translucent *kurtas*, their well-formed legs in tight-fitting *churidars*, their willowy waists...or, does it begin when all her prayers and vows, her vigils and charms failed to move the Nawab? What's the use of applying leeches to a stone? The Nawab didn't budge an inch. When this happened Begum Jan was heartbroken. She turned to books. But this too failed. Romantic novels and sentimental poetry left her even more dejected. She lost sleep and became a bundle of regret and despondence.

To hell with all those clothes! One dresses up in fine clothes to catch another's eye. But here, neither did the Nawab Sahib have any time to spare from the boys to look at her, nor did he let her go visit other people. Ever since she had been married, Begum Jan's relatives had come to visit her, staying for months, while the poor lady herself never escaped the confinement of her house. Those relatives made her blood boil. They all came to enjoy themselves, eat the rich food that the Nawab Sahib served, and have their winter needs provided for, while she would lie in the cold, feeling chilly even under her lihaf, freshly stuffed with cotton which had been teased out into a fluff. As she turned in her bed, the lihaf threw ever-changing shadows on the wall, but not one of these held any hope or solace for her. Why should one live then?...Well, one lives as long as life lasts. It was in her stars that she should live, and live she did.

It was Rabbu who pulled her back from the brink. And then in no time, Begum Jan's dried-up body began to fill, her cheeks glowed, her beauty burst into bloom. The massage of a mysterious oil brought back the flush of life to her. And the best medical journals, if you ask me, will not give the prescription for this oil.

* *

When I first saw Begum Jan she must have been forty or forty-two. How elegantly she reclined on the *masnad*, with Rabbu sitting close and kneading her back and her body! She had thrown a purple shawl across her legs and looked as grand as a queen. I was quite enamored of her looks. I was happy to sit near her and look at her for hours. Her dark, luxuriously oiled hair was neatly parted, and so immaculately set that not a strand of hair could be found straying. Her eyes were black and her carefully plucked eyebrows were like drawn bows. Her eyes were a little distended with heavy eyelids and thick lashes. But it was her lips, often reddened, that were the most amazingly attractive feature of her face. She had a downy upper lip with the faint suggestion of a mustache. Her hair grew long at her temples. Sometimes watching her face you had the queer feeling that you were looking at the face of a young boy.

Her skin was white and smooth as though someone had stitched it tightly on her body. Often when she uncovered her legs below the knees so that she could scratch them, I would cast sneaking glances to see how they glistened. She had a tall figure and, being well clothed with flesh, she looked large of build. But her body was perfectly molded and beautifully proportionate. She had large, white, smooth hands and a well-formed waistline. Well then, as I was saying, Rabbu used to sit with her, scratching her back. She sat for hours doing it, as if scratching the back was one of the basic necessities of life, perhaps even more than a basic necessity.

Rabbu had no other job assigned to her. She sat all the time with Begum Jan, on the canopied bed, massaging her legs or her head or various other parts of her body. It bewildered me sometimes to watch the endless kneading and rubbing. I can't speak for others, but I can say that my body would have disintegrated under so much pounding. And this vigorous daily massaging was not all. On the day Begum Jan took her bath the ritual became more elaborate. God, to think of it! For two full hours before she entered the bath, she would have her body rubbed with all kinds of oils, perfumed unguents, and lotions. That would go on so long that the very thought of it made my imagination race. The doors of her room were shut, the braziers were lighted, and the massage would begin. Generally only Rabbu was in the room with her. The other maids stood by at the door, murmuring and handing in whatever was required.

The fact is that Begum Jan suffered from a permanent itch. Hundreds of oils and unguents were tried but the poor woman could not get rid of it. The doctors and hakims said there was nothing they could diagnose. The skin lay clean, without a blemish. If there was a disorder below the skin they wouldn't know. 'Oh these wretched doctors, they are so stupid! Who would believe you have a disease? Your blood, God bless you, is a little heated, that's all,' Rabbu says smiling and looks at Begum Jan with her eyes screwed into a slit. As for this Rabbu—she was as dark-skinned as Begum Jan was fair, as flushed in her face as Begum Jan was snowy white. She seemed to glow like heated iron. There were faint pockmarks on her face. She had a robust, solid body, small, nimble hands, a small, taut belly and fat, always moist, lips. Her body exuded a distracting odor. How quick her small, plump hands were! This moment you saw them at Begum Jan's waist and in a trice they were at her thighs and then racing down to her ankles. As for me, I used to watch those hands whenever I sat near Begum Jan, intent on seeing where they were and what they were doing.

Winter or summer, Begum Jan always wore fine-spun Hyderabadi lace kurtas, foamy white over her dark colored pajamas. The fan was kept going as a rule. Begum Jan habitually draped a light shawl over her body. She loved the winter months. I enjoyed staying with her in winter. She avoided exertion. One always found her lying relaxed on the carpet, munching dry fruit, while her back was being scratched. The other maids in the house held a bitter grudge against Rabbu. The witch!

She ate with Begum Jan, was her constant companion, and even slept with her! Rabbu and Begum Jan were a topic of amused conversation at social functions and gatherings. There were bursts of laughter the moment their names were mentioned. Innumerable stories had been coined about the poor lady. She, on her part, never stirred out, never met anyone. It was just herself and her itch, and the world could go by! As I was telling you, I was a small girl at the time I am talking about and was quite enamored of Begum Jan. She, too, was very fond of me. And that is why, when Mother went to Agra, knowing that left by myself in the house I would run wild and start up a war with my brothers, she left me for a week with Begum Jan. It delighted me and Begum Jan alike. After all, she had declared herself my mother's sister.

Where was I to sleep? Naturally, in Begum Jan's room. So a small cot was placed for me next to Begum Jan's bedstead. On that first night, Begum Jan and I chatted and played 'Chance' till ten or eleven. Then I went over to my bed to sleep. When I fell asleep, Rabbu was still with Begum Jan, scratching her back as usual. The low woman! I thought.

Sometime in the night I suddenly woke up, feeling a strange kind of dread. The room was in total darkness, and in the darkness Begum Jan's lihaf was rocking as though an elephant were caught in it.

'Begum Jan—,' I called out timidly.

The elephant stopped moving. The lihaf subsided.

'What is it?—Go to sleep—,' came Begum Jan's voice, from somewhere.

'I feel frightened—,' I said in a scared, mousy voice.

'Go to sleep—what's there to frighten you—just say the "Aayat-al-Kursi".'

'Okay.' I started repeating the 'Aayat-al-Kursi' hurriedly but got stuck in the middle although I knew it by heart quite well.

'May I come over to you, Begum Jan?'

'No, daughter,—get back to sleep.' This a little sternly. And then I heard two people whispering. Dear me! Who was this other one? I felt even more scared.

'Begum Jan—do you think there is a thief around?'

'Get to sleep, girl—what thief could there be?' This was Rabbu's voice. I quickly pulled my head back under my lihaf and went back to sleep.

By next morning the whole frightening scene had vanished from my mind. I've always been of an apprehensive nature. When I was a child, I had nightmares. Muttering in my sleep, waking up suddenly, and bolting from the bed were daily occurrences. People said I was possessed. The previous night's incident, therefore, quite slipped from my mind. In the morning the lihaf looked absolutely innocent.

When I awoke on the second night, I felt as though a dispute between Rabbu and Begum Jan were being silently settled on the bed. I could not make out anything, nor could I tell how it was decided. I only heard Rabbu's convulsive sobs, then noises like those of a cat licking a plate, lap, lap. I was so frightened that I went back to sleep.

One day Rabbu went off to see her son, a perverse lad. Begum Jan had done a lot to help him. She had set up a shop for him, and tried to settle him in a village, but he was amenable to nothing. For a time, he too took up the service of the Nawab Sahib and received many gifts of clothes from him, but then, no one knew why, he fled and never turned up at the house even to see his mother. So Rabbu had to go to see him at a relative's. Begum Jan was unhappy about that, but Rabbu had no choice.

The whole day Begum Jan was disconsolate. Her body ached at every joint. She didn't want anyone to touch her. She didn't eat anything and was dejected the whole day long.

'Shall I scratch your back, Begum Jan?' I asked with eagerness, shuffling a pack of cards. Begum Jan looked at me intently.

'Shall I?...Really?' And I put the cards away.

For a while I did the scratching, and Begum Jan said nothing. She just lay quiet. The next day Rabbu should have returned, but she didn't. Begum Jan grew irritable—she drank several cups of tea and gave herself a headache.

Once again I sat scratching her back—smooth like a table top...I kept on gently scratching. One felt so happy doing something for her!

'A little harder—undo the buttons,' Begum Jan told me. 'This side—ah me, a little below the shoulder, here—yes—there's a nice girl!—Ah!—Ah!—,' she sighed with pleasure.

'Further, this side.' Begum Jan could have easily reached the spot with her own hand, but she was making me do it, and instead of resenting it, I felt important.

'Here,' She said. '—Oi,—you're tickling me.'

'—You!—' and she giggled. I had kept talking to her while I scratched.

'Tomorrow I'll send you out shopping,' she continued. 'What will you buy? A doll that opens and shuts its eyes again?'

'No, Begum Jan, not a doll. I'm not a child now.'

'What are you then, an old woman?' she laughed. 'All right, buy a *babua*—make the clothes yourself. I will give you lots of cloth to do it with.' She turned as she spoke.

'Fine,' I said.

'Here,' she took my hand and placed it where she felt the itching. She kept guiding my hand wherever she wanted to be

scratched, and I, lost in thinking of the babua, went on scratching mechanically while she kept up her chatter.

'Listen, you don't have many frocks left. Tomorrow I'll get the tailor to make a new one for you. Your mother has left some cloth with me.'

'I don't want one of that red cloth...it looks cheap...' I was prattling and did not notice where my hand had wandered, nor that Begum Jan was now lying on her back, supine. 'Oh my...!' I hastily withdrew my hand.

'Dear me, child! Watch where you're scratching—you're tearing up my ribs,' Begum Jan said with a shy, mischievous smile, making me blush.

'Come here, lie down by my side.' And she made me lie down with my head resting on her arm.

'Dear, dear! How thin you are! All your ribs show.' She counted my ribs.

'Oo-oo!' I mumbled.

'Oui?—I wouldn't gobble you up, would I?—What a tight sweater! You haven't even put on a warm vest.'

I began to fidget.

'How many ribs does one have?' She changed the tenor.

'Nine on one side and ten on the other,' I said, haphazardly recalling hygiene lessons learned at school.

'Let's see, take off your hand—right—one—two—three!' I wished desperately to escape but she held me tight and pressed me to herself.

'Ouh!' I protested—Begum Jan began to laugh loudly. Even now when I think of how she looked that day I feel quite distraught. Her heavy eyelids had grown heavier, the down on her upper lip darker, and, in spite of the chilly weather, tiny drops of sweat glistened on her lips and nose. Her hands were cold as ice but so soft that it felt as though the skin on them had been peeled off. She had taken off her shawl, and in her thin kurta her body gleamed like dough. Heavy gold studs that had come undone were swinging to one side of her open front. Dusk had fallen and the room was in total darkness. An unknown dread took hold of me. I felt bewildered. Begum Jan's eyes had deepened. I began to weep inwardly. She hugged and squeezed me like a plaything. The warmth of her body drove me to distraction. But she paid no

attention, she was like one possessed. And I could neither scream nor cry.

After a while she lay back exhausted. Her face grew dull and unattractive. She started taking long breaths. She is dying, I thought, and jumping up, took to my heels.

Rabbu, thank God, was back in the evening, and as I got into bed still nervous, I quickly pulled the quilt over me to sleep. But sleep wouldn't come and I lay awake for hours.

Why was Mother taking so long to return? Begum Jan so scared me now that I passed the whole day with the servants. The mere thought of setting foot in her room was enough to drive me out of my wits. There was no one I could speak my mind to. And what could I say, after all? That I was scared of Begum Jan, the Begum Jan who, everybody knew, was so fond of me?

Rabbu and Begum Jan had fallen out again, to my ill luck. This had me worried, for suddenly it occurred to Begum Jan that I was too much out of doors in the cold and would certainly catch pneumonia and die.

'Young girl!' she said. 'Do you want that my head should be shaved? If anything happened to you, I'd be held responsible.' She sat me down near her. She was washing herself in a basin placed before her and the tea was ready on a small table.

'Pour a cup out for yourself, and give me a cup too,' she said, drying her face on a towel. 'I'll get changed in the meantime.'

I sipped tea while she dressed. Whenever Begum Jan called me to her when her back was being rubbed, I would go, but keep my face averted and run back at the first chance. Now when she began changing in my presence the gorge rose in me. Looking away, I kept sipping my tea.

'Oh, Mother!' a voice within me called out in despair. 'Is quarrelling with one's brothers such an offense that you should cause me all this...' Mother was always against my playing with boys. As if boys were carnivorous beasts who would eat up her dear one. And what boys were they after all! My own brothers and a few of their rotten little friends. But Mother thought otherwise. For her, womankind had to be kept under lock and key. And here I was, more scared of Begum Jan than of all the loafers in the world. I would have run into the street that moment if I could. But I sat helpless.

After she had dressed, Begum Jan went through her elaborate toilet. When the makeup was over the warm scent of the perfumed oils she had used made her glow like an ember, and she prepared to shower her affection on me.

'I want to go home,' I repeated in reply to every proposal she made. And I started crying.

'Come, sit beside me,' she coaxed. 'I'll take you to the bazaar—listen to me...'

But I would have none of it. 'I want to go home' was my one response to all the toys and sweets that were being offered.

'Your brother will hit you when you are home, you little witch,' she said, slapping me affectionately.

'Let him beat me as much as he will,' I thought to myself and remained withdrawn and stiff.

'Unripe mangoes are sour, Begum Jan,' Rabbu offered acidly. And then, suddenly, Begum Jan had a fit. The gold necklace which a moment before she had wanted to put around my neck flew into pieces, her fine lace *dupatta* was in shreds, and the neat part in her hair, never for a moment disturbed, was all roughed up. 'Oh!—Oh! Oh! Oh!' she began to scream. Her body shook with convulsive jerks. I ran out of the room.

It was a long time before Begum Jan could calm down. When later I tiptoed into the bedroom, I found Rabbu sitting with her, massaging her body.

'Take your shoes off,' Rabbu said as she scratched Begum Jan's ribs. Like a frightened mouse I crept into my bed and pulled the lihaf over me.

Sr—sr—phat—kitch... In the darkness, Begum Jan's lihaf was swaying again like an elephant. 'My God,' I murmured, my voice faint with fear. The elephant leapt inside the lihaf, and then lay still. I was quiet. But the elephant was on the rampage again. I trembled from head to foot. I decided that I should gather all my courage and switch on the light at the head of the bed. The elephant rose, agitated. It seemed to be trying to sit on its legs. I heard noises, slop, slop—as if someone were eating something with great relish. Suddenly I understood the whole affair. Begum Jan hadn't eaten anything that day and Rabbu—Rabbu had always been a greedy glutton. Surely something delicious was being gulped down under the lihaf. I sniffed the air trying to catch the

aroma. Only the warm scent of attar, sandalwood, and henna reached me.

The lihaf was swelling again. I did my best to lie still and ignore it. But the lihaf began to take on such strange, outlandish shapes that it sent shivers down my spine. It seemed like a huge, bloated frog inflating itself and about to spring on me. I plucked up the courage to make some disturbing noises, but no one took notice and the lihaf entered my skull and began to swell there. Hesitatingly I brought my legs down on the other side of the bed, groped for the switch and pressed the button. Under the lihaf the elephant turned a violent somersault and collapsed. But the somersault had lifted the corner of the lihaf by a foot—'Allah!' I dived for my bed!

Translated from the Urdu
by Syed Sirajuddin

ANNOTATIONS

Title: Lihaf: A thick quilt.

Page 117

male friends: The word 'friend' in English is gender non-specific, while 'dost', the Urdu word in the original text, is gender specific—'a male friend'.

when the other girls were securing admirers: The Urdu word for 'admirers' in the original is 'ashique'. When Chughtai was on trial for obscenity, the prosecution had a difficult time locating specific instances. The best they could do was to pick out this phrase. Their argument was that girls from respectable families do not 'collect admirers'. The judge, however, was not convinced and the charge was dropped.

adopted sister: This seems to be the closest translation of the phrase in Urdu, 'muhboli bahan', but it does not quite convey the original meaning. 'Adopted' implies a legal status, while 'muhboli' is an informal acknowledgement of a sisterly bond.

Begum Jan: Begum Jan was based on a real life character. Years later, when Chughtai happened to meet her, she was delighted to know that the lady had divorced her husband, had remarried, and had given birth to a son. Chughtai wrote in her autobiography that she had long wanted some bold young man to rescue Begum Jan from the clutches of the witch Rabbu (*Kaaghazi Hai Pairahan*

[The Apparel is Paper-Thin], Delhi: Raj Kamal Prakashan, 1998, pp. 42–3).

hajj…Mecca: see note on 'The Holy Panchayat', p. 65.

Page 118

along with the furniture: The original phrase, 'kul saazo samaan ke saath' translates as 'along with all his possessions'.

was tethered to her canopied bed: 'tethered' for 'zindagi guzarne lagi' seems too strong a word. The strength of Chughtai's style is the simplicity of her statements, without any loaded meanings, in spite of which her ideological viewpoint comes across with great force. A more apt translation would be: 'began to spend her life on the canopied bed'.

rich sweets began to be prepared for him: It is not 'him' but 'them'. The confusion arises from the Urdu word 'unke' which means both 'him' and 'them'. But in the context here 'them' is more appropriate, for it was the students who were being pampered thus.

churidars: close-fitting pajamas with lots of pleats near the ankles.

applying leeches to a stone: In the medieval system of medicine leeches were applied to the human body to suck out blood as a means of curing many ailments. The phrase here emphasizes the futility of Begum Jan's efforts to get the Nawab's attention.

The Nawab didn't budge an inch. When this happened…: A better construction would be: 'When the Nawab didn't budge an inch, Begum Jan was…'

the best medical journals: The original does not have 'medical'.

Page 119

masnad: a bolster.

and look at her for hours: A sentence has been omitted after this: 'She was absolutely fair—there was not even a hint of rosiness'.

murmuring and handing in…: 'Muttering' would be a more appropriate translation of 'badbadaati', the word used in the original.

Page 120

your blood…is a little heated: 'khoon mein garmi hai'. Syeda Hameed's translation is more appropriate here: 'It is your hot blood that causes all the trouble!' (*The Quilt and Other Stories*, p. 11).

Page 121
the 'Aayat-al-Kursi': A verse from the Quran recited to ward off evil.

Page 122
shuffling a pack of cards: A more accurate translation is 'dealing the cards'.
babua: A male doll.

Page 123
Begum Jan said with a shy mischievous smile: 'shy' seems to be a misprint for 'sly' here.

Page 125
dupatta: a veil or a scarf which covers the head and is wrapped around the shoulders.

Page 126
'Allah!' I dived for my bed: The ending in Syeda Hameed's translation is as follows: 'Allah! I dove headlong into my sheets!! What I saw when the quilt was lifted, I will never tell anyone, not even if they give me a lakh of rupees'. This is how the story ended when it first appeared in 1942, in *Adab-e-Latif* and in a collection of Chughtai's short stories. However, when Saadat Hasan Manto read the story he remarked: '...but the last line is not artistic at all. Had I been the editor in place of Ahmad Nadeem, I would certainly have deleted it. So when I spoke to Ismat about the story I said: "I liked your 'Lihaf' very much. It is truly the distinctive feature of your style to use words in a judiciously economical fashion. But I was surprised that you wrote a pointless sentence at the end of your story"'. Subsequently, the story was published without the last sentence (Manto, 'Ismat Chughtai', in *Naye Adab Maymar,* Bombay: Qutb Publishers, 1948).

SUGGESTED READING

Chughtai, Ismat, *The Quilt & Other Stories*, trans. Tahira Naqvi and Syeda S. Hameed, Delhi: Kali for Women, 1990.

Kumar, Sukrita Paul and Sadiq eds, *Ismat: The Life and Times of Ismat Chughtai*, New Delhi: Katha, 1999.

Tharu, Susie & K. Lalita eds, *Women Writing in India: 600 BC to the Present*, vol. 2, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993, Introduction and pp. 126–9.

AMBAI
(b. 1944)

C. S. Lakshmi (Ambai) inherited her love of the Tamil language and culture from her self-taught grandmother and her mother—a musician who sang Tamil lyrics and subscribed to popular Tamil journals. She borrowed her pen-name from Devan's novel *Parvatiyin Sangalpam* (Parvati's Vow), in which the protagonist, Parvati, deserted by her husband on account of her 'inferior intelligence', begins writing under the pseudonym 'Ambai' and becomes famous. Later, when her husband wishes to return to her, she rejects him. C. S. Lakshmi was so impressed by this character's determination that she chose Ambai as her pen-name when she began writing in her teens. Two of Ambai's novels were published before she was twenty. She also gave performances of classical music and dance until 1974. She taught for a while at a college in Delhi and completed her doctorate in American history from Jawaharlal Nehru University. Besides novels, Ambai has published two collections of short stories; she has also written plays and scripts for films. Her first collection of short stories, *Siragugal Muriyum* (Wings Get Broken), published in 1976, is an important milestone in the history of women's writing in Tamil. She was a regular contributor to the literary journal *Kanaiyazhi* (The Signet Ring), and was actively associated with *Pregnyai* (Consciousness). She is married to the film-maker Vishnu Mathur, and lives in Mumbai. Ambai has worked on the social history of women in Tamil Nadu and on Dalit writers and women activists. Her three-volume study of the lives of women artists of Tamil Nadu is under publication.

Ambai's writing exemplifies the voice of feminist self-affirmation in Tamil fiction. Her fiction presents experimentation in form (fables, prose-poems, monologues, surrealist pieces, expressionistic sequences—to mention a few), innovative, pluralistic narrative patterns, and an abundance of cultural allusions. Her