

22nd International Interdisciplinary Conference, Pune

**The Contribution and Achievements of
Women in Various Fields**
at
National and International Levels

Volume - 6



Editors

Dr. Snehal Tawre
Dr. Shivling Menkundale
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Ecofeminism

Chick Lit : A New Trend in Women's Writing in India

- Prof. Dipali Lodh

Chick Lit or Chick literature, a term first used in 1995 by CrisMazza and Jeffrey DeShell, signifies fiction that is heroine-centric and focusses on the trials of modern womanhood. It speaks of women in contemporary society, balancing their cosmopolitan lifestyles within an orthodox society. The tone of the writing is usually wry and humourous and it is literature written about women, by women and for women.

The term Chick Lit, with its slightly derogatory connotation of literature that's not meant to be taken seriously, was initially used ironically. But with the passage of time, the term has tried to reclaim its status as a validated sub-genre of women's fiction.

Chick Lit has seen its share of controversies with literary critics being largely disapproving of the genre. But, nonetheless Chick Lit is here to stay. It would not be an exaggeration to say that what is termed as Chick Lit, today, in a rather negative tone, is actually a modernized and rebooted version of novels written by Jane Austen or the Bronte sisters. All these novels portray strong women characters and their lives and aspirations.

Chick Lit has seen a boom in the West with the publication of novels like 'Bridget Jones's Diary' and sit-coms like 'Sex in the City'. The Indian Chick Lit market has had a slower start with novelists like Advaita Kala, Anuja Chauhan and PreetiShenoy to name a few, venturing into the genre almost a decade after the West. Interestingly, this new genre has quickly become popular finding readers who connect with the characters

and vibe with the narrative

An article in *The Times of India* by Neelam Raj on July 27, 2008, talks of a 'new breed of female authors whose light-hearted tales... are dominating Indian bookstores these days.' The article also acknowledges that Chick Lit is flying off the shelves, making it a profitable proposition for publishing houses and book sellers.

This paper is based on the novel, 'The Crunch Factor' by Andaleeb Wajid. Written in the breezy manner typical of Chick Lit, it is the story of twenty-six year old Aliya, a food photographer who lives in Bangalore with her parents and sister, Faria. Her parents are obsessed with the need to belong to the upper elite and marrying Aliya off to the extremely rich Kamaal is their way to the upper echelon of society. Agreeing to an arranged marriage to please her social climber parents, Aliya meets Kamaal, the owner of an upcoming restaurant, 'B for Biryani'. Kamaal is a young, handsome, and personable young man and Aliya is impressed by him. While visiting his restaurant, Aliya meets Sameer, her ex-boyfriend, who had suddenly disappeared from her life ten years ago. Sameer is now the head-chef of Kamaal's restaurant. Tensions fly high when the two meet, but the upcoming wedding between Aliya and Kamaal makes the situation awkward. Aliya discovers that her childhood idol, Amina Asghar Khan, a chef, is Kamaal's aunt.

On hearing that Aliya is a food photographer and checking out her work, Amina decides to hire her to take photos for her next cookbook, on which she is working with Sameer; a fact that initially Aliya is unaware of. Amina decides to take Sameer and Aliya along with her to visit her grandmother in Vellore. The trip is to trace her journey from her humble beginnings to becoming a famous chef. The trip pushes Sameer and Aliya together and helps in sorting out their personal issues. Aliya decides to break off her marriage with Kamaal concentrate on her career and perhaps see where the relationship with Sameer can lead to.

Once back to Bangalore, Aliya learns that her father has

been saved from a major financial crisis by Kamaal and now feels indebted to him. She finds it difficult to break off the marriage immediately, thus putting Sameer in a state of doubt. Finally, Aliya musters the courage to break the marriage, moves out of her parent's house and decides to move on with her life. Sameer reconciles with her and the future looks rosy. Kamaal has by now decided to marry Faria, Aliya's sister who is better suited to him and his lifestyle and whom his mother probably approves more than she did Aliya.

What makes the novel interesting is the way in which Wajid has presented the central character. Aliya is a typical 'good girl', who has had one bad relationship and has tried to make peace with it. She is an intelligent girl, who describes her parents as nouveau riche, sees them for who they really are and yet accepts them. She understands their anxiety to see her get married, and yet wishes to pursue a career and make her own decisions. Her act of agreeing to an arranged marriage is guilt-driven but this self-sacrificing attitude does not last for long. She is a woman who knows her mind and where her happiness lies and hence refuses to become a pawn for her parents and Kamaal's family and opts out to chase her own dreams. Her self-doubt, insecurity, desire to please her parents and conform to the norms of society and her eventual acceptance of the person she is all resonate with the young readers of today. Wajid does not present Aliya as a paragon of virtue but as someone who accepts her shortcomings, mistakes and is willing to deal with the consequences of her actions. She is a grounded young woman with unapologetic romantic dreams: a seeming conundrum, but a very real, believable and relatable one. This kind of characterization is one of the hallmarks of Chick Lit.

Aliya's personal ambitions and dreams firmly put her in the young, modern, urban woman category. Her desire to follow her own path, her gradual realization that the man of her dreams is not infallible or even indispensable makes the novel more than just a feel-good story. Aliya's character grows, matures and turns

into a far more pleasing version of itself. Thus with a central character who echoes the modern ethos, an engaging plot and a trite but satisfactory ending, 'The Crunch Factor' firmly falls into the category of Desi Chick Lit: a new trend that's definitely here to stay.

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