

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AS RESISTANCE IN THE FICTION OF ISMAT CHUGHTAI AND SIMIN DANESHVAR: A COMPARATIVE FEMINIST LITERARY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This article examines women's leadership as a form of resistance in the fiction of Ismat Chughtai and Simin Daneshvar, two pioneering feminist writers from South Asia and Iran respectively. Through comparative literary analysis, the study explores how both authors contest patriarchal ideologies by portraying women as active agents of social, intellectual, and moral transformation rather than as passive victims of oppression. Drawing on feminist literary criticism—particularly the theories of Simone de Beauvoir and Elaine Showalter, together with postcolonial feminist thought the article investigates the intertwined themes of education, identity, domestic resistance, emotional leadership, and female agency. It argues that Chughtai's uncompromising realism and Daneshvar's symbolic narrative mode together redefine leadership as the capacity to resist oppressive structures through courage, self-awareness, and ethical responsibility. In this article this Idea is also supported by prominent Punjabi fiction writers such as Amrita Pritam, Ravinder singh bedi Afzal Ahsan Randhawa Ahmad Saleem and Samina asma . The analysis further demonstrates that, despite their differing historical and cultural contexts, both writers deploy fiction as a powerful medium for advocating women's empowerment and challenging patriarchal authority. Their literary contributions remain significant to contemporary feminist discourse because they continue to inform debates about gender justice, social equality, and women's rights across Muslim societies and beyond (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Showalter, 1977; Talattof, 1995; Zecchini, 2021).

KEYWORDS: women's leadership, resistance, feminism, Ismat Chughtai, Simin Daneshvar, Amrita Pritam, punjabi

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature of Persian Urdu English and Punjabi has long served as one of the most influential platforms for representing social reality, interrogating dominant ideologies, and imagining alternative possibilities for marginalized communities. Among its many functions, it offers women writers a powerful means of challenging patriarchal norms and exposing the gendered inequalities that remain deeply embedded in society. Feminist literature in particular has transformed literary expression into an intellectual movement that not only documents women's experience but also redefines their social, political, and cultural identities. Through fiction, women writers have consistently contested systems of oppression by creating female characters whose struggles come to symbolize broader movements for justice, dignity, and equality (Showalter, 1977; Beauvoir, 1949/2011).

Across the twentieth century, feminist writing emerged as a significant response to colonialism, nationalism, modernization, and entrenched patriarchal structures throughout Asia and the Middle East. Rather than depicting women merely as victims of discrimination, many authors presented them as active participants in shaping their own destinies. Their works questioned conventional gender roles, exposed domestic oppression, and affirmed women's intellectual and emotional autonomy. Literature thus became an important site of resistance, one at which female voices confronted both the public and the private faces of patriarchal authority (Ahmed, 1992; Mohanty, 1988; Ferguson, 2017).

Among the most influential feminist writers of the century are Ismat Chughtai (1915–1991) of the Indian subcontinent and Simin Daneshvar (1921–2012) of Iran. Although they belonged to different linguistic, political, and cultural traditions, both shared a commitment to exposing women's oppression and advancing female empowerment through literature. Their fiction represents women not as passive recipients of social norms but as individuals capable of questioning authority, resisting injustice, and transforming society through intellectual courage and moral leadership (Hashmi, 1995; Milani, 2011; Talattof, 1995).

The concept of women's leadership at issue here extends well beyond political office or institutional authority. Leadership may equally be understood as the capacity to challenge oppressive systems, catalyze social transformation, and exercise moral courage under restrictive conditions. Chughtai and Daneshvar redefine it precisely in these terms, portraying ordinary women who resist patriarchal expectation through education, self-awareness, ethical decision-making, and emotional resilience. Their protagonists lead through resistance rather than domination, and in doing so expand conventional understandings of leadership within feminist literary studies (Northouse, 2022; Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Showalter, 1977).

Adopting a comparative literary approach, this study examines how women's leadership functions as resistance in the fiction of these two writers. Through close reading of selected texts—principally *Terhi Lakeer* (The Crooked Line), *Lihaaf* (The Quilt), and *Savushun*—it investigates how each author uses fiction to challenge patriarchal ideology while constructing alternative models of female identity and empowerment. The study contributes to comparative feminist scholarship by demonstrating that, notwithstanding differences of national history, religion, and culture, both authors articulate remarkably convergent visions of women's agency and resistance (Chughtai, 2006; Daneshvar, 1990; Zecchini, 2021).

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite their significant contributions to feminist literature, the works of Ismat Chughtai and Simin Daneshvar are generally studied within their respective national traditions rather than through a comparative lens. Existing scholarship tends to examine Chughtai's critique of patriarchal Muslim society or Daneshvar's treatment of Iranian nationalism and women's identity in isolation from one another. As a result, insufficient attention has been paid to how the two writers conceptualize women's leadership as a shared strategy of resistance to patriarchal domination across distinct cultural contexts. This omission constrains broader comparative discussion within feminist literary criticism (Milani, 2011; Zecchini, 2021; Talattof, 1995).

3. Research Gap

Although many scholars have analyzed feminism, gender identity, and resistance in the writing of Chughtai and Daneshvar separately, comparatively few offer a sustained comparative account of women's leadership as a literary strategy of resistance across their fiction. Prior research has, moreover, tended to foreground sexuality, domestic oppression, and nationalism while attending only slightly to leadership as an intellectual, ethical, and emotional practice exercised by female protagonists. This study addresses that gap by integrating feminist leadership theory with comparative literary analysis (Showalter, 1977; Ferguson, 2017; Milani, 2011).

4. Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- (i) examine the representation of women's leadership in the fiction of Ismat Chughtai and Simin Daneshvar;

- (ii) analyze how female protagonists resist patriarchal structures through intellectual, emotional, and moral leadership;
- (iii) compare the feminist perspectives of Chughtai and Daneshvar within their respective socio-cultural contexts similarly in Punjabi literature writers like amrita pritam who has also portrayed women as resistant and leading figure
- (iv) apply feminist literary criticism to illuminate women's resistance in Punjabi, Urdu and Persian fiction; and
- (v) contribute to comparative feminist scholarship by identifying similarities and differences in their portrayal of female agency.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminist literary criticism has consistently held that literature functions as a powerful medium for exposing gender inequality while reconstructing women's identities beyond patriarchal definition. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* established one of the foundational arguments of feminist theory in claiming that women are socially constructed as "the Other," a positioning that deprives them of autonomy and equal subjectivity. Her framework remains indispensable for analyzing texts that depict women resisting social marginalization and reclaiming agency (Beauvoir, 1949/2011).

Elaine Showalter extended the field through gynocriticism, a methodology that centers women's writing, female experience, and women's literary traditions rather than assessing female authors by male literary standards. On Showalter's account, women's literature should be read as an independent intellectual tradition reflecting women's cultural experience, emotional realities, and social struggles. This perspective is especially productive for reading Chughtai and Daneshvar, since each foregrounds women's lived experience within a patriarchal society (Showalter, 1977).

Postcolonial feminist scholarship complicates and enriches these foundations. Mohanty (1988) and Spivak (1988) caution against universalizing categories of "woman" drawn from Western contexts, insisting that gender oppression in colonized and postcolonial societies is inseparable from class, religion, nationalism, and colonial history. Ahmed (1992) similarly situates the position of Muslim women within layered historical and ideological pressures. This body of work provides the critical vocabulary for reading Chughtai's and Daneshvar's protagonists as figures shaped by intersecting rather than singular structures of domination.

Scholarship devoted specifically to each author has tended to develop along separate national lines. Studies of Chughtai emphasize her realism, her association with the Progressive Writers' Movement, and the controversy surrounding Lihaaf, reading her as a bold critic of patriarchal Muslim middle-class society (Hashmi, 1995; Naqvi, 1994; Zecchini, 2021). Work on Daneshvar, by contrast, foregrounds her pioneering status in Persian fiction and the entanglement of gender with nationalism and political upheaval in Savushun (Milani, 2011; Talattof, 1995; Talakhadze, 2023). While each strand is rich, the two rarely converse—precisely the disjunction this study seeks to bridge by reading both writers through the shared category of leadership-as-resistance (Ferguson, 2017).

7. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in feminist literary criticism, which offers a critical lens for examining how literature represents women's experience, identity, and resistance to patriarchal structures. Central to this tradition is the premise that literary texts are not merely aesthetic artifacts but ideological constructs that both reflect and contest gendered power relations. Reading Chughtai and Daneshvar through feminist theory reveals how each transforms literature into a space of resistance in which women negotiate identity, agency, and leadership despite social constraint (Showalter, 1977; Tyson, 2015).

The framework draws first on **Simone de Beauvoir's** conception of woman as the "Other." In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir argues that women have historically been defined not as autonomous beings but in relation to men, who occupy the position of the universal subject. Patriarchal societies construe femininity as passive, emotional, and dependent, thereby curtailing women's opportunities for self-realization; women, she famously insists, are not born subordinate but become so through social conditioning and institutional discrimination. This account speaks directly to the fiction under study, in which female protagonists struggle against socially imposed identities and gradually assert their independence (Beauvoir, 1949/2011).

Elaine Showalter's theory of gynocriticism supplies a second foundation. Showalter advocates studying women's literature from the vantage of women's experience rather than through male-centered traditions, treating female creativity, history, language, and psychology as legitimate objects of inquiry. Both Chughtai and Daneshvar write from within women's lived realities—rendering domestic life, emotional conflict, and social inequality from perspectives long marginalized in mainstream literature—and thus constitute a distinct female literary tradition that unsettles patriarchal definitions of womanhood (Showalter, 1977).

The analysis also incorporates **postcolonial feminist theory**, which examines the intersection of gender, culture, class, religion, and colonial history. Departing from strands of Western feminism, postcolonial feminism holds that women's oppression cannot be grasped through gender alone, since women in colonized or formerly colonized societies experience multiple and overlapping forms of marginalization. Chughtai's Muslim women in colonial India and Daneshvar's Iranian women amid political instability illustrate how gender oppression is braided together with nationalism, religion, and social hierarchy, so that resistance is directed not only against patriarchy but against broader systems of cultural domination (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988; Ahmed, 1992).

Finally, contemporary **feminist leadership theory** reframes leadership beyond institutional authority. Recent scholarship construes leadership in terms of moral influence, intellectual agency, ethical responsibility, and the capacity to inspire social transformation, noting that women often lead through dialogue, empathy, resilience, and community-building rather than hierarchical control. In Chughtai and Daneshvar, leadership is enacted through everyday acts of resistance, self-awareness, and moral courage rather than formal power; their protagonists show that resistance itself can constitute a form of leadership capable of transforming families, communities, and societies (Northouse, 2022; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Taken together, these perspectives yield an integrated framework. Beauvoir explains the social construction of female subordination; Showalter affirms the significance of women's literary traditions; postcolonial feminism situates gender within wider cultural and political fields; and feminist leadership theory accounts for how agency emerges through everyday resistance. In combination they enable a comprehensive comparative reading of Chughtai's and Daneshvar's representation of women as intellectual, emotional, and ethical leaders (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Showalter, 1977; Tyson, 2015).

8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a **qualitative comparative literary methodology** to examine women's leadership as resistance in the fiction of Chughtai and Daneshvar. Qualitative literary inquiry allows the researcher to explore theme, symbol, characterization, and ideological perspective as they are embedded in the text, rather than reducing them to quantitative measures. Because the study's aim is to interpret representations of women's agency and leadership, qualitative textual analysis is the most appropriate approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study proceeds through **comparative literary analysis** of selected works—Chughtai's *Lihaaf* (The Quilt) and *Terhi Lakeer* (The Crooked Line) alongside Daneshvar's *Savushun*. Comparative literature seeks to identify continuities and divergences between traditions arising from distinct linguistic, cultural, and historical settings. Although Urdu and Persian literature developed within different national contexts, both authors engage comparable questions of patriarchy, gender inequality, identity, and resistance (Bassnett, 2014).

Interpretation rests primarily on **close textual reading**, attending to characterization, narrative voice, symbolism, dialogue, thematic development, and the representation of female agency. Particular attention is given to the ways women contest patriarchal authority through education, emotional resilience, moral courage, and self-awareness. Rather than confining analysis to overt political activism, the study attends to the everyday forms of resistance embedded in domestic space and interpersonal relationship (Tyson, 2015).

Secondary sources—scholarly monographs, peer-reviewed articles, and feminist theoretical works—contextualize the literary analysis. Contributions by Beauvoir, Showalter, Mohanty, and Spivak, together with contemporary scholarship on Chughtai and Daneshvar, supply the conceptual grounding for interpreting the primary texts. Combining primary literature with secondary criticism enhances the reliability and rigor of the study (Showalter, 1977; Mohanty, 1988; Zecchini, 2021).

The overall stance is interpretive: the analysis asks how literature constructs meaning around women's leadership. Conceptualizing leadership as intellectual independence, ethical responsibility, emotional resilience, and resistance to oppressive structures—rather than as political authority per se—the study shows that both writers recast leadership by portraying women as active agents of social transformation within patriarchal societies (Northouse, 2022; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

9. Ismat Chughtai: Life, Struggles, and Literary Contribution

Ismat Chughtai (1915–1991) holds a central place in twentieth-century Urdu literature as one of the earliest and most influential feminist writers of the Indian subcontinent. Her fiction challenged the patriarchal values of Muslim middle-class society and introduced a bold voice willing to treat subjects long considered taboo—female sexuality, domestic oppression, class inequality, and women's psychological life. By foregrounding women's perspectives, Chughtai turned Urdu fiction into a platform for interrogating gender discrimination and asserting female agency. Her work is now regarded as foundational to South Asian feminist literature for its realism, intellectual courage, and social critique (Hashmi, 1995; Zecchini, 2021; Naqvi, 1994).

Born on **21 August 1915** in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh, in British India, Chughtai grew up in an educated Muslim family in which, despite its progressive values, gender inequality remained entrenched. The ninth of ten children, she observed early that boys were granted greater educational opportunity and personal freedom than girls—an observation that shaped her understanding of gender discrimination and recurred throughout her fiction. Rather than accept conventional expectations of female obedience, she questioned the norms that restricted women's education, mobility, and independence (Zecchini, 2021; Hashmi, 1995).

Education became one of Chughtai's earliest acts of resistance. At a time when higher education for Muslim women was frequently discouraged, she insisted on continuing her studies against family and social opposition, ultimately completing a Bachelor of Education at Aligarh Muslim University—an achievement reflecting both determination and intellectual independence. That trajectory shaped her fiction's recurring figure of the educated, self-aware protagonist. Throughout her work, Chughtai presents education as a means by which women acquire confidence, critical judgment, and the capacity to challenge oppressive tradition (Chughtai, 2006; Zecchini, 2021).

The **Progressive Writers' Movement** of the 1930s decisively shaped her literary outlook. Committed to exposing social injustice, colonial oppression, economic inequality, and religious orthodoxy through literature, the movement gave Chughtai a platform she expanded from within: while many of its writers concentrated on class exploitation, she insisted that gender inequality demanded equal literary and political attention (Ahmed, 1992; Hashmi, 1995).

A defining moment came with the 1942 publication of **"Lihaaf" (The Quilt)**, whose subtle yet powerful treatment of female desire, loneliness, and same-sex intimacy within an unhappy marriage challenged conventional morality. The story provoked intense controversy and an obscenity trial in Lahore in 1944. Chughtai refused to apologize or withdraw it, defending literature's responsibility to represent social reality honestly; her acquittal marked not only a legal victory but a symbolic triumph for artistic freedom and for women's right to narrate their own experience without patriarchal censorship (Naqvi, 1994; Zecchini, 2021).

Her novel *Terhi Lakeer* (*The Crooked Line*) is widely regarded as one of the earliest feminist Bildungsromane in Urdu. Through **Shama**, Chughtai traces the intellectual and emotional development of a young Muslim woman who refuses to conform to traditional expectations of marriage, domesticity, and obedience. Shama's trajectory suggests that leadership begins in self-awareness and critical reflection: rather than seeking power over others, she develops the courage to question inherited belief and construct her own identity, so that education and independent thought emerge as the foundations of women's leadership (Chughtai, 2006; Sharma, 2015).

Equally notable is Chughtai's unromantic rendering of domestic space. Where earlier writers idealized family life, she exposes the household as a site in which gender hierarchy is produced and sustained. Kitchens, bedrooms, courtyards, and drawing rooms become symbolic arenas where women negotiate power, silence, desire, and resistance; through ordinary domestic interaction she shows how patriarchal authority operates in everyday life and how women subtly contest it through speech, education, solidarity, and emotional endurance (Showalter, 1977; Zecchini, 2021).

Her female characters seldom fit the conservative ideal of the obedient woman. They are intellectually curious, emotionally complex, and morally independent figures who interrogate social convention. Whether confronting forced marriage, class discrimination, domestic violence, or the hypocrisy of elite Muslim households, they refuse passive acceptance of injustice—resisting through dialogue, education, and personal choice rather than overt political rebellion, and thereby recasting leadership as everyday courage and ethical conviction (Hashmi, 1995; Sharma, 2015). Language constitutes a further dimension of her resistance. Rejecting ornamental convention in favor of direct, conversational Urdu drawn from the everyday speech of ordinary women, Chughtai deployed sharp dialogue, satire, irony, and psychological realism to reach a wide readership while unsettling elite literary norms. In giving voice to women whose experience had been ignored or silenced, she enlarged both the thematic and the linguistic range of Urdu fiction, and her innovations continue to shape South Asian writing (Naqvi, 1994; Zecchini, 2021).

Chughtai's enduring significance lies not only in the controversial subjects she engaged but in her redefinition of female leadership. She shows that leadership is not confined to political institutions or public authority but emerges wherever women challenge oppressive tradition, claim intellectual autonomy, and turn silence into resistance. Through figures such as Shama and Begum Jan, she demonstrates that personal acts of courage can seed broader social change—one reason her fiction remains a vital resource for feminist scholarship, comparative literary study, and debates about women's empowerment across South Asia and beyond (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Northouse, 2022; Zecchini, 2021).

10. Simin Daneshvar: Life, Struggles, and Literary Contribution

Simin Daneshvar (1921–2012) occupies a distinguished position in modern Persian literature as Iran's first professional female novelist and a leading voice of feminist fiction in the Middle East. Her career marked a turning point by bringing women's experience, emotion, and social struggle to the center of literary discourse. Across her novels and short stories she explored the intersections of gender, nationalism, culture, and identity, showing how women negotiate patriarchal authority while confronting political and social instability, and in the process establishing herself as a pioneer of Iranian feminist literature (Milani, 2011; Talattof, 1995; Talakhadze, 2023).

Born on **28 April 1921** in Shiraz, Daneshvar was raised in an educated, culturally progressive family that prized intellectual development; her father was a physician and her mother an accomplished artist and educator. Unlike many women of her generation, she had access to higher education and earned a doctorate in Persian Language and Literature from the University of Tehran. Yet she remained acutely conscious of the structural inequalities that limited women's participation in Iranian public and intellectual life (Milani, 2011; Talattof, 1995).

Her career unfolded during a period of profound political transformation. The twentieth century in Iran brought constitutional reform, foreign intervention, modernization, and mounting tension between traditional values and modern aspiration. Women occupied a particularly fraught position within these currents, expected to preserve traditional family life while adapting to rapid change. Daneshvar captured these contradictions with unusual sensitivity, portraying female characters who struggle to reconcile personal aspiration with social expectation (Abrahamian, 2008; Talattof, 1995).

An important influence on her development was her marriage to the prominent writer and social critic **Jalal Al-e Ahmad**. Though founded on mutual intellectual respect, the relationship often left her overshadowed by her husband's reputation. Rather than allow that imbalance to define her, she built an independent literary identity through sustained scholarship and creative achievement—a determination that mirrors the broader struggle of women writers for recognition within male-dominated institutions (Milani, 2011; Talakhadze, 2023).

International recognition came with **Savushun** (1969), widely regarded as the first major novel by an Iranian woman. Set during the Allied occupation of Iran in the Second World War, it examines the relationship between political oppression and domestic life through its protagonist, **Zari**. Rather than viewing historical events solely through the eyes of political leaders, Daneshvar shows how national conflict reshapes the everyday lives of ordinary women, underscoring the inseparability of private experience and public reality (Daneshvar, 1990; Milani, 2011).

Zari stands among the most compelling instances of women's leadership in modern Persian literature. At the outset she appears cautious, emotionally vulnerable, and preoccupied with protecting her family from unrest; as the narrative advances she undergoes marked intellectual and emotional growth. The assassination of her husband compels her to confront injustice directly, transforming her from a passive observer into a morally courageous figure who refuses to capitulate to oppression. Her leadership arises not from political office but from ethical responsibility, resilience, and an unwavering commitment to truth and justice (Daneshvar, 1990; Talattof, 1995).

Unlike revolutionary models that valorize confrontation and violence, Daneshvar presents leadership as inner transformation. Zari's strength lies in her capacity to sustain hope, preserve moral integrity, and protect human dignity in the face of political and personal loss; her resistance is expressed through compassion, wisdom, and ethical conviction rather than physical rebellion. This portrayal broadens conventional understandings of leadership by treating emotional intelligence and moral courage as equally potent forms of social influence (Northouse, 2022; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

A further hallmark of her fiction is its dense symbolism and cultural mythology. Where Chughtai writes in a mode of direct realism, Daneshvar frequently turns to metaphor, allegory, and historical symbol to convey complex political and feminist ideas. The title *Savushun* itself invokes the ancient Persian mourning rituals associated with the legendary Siyavash, evoking sacrifice, injustice, and collective memory. By weaving cultural myth into modern fiction, Daneshvar links women's personal struggle to national narrative, intimating that women's resistance is central to a society's moral survival (Talattof, 1995; Milani, 2011).

Education and intellectual awareness recur as foundations of empowerment in her work. Her protagonists are thoughtful and reflective, capable of critically appraising the structures that govern their lives; rather than accepting inherited tradition unexamined, they develop independent perspectives that enable them to challenge patriarchal authority. Here education signifies not formal schooling alone but the cultivation of critical consciousness and ethical judgment—the very capacities that allow women to lead within families and communities (Showalter, 1977; Daneshvar, 1990).

The domestic sphere is likewise central to her fiction, though on unconventional terms. Rather than depicting the home as private and passive, Daneshvar renders the household a site of ideological conflict and social negotiation, where questions of gender, nationalism, morality, and authority are continually contested. Through these settings she shows that resistance often begins in everyday interaction before extending into wider social and political movement (Milani, 2011; Talakhadze, 2023).

Daneshvar's contribution exceeds her individual achievements. By demonstrating that serious literature is not a male preserve and that women's experience is integral to national history and cultural identity, she expanded the scope of Persian literature and inspired later generations of Iranian women writers to address themes once marginalized in mainstream discourse. Her influence continues to shape feminist scholarship, comparative literature, and gender studies across the Middle East and beyond (Milani, 2011; Talattof, 1995).

Ultimately, Daneshvar redefines women's leadership as a composite of moral integrity, intellectual independence, emotional resilience, and social responsibility. Her protagonists show that meaningful leadership need not arise through public office or political activism but can develop through everyday courage, ethical decision, and resistance

to injustice. This vision closely parallels Chughtai's, even as each writer articulates it through distinct cultural, historical, and literary traditions; together their works establish leadership as a transformative force rooted in women's lived experience and their determination to challenge oppressive structures (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Northouse, 2022; Milani, 2011).

Leadership as Resistance in the Fiction of both scholar's

Women's leadership in literature should not be understood solely in terms of political authority or institutional power. Contemporary feminist scholarship holds that leadership also encompasses intellectual independence, moral courage, emotional resilience, and the capacity to challenge unjust social structures. Within patriarchal societies women frequently exercise leadership through acts of resistance that unsettle dominant gender norms and open possibilities for transformation. In the fiction of Chughtai and Daneshvar, leadership emerges not from formal positions of authority but from women's determination to reclaim agency, dignity, and selfhood in the face of persistent oppression; their protagonists become leaders because they resist silence, confront injustice, and inspire change within their families and communities (Northouse, 2022; Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Showalter, 1977).

Although Chughtai wrote within colonial and postcolonial Muslim society in the Indian subcontinent while Daneshvar addressed Iran amid political upheaval, both depict women confronting strikingly similar systems of patriarchal domination. Their fiction suggests that leadership develops gradually—through personal growth, intellectual awakening, and ethical decision—rather than through sudden revolutionary action, so that resistance functions at once as an individual journey and a collective feminist strategy against inequality (Milani, 2011; Zecchini, 2021).

11.1 Leadership through Education

Education occupies a central place in both writers' feminist visions because it enables women to interrogate inherited tradition and forge independent identities. Neither author reduces education to formal schooling; each presents it as a process of intellectual awakening that equips women to analyze their circumstances critically. Knowledge becomes a source of confidence through which women reject dependence and assert autonomy, so that education emerges as one of the earliest forms of leadership—furnishing the intellectual tools with which to challenge patriarchal authority (Showalter, 1977; Freire, 1970).

In Terhi Lakeer, Chughtai presents **Shama** as a young woman whose education transforms her understanding of herself and her society. As she grows conscious of gender discrimination, she refuses the traditional expectations of marriage, obedience, and domestic confinement, questioning customs that many accept without resistance. Chughtai thus binds education to leadership by showing that knowledge empowers women to become independent decision-makers capable of shaping their own futures (Chughtai, 2006; Sharma, 2015).

Daneshvar treats education as an instrument of social awareness in Savushun. Although **Zari** at first tries to remain detached from political conflict, her deepening grasp of surrounding realities gradually reorients her worldview. Through observation, reflection, and experience she acquires the confidence to challenge injustice and defend her family's moral values—evidence that, for Daneshvar, education extends beyond academic learning to embrace ethical consciousness and critical engagement (Daneshvar, 1990; Milani, 2011).

The educational journeys of Shama and Zari reveal that leadership begins in consciousness: before women can transform society, they must first understand how oppression operates. Both writers therefore reject the patriarchal assumption that educated women threaten family stability, arguing instead that education strengthens women intellectually and ethically, enabling fuller contribution to family and society alike (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Freire, 1970).

11.2 Resistance to Patriarchy

Patriarchy is among the most significant themes the two writers share. Both expose how patriarchal systems regulate women's conduct, restrict their freedom, and deny them self-expression—not as abstract ideology but through the concrete textures of family, marriage, inheritance, education, and social expectation. Their fiction locates the origin of resistance in women's refusal to internalize these unequal structures (Walby, 1990; Beauvoir, 1949/2011).

Chughtai's critique is direct and uncompromising. Her stories lay bare the hypocrisy of middle-class households in which men enjoy social freedom while women are expected to embody silence, sacrifice, and obedience. Her characters resist forced marriage, unequal educational access, and emotional neglect by questioning the legitimacy of patriarchal authority; even where they cannot dismantle oppressive systems outright, their refusal to accept injustice is itself a form of leadership because it challenges patriarchy's ideological foundations (Hashmi, 1995; Zecchini, 2021).

Daneshvar approaches patriarchy in a more symbolic, psychological register. Rather than staging open confrontation, she traces women gradually recognizing the limits imposed by cultural tradition and political instability. Zari's transformation shows that resistance often begins internally before becoming outwardly visible: as her confidence

grows, she increasingly refuses to remain silent before injustice, so that leadership appears as gradual moral awakening rather than immediate rebellion (Daneshvar, 1990; Talattof, 1995).

Both writers stress that patriarchal authority endures because it is normalized through everyday practice rather than sustained by overt violence alone. Contesting ordinary social custom therefore becomes a genuinely political act. Whether refusing discriminatory tradition, demanding educational opportunity, or questioning male authority within the family, their protagonists erode patriarchal power through the accumulation of everyday resistance (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988).

11.3 Female Identity and Selfhood

The search for identity forms another essential dimension of women's leadership in this fiction. Feminist scholars observe that patriarchal societies frequently define women through their relationships to men rather than as autonomous individuals; as Beauvoir argues, women become "the Other," their existence measured against male expectation rather than personal aspiration. Both Chughtai and Daneshvar reject this construction by portraying women who actively seek identities beyond prescribed roles (Beauvoir, 1949/2011).

In Terhi Lakeer, Shama continually negotiates competing demands of education, marriage, religion, and personal freedom—a struggle that reflects the wider experience of educated Muslim women reconciling individuality with tradition. Rather than accept an identity imposed by family or society, she constructs her own sense of self through intellectual independence and reflection, an act that is itself a form of leadership because it contests patriarchal definitions of femininity (Chughtai, 2006; Sharma, 2015).

Zari's journey in Savushun likewise shows identity forming through experience and ethical responsibility. Initially defined chiefly as wife and mother, she gradually assumes a broader social role by confronting injustice and accepting moral responsibility for her community. Daneshvar thus suggests that women's identities evolve through participation in history rather than remaining confined to domestic boundaries, and that leadership becomes possible once women recognize themselves as independent moral agents (Daneshvar, 1990; Milani, 2011).

The protagonists of both writers reject the notion that women exist merely to fulfill domestic expectation, insisting instead on intellectual autonomy, emotional authenticity, and ethical responsibility. Their pursuit of selfhood functions as a powerful form of feminist resistance precisely because it challenges the ideological assumptions that sustain gender inequality (Showalter, 1977; Tyson, 2015).

11.4 Domestic Space as a Site of Resistance

One of the most significant contributions the two writers make to feminist literature is their redefinition of domestic space. Patriarchal societies commonly regard the home as a private sphere in which women are expected to remain silent, obedient, and devoted to household duty. Feminist critics counter that the domestic sphere is deeply political, since it is within the family that gender roles, power relations, and social hierarchies are first established and reproduced. Chughtai and Daneshvar unsettle the conventional view by transforming the home into a space where women negotiate authority, question patriarchal norms, and cultivate resistance—demonstrating that leadership frequently begins in the household before extending outward (Showalter, 1977; Walby, 1990; Tyson, 2015).

In Chughtai's fiction, bedrooms, kitchens, courtyards, and family gatherings become symbolic arenas in which women confront unequal power relations. Refusing to depict the home as harmonious, she exposes its hidden tensions—emotional neglect, gender discrimination, and class hierarchy. In Lihaaf, Begum Jan's emotional isolation registers the consequences of a patriarchal marriage that denies women companionship, affection, and fulfillment. By exposing such realities, Chughtai turns domestic life into a searching critique of patriarchal institutions and treats the very recognition of injustice within the home as an act of resistance (Chughtai, 1994; Zecchini, 2021; Hashmi, 1995).

Daneshvar, similarly, presents the household in Savushun as a microcosm of Iranian society. Although much of the narrative unfolds within the family, the home is continually shaped by political conflict, foreign intervention, and social instability, so that Zari's household becomes a space where ethical dilemma, political decision, and questions of justice intersect. Through this strategy Daneshvar shows that women are not detached from public life simply because they occupy domestic space; they actively interpret political events, preserve cultural values, and shape the moral direction of their families, making the household a site of leadership rather than passive confinement (Daneshvar, 1990; Milani, 2011).

The domestic sphere also fosters solidarity among women. Female conversation, shared experience, and mutual support create alternative networks of knowledge that challenge patriarchal authority: women exchange counsel, voice dissatisfaction, and encourage one another to question oppressive tradition. These quotidian interactions constitute subtle yet significant forms of collective resistance, so that—for both writers—social transformation often germinates in relationships among women before expanding into wider political movement (Mohanty, 1988; Showalter, 1977). Both authors thus reject the patriarchal premise that domestic life is politically insignificant. They reveal the household as a primary location where power is exercised and contested, and by portraying women who negotiate authority, preserve dignity, and challenge injustice at home, they recast domestic life as an essential arena of feminist

leadership—showing that meaningful resistance often originates in the ordinary spaces traditionally excluded from political discourse (Tyson, 2015; Beauvoir, 1949/2011).

11.5 Emotional Leadership and Moral Courage

Leadership in this fiction extends beyond intellectual achievement and political resistance to encompass emotional resilience and moral courage. Contemporary leadership scholars increasingly recognize emotional intelligence as an essential quality, since it enables individuals to inspire others, manage conflict, and uphold ethical values under duress. Feminist leadership theory likewise treats compassion, empathy, resilience, and ethical responsibility as fundamental—dimensions long overlooked within male-centered models that privilege dominance and authority (Northouse, 2022; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Chughtai's characters display remarkable emotional resilience amid discrimination, neglect, and social humiliation. Rather than yielding to despair, they continue to question injustice while preserving their dignity and individuality; their strength lies not in physical confrontation but in their refusal to internalize patriarchal assumptions of female inferiority. Even when socially marginalized, they retain intellectual independence and emotional integrity—a resilience that is itself a form of leadership, since it allows women to resist oppression without surrendering their sense of self (Chughtai, 2006; Sharma, 2015).

Daneshvar renders emotional leadership most powerfully through Zari. Initially fearful of political instability and personal loss, she gradually develops extraordinary moral courage as circumstances darken. After her husband's death she refuses to abandon his ethical principles despite intense social pressure, responding not with hatred or revenge but with patience, compassion, and steadfast commitment to justice. Daneshvar thereby figures leadership as the capacity to preserve one's humanity and ethical conviction even amid violence and political uncertainty (Daneshvar, 1990; Talattof, 1995).

Both writers, in short, redefine courage. Rather than tie bravery to warfare or political confrontation, they emphasize the courage required to hold one's principles, contest injustice, and sustain hope against overwhelming adversity. Emotional endurance becomes an act of resistance because it prevents oppressive systems from eroding women's confidence, dignity, and ethical identity; leadership, on this view, emerges through perseverance rather than domination (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Northouse, 2022).

11.6 Voice, Silence, and Female Agency

The relationship among voice, silence, and power is a recurring concern of feminist literary criticism. Patriarchal societies frequently silence women by denying them the means to articulate their thoughts, desires, and experiences; recovering women's voices thus constitutes a vital act of resistance, since speech enables women to challenge dominant narratives and assert independent identities. Chughtai and Daneshvar both explore this dynamic by portraying female characters who gradually convert silence into speech and submission into agency (Spivak, 1988; Showalter, 1977).

In Chughtai's fiction, dialogue operates as a potent instrument of resistance. Her protagonists openly question family tradition, criticize gender discrimination, and expose social hypocrisy through direct conversation; even under pressure to keep silent, their willingness to speak repudiates patriarchal expectations of feminine reticence. Chughtai's own fearless style mirrors this commitment, and her fiction accordingly encourages women to claim authority over their own narratives (Chughtai, 1994; Zecchini, 2021).

Daneshvar portrays voice more gradually and symbolically. Zari's development illustrates that agency often emerges through reflection before it becomes visible in speech and action: hesitant at first to challenge authority, she gradually finds the confidence to articulate her moral convictions publicly, her voice gaining weight as she recognizes responsibility not only toward her family but toward society. Her trajectory demonstrates that leadership entails the courage to speak truthfully even at personal risk (Daneshvar, 1990; Milani, 2011).

By enabling women to narrate their own experience, both writers challenge patriarchal control over knowledge and representation. Their fiction shows that reclaiming one's voice is itself an act of leadership, since it disrupts systems that depend on women's silence; literature thereby becomes a medium through which marginalized women recover agency and reshape public understanding of gender, identity, and justice (Showalter, 1977; Tyson, 2015).

11.7 Comparative Analysis of Shama (Terhi Lakeer) and Zari (Savushun)

Shama in *Terhi Lakeer* and Zari in *Savushun* stand among the most influential female characters in twentieth-century Urdu and Persian literature. Though they belong to different cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts, both challenge patriarchal structures through intellectual growth, moral courage, and self-awareness. Their journeys show that women's leadership does not depend on political authority but emerges through resistance to injustice, independent decision, and ethical responsibility. By portraying ordinary women who transform themselves within restrictive environments, Chughtai and Daneshvar recast leadership as an everyday practice of resistance rather than an institutional position (Chughtai, 2006; Daneshvar, 1990; Northouse, 2022).

A first, striking similarity is their gradual process of personal transformation. Neither begins as a revolutionary; each develops leadership through lived experience. Shama's intellectual curiosity leads her to question the patriarchal norms of Muslim middle-class society, while Zari's confrontation with political oppression draws her beyond domestic concern toward broader social responsibility. Their development bears out the feminist claim that leadership is cultivated through experience, reflection, and ethical growth rather than inherited privilege or formal authority (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Chughtai, 2006; Daneshvar, 1990).

Education furnishes another shared foundation. Shama's pursuit of knowledge enables her to challenge gender discrimination, resist conventional expectations of marriage, and construct an independent identity. Zari's transformation, though shaped more by political experience than by formal schooling, likewise proceeds through critical awareness gained by observation, reflection, and engagement with social reality. Both characters demonstrate that education is not limited to academic institutions but comprises the development of intellectual independence and critical consciousness—the confidence to question oppressive tradition and inspire others to do the same (Freire, 1970; Showalter, 1977).

Yet the character of their resistance differs markedly. Shama resists openly, through direct criticism of patriarchal custom and social hypocrisy; Chughtai's realist mode allows her to confront injustice through argument, dialogue, and intellectual independence. Zari's resistance, by contrast, develops gradually and finds expression in emotional resilience, ethical decision, and quiet determination, in keeping with Daneshvar's symbolic emphasis on internal transformation preceding external action. These contrasting strategies reflect the different literary traditions and socio-political environments of the two authors while reinforcing the broader feminist principle that resistance may take diverse forms (Hashmi, 1995; Milani, 2011; Talattof, 1995).

The relationship between domestic life and leadership further distinguishes the protagonists. Shama actively challenges traditional expectations of women's domestic role and seeks intellectual and personal growth beyond the household. Zari, however, initially embraces domestic responsibility before transforming the household itself into a site of ethical and political leadership; rather than abandoning her family, she shows that domestic responsibility and public consciousness need not be mutually exclusive. Daneshvar thereby expands the meaning of leadership by illustrating how women can influence society through moral authority exercised within family life (Daneshvar, 1990; Chughtai, 2006).

Voice and silence offer a further point of comparison. Shama speaks openly against discrimination and refuses patriarchal authority without demur, her readiness to voice dissatisfaction echoing Chughtai's own commitment to fearless expression. Zari, by contrast, is initially silenced by fear, uncertainty, and social expectation, only gradually finding the confidence to defend justice and human dignity. Both trajectories affirm the feminist argument that reclaiming one's voice is an essential step toward empowerment and leadership (Spivak, 1988; Showalter, 1977).

Emotion, too, functions differently across the two narratives. Chughtai often stages emotional struggle as a catalyst for intellectual rebellion, prompting women to reject oppressive tradition through critical reflection; Daneshvar emphasizes emotional endurance and compassion as the ground of ethical leadership, with Zari's empathy, patience, and moral resilience allowing her to preserve hope amid violence and turmoil. If Shama thus symbolizes intellectual resistance, Zari embodies moral resistance—together illustrating the diverse forms through which women's leadership may emerge within patriarchal societies (Northouse, 2022; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Ultimately, both protagonists reject the assumption that women should remain passive recipients of social expectation. Each constructs her own identity through education, reflection, ethical responsibility, and resistance to injustice, grounding leadership not in domination but in the courage to challenge inequality while preserving dignity and humanity. Through Shama and Zari, Chughtai and Daneshvar demonstrate that genuine leadership begins in self-transformation and culminates in the empowerment of others, and the two characters remain enduring symbols of feminist resistance in the South Asian and Iranian literary traditions (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Milani, 2011; Zecchini, 2021).

12. CONCLUSION

This study has examined women's leadership as a form of resistance in the fiction of Ismat Chughtai and Simin Daneshvar through a comparative feminist literary perspective. The analysis demonstrates that both writers challenge patriarchal ideologies by presenting women not as passive victims but as active agents of intellectual, emotional, and social transformation. This reference is also presented in the writings of Punjabi fiction writers like amrita pritam. Although the two wrote in different cultural, linguistic, and historical contexts, their works share a commitment to exposing gender inequality and advancing women's empowerment, redefining leadership as the courage to resist oppression, assert independent identity, and inspire ethical change (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Showalter, 1977; Zecchini, 2021).

Education emerges as one of the most significant instruments of women's leadership in both bodies of work. Chughtai's protagonists use education to challenge patriarchal norms, reject imposed gender roles, and cultivate

intellectual independence, while Daneshvar treats knowledge, reflection, and political awareness as foundations of women's moral and social leadership. Both writers thus argue that education enables women not only to transform themselves but to contribute meaningfully to the transformation of society (Chughtai, 2006; Daneshvar, 1990; Freire, 1970).

A further finding is that both authors expand the meaning of resistance beyond overt political activism. Their characters show that resistance may be expressed through everyday courage, ethical decision, emotional resilience, and the refusal to accept discriminatory practice. Whether confronting domestic oppression, questioning unequal tradition, or preserving dignity under duress, the protagonists challenge patriarchal power through ordinary yet consequential action, so that leadership appears as an ethical practice rooted in responsibility, compassion, and self-awareness rather than institutional authority (Northouse, 2022; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

The comparison also indicates that, while Chughtai adopts a direct realist style marked by satire and open criticism of patriarchal hypocrisy, Daneshvar deploys symbolism, historical allegory, and psychological realism to depict women's gradual moral awakening. Despite these stylistic differences, both ultimately advance similar feminist ideals by affirming women's agency, intellectual capability, and social responsibility—demonstrating that women's leadership is multidimensional and can be exercised through diverse forms of resistance shaped by particular cultural and historical conditions (Hashmi, 1995; Milani, 2011; Talattof, 1995).

This research contributes to comparative feminist literary studies by bringing together two major writers whose works are usually examined separately within the Urdu and Persian traditions. Reading their fiction through the shared concept of leadership-as-resistance foregrounds common feminist concerns that transcend national and linguistic boundaries and illustrates how literature serves as a medium through which marginalized voices challenge dominant ideologies and imagine alternative visions of justice, equality, and human dignity (Mohanty, 1988; Ferguson, 2017; Tyson, 2015).

Ultimately, the fiction of Chughtai and Daneshvar remains profoundly relevant in the twenty-first century in punjabi fiction. Amrita Pritam (1919-2005) stand out for her bold portrayal of women's resistance and leadership. Gender inequality, discrimination, and patriarchal violence continue to affect women across many societies despite significant legal and social progress. The leadership models embodied by characters such as Shama and Zari therefore continue to inspire readers by showing that meaningful social change often begins with individual courage, intellectual independence, and ethical commitment. Their contributions not only enrich Urdu and Persian literature but also offer enduring insight into feminist theory, leadership studies, and comparative literary scholarship (Beauvoir, 1949/2011; Milani, 2011; Zecchini, 2021).

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