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**Paper Title:** **Ismat Chughtai, Progressive Literature, and Formations of the Indo-Muslim Secular**

With a body of work that explored the tensions between religious and national belonging, Ismat Chughtai (1911-1991) is celebrated by readers of Urdu for her short stories and novels and is recognized throughout India for her importance as a cultural critic. Her subaltern identities—as a woman and as a Muslim—play a role in the contemporary reception of her work. But the question of the conceptual and social conditions that allowed her to negotiate between her varying modes of identity (national, gendered, and religious) has not been adequately explored. In this paper, I argue that it was her particular formation of the secular that allowed for this negotiation. At its core, Chughtai's critique of society hinged upon the equality (*barābarī*) of all Indian people, whether they be women or men, Muslim or Hindu, master or servant. The primacy of “humanity” (*insāniyat*) over other identities was the keystone of her formation of the secular, and has roots as in the longstanding critique of religious boundaries in a tradition that can be termed Islamicate humanism. It was also rooted in a cosmopolitan understanding of human worth engendered by a creative integration of ideas found in European realist literature. I contend that Chughtai's formation of the secular was primarily shaped by her participation in the Indian political and cultural Left's visions of modernity. Departing from most recent English-language scholarship on Chughtai, which considers her writing as a description of the realities of South Asian Muslim women's lives, I argue that Chughtai's work is a productive site of inquiry into formations of the secular among progressive Indo-Muslim intellectuals. This paper will explore the secular with relation to religious cosmopolitanism, with an emphasis on sexual autonomy and social progress, ideas concerning the role of education and an examination of Chughtai's many lives as an Indo-Muslim secular icon.