



BRIDGET JONES – THE NORM CHANGING CHICK-LIT HEROINE OF *BRIDGET JONES'S DIARY*

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ABSTRACT

The concept of women being independent is not a new one in the literary scene, but the domain it offers, that is where Chick lit becomes different and successful. Here the characters are not at all perfect, the situations are worse and there are always problems and confusions and self-doubts. But despite these the protagonists find romance and they balance both their personal and professional lives. Dysfunctional family, failed and troubled romantic relationships, and career struggles all contribute to the story of the Chick lit. Jane Austen's novels are often mixed with this genre but there is a great difference here. Here the heroines are not the model women. In contrast, the Chick lit heroines are full of self-deprecation and confusions. It is the very subversion of traditional romances. Austen repeatedly emphasises the point that a woman can be happy and content only when she gets married to a good guy. Chick lit subverts this very idea. This paper aims at celebrating Bridget Jones of Bridge Jones's Diary as the norm changing Chick lit heroine of all times. Thanks to Bridget Jones's Diary Indian literature is also revelling in celebrating the imperfections of women, thus giving birth to Indian Chick lit. As Pride and Prejudice is considered as the definition of classic romance, Bridget Jones's Diary is considered as the classic definition of modern woman who succeeds despite her imperfections.

INTRODUCTION

Written for urban women, Chick lit differs from the idea of conventional romance and the portrayal of women. Considered as a Global feminine genre, it is not only a reflection but also a product of the contemporary society. It is a combination of the terms derived from the slang word "chick" which means young woman and "lit" means literature. The publication of Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones Diary* (1996) marks the beginning of the development of this genre. Several works followed soon such as *Shopaholic* series, *The Nanny Diaries*, *The Botox Diaries*, and *The Dirty Girls Social Club*.

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Helen Fielding, the English novelist and screenwriter created the fictional character Bridget Jones who became an instant hit with the singletons in the novel *Bridget Jones's Diary*. The novel became a huge success and introduced a sub-genre the Chick lit in the literary scene. This novel is followed by *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (1999) and *Bridget Jones: Mad About the Boy* (2013) all tracing the life of Bridget Jones, who tries to make sense of her life and love by changing the traditional norms set for women.

Of course the concept of women being independent is not a new one in the literary scene, but the domain it offers, that is where Chick lit becomes different and successful. Here the characters are not at all perfect, the situations are worse and there are always problems and confusions and self-doubts. But despite these the protagonists find romance and they balance both their personal and professional lives. Dysfunctional family, failed and troubled romantic relationships, and career struggles all contribute to the story of the Chick lit. Jane Austen's novels are often mixed with this genre but there is a great difference here. Here the heroines are not the model women. In contrast, the Chick lit heroines are full of self-deprecation and confusions. It is the very subversion of traditional romances. Austen repeatedly emphasises the point that a woman can be happy and content only when she gets married to a good guy. Chick lit subverts this very idea. This paper aims at celebrating Bridget Jones as the norm changing Chick lit heroine of all times. The novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* is abbreviated as *BJD* in this paper. Thanks to *BJD*, Indian literature is also revelling in celebrating the imperfections of women, thus giving birth to Indian Chick lit. As *Pride and Prejudice* is considered as the definition of classic romance, *BJD* is considered as the classic definition of modern woman. The literary critics pan chick-lit, since it does not belong to the category of "high-art" or "high-brow". Despite this chick lit novels enjoy commercial success and great popularity holding its place in the literary scene.

BJD is the norm book of Chick lit. It is an urban satire of contemporary modern human relations and the pressures the society places upon women. From the very first sentence of the novel, we come to know of Bridget's predicament. She is single, suffers from severe inferior complexity when it comes to her looks, not satisfied professionally. In general - she is messed up a lot. Bridget starts the New Year as single in her parent's house. Bridget is being set up with every eligible bachelor by her friends and relatives but of no avail.

Oh, why am I so unattractive? Why? Even a man who wears bumblebee socks thinks I am horrible. Hate the New Year. Hate everyone. Except Daniel Cleaver. Anyway, have got giant tray-sized bar of Cadbury's Dairy Milk left over from Christmas on dressing table, also amusing joke gin and tonic miniature. Am going to consume them and have fag. (Fielding 16-17)

Daniel Cleaver is Bridget's boss on whom she has a huge crush. Bridget is called as the "old girl". At every parties Bridget is constant reminded of her biological clock and also called as



“old girl” to indicate that she is ageing. The novel is in diary format. Bridget makes entries of her day-to-day activities, her fears, her wishes, her resolutions in her diary. The entries in her diary are sort of confessionary. But what is special about that is though she makes arduous entries regarding her life and vows to reform, she never does that. She even celebrates that. Bridget’s resolutions almost become ironic since she frets over Daniel the very next minute after she makes a resolution or decision.

Bridget has a close set of friends: Jude who is in a relationship with “Vile Richard”. Tom - a homosexual, who undergoes a nose job in order to win back his ex, and finally Sharon. Jude always laments about Richard’s non-committal stance and yet continues to be with him. Sharon is a sort of feminist and whenever she comes to the scene, there is a treat for the feminists. Bridget forms a bad opinion on the first meeting of Mark Darcy because he wears a diamond-patterned V-neck sweater. And from there on, every meeting of theirs is charged with equal amount of hatred and revulsion on both sides (or appears to be so). Mark is recently divorced from his disloyal wife and has a brilliant career and a new girlfriend Natasha. But Bridget’s “well-wishers” tries to set her up with him and the result is disastrous in Bridget humiliating and embarrassing herself on each and every occasion with Mark Darcy.

Bridget enters into a relationship with her boss Daniel and soon realizes that Daniel is non-committal. When Daniel fails to turn on his date with Bridget, she becomes very upset but soon recovers as she wants to be a woman of substance. Daniel tries to have intercourse with her but she humiliates him and leaves. But then she really wants to have a future with Daniel and so she goes back to him. The final stop comes when she returns from The Vicar and Tarts party humiliated only to find Daniel with another woman, who comments on Bridget’s figure after seeing her. After the break up, she quits her job. On the recommendation of her mother, she joins as a Home News Correspondent in a television channel where her professional ill-luck continues, but she is saved then by Mark Darcy which becomes an important part of developing their relationship. Though Mark helps her in her job and maintains an impersonal relationship with her, it is still difficult for Bridget to make a connection with him. It is only after her mother’s episode, Bridget comes to the realization that Mark really likes her and so she reciprocates his feelings and the novel ends happily ever after.

Many critics feel that Bridget is unable to take control of her life which can be done by women in this modern era. But what actually is special about Bridget is that her low self-estimation which turns to be rewarding at the very end. This is the problem among many young women of today. “Seeing Bridget through Rebecca’s eyes reminds us of all that Bridget underplays about herself: she owns an apartment in central London, holds job in publishing and television, attracts desirable men, and maintains her family relationships and a wide circle of true friends” (Marsh 57). This is where *BJD* stands out for the reality check. Bridget’s mother Pam is victimized in her marriage hence she decides not to waste her

remaining years. She becomes the controller of her life, takes power in her hands. Bridget's mother (mummy) Pam comes across as a true modern woman. Of course she ends up in more mess with her boyfriend Julio, but she is able to get back the place and respect she deserves in her family. All through her life, she has limited herself to the maintaining of her family and household chores. Once she realises that it is high time to pursue her desires, she becomes active and busy. Bridget is kind of jealous of her mom because of this.

I know what her secret is: she's discovered power. She has power over Dad: he wants her back. She has power over Julio, and the tax man, and everyone is sensing her power and wanting a bit of it, which makes her even more irresistible. So all I've got to do is find someone or something to have power over and the...oh God. I haven't even got power over my own hair. (Fielding 66-67)

Even her Mom who manages to secure a job in television wishes to make a program on Bridget as the one who is recently separated. There can be no better humiliation than this to her. But as is her nature, Bridget improvises. Though it appears that she laments a lot and dissatisfies, actually she is happy with her life.

Throughout the novel, we could find endless descriptions of the idea of beauty, and the poise that is expected from a woman. Bridget is free from all of these. She is constantly humiliated as she is a singleton, for her lack of control, and finally for her looks. Outward appearance is one of the major ideas of the novel. As Bridget herself states:

Completely exhausted by entire day of date-preparation. Being a woman is worse than being a farmer –there is so much harvesting and crop spraying to be done: legs to be waxed, underarms shaved, eyebrows plucked, feet pumiced, skin exfoliated and moisturized, spots cleansed, roots dyed, eyelashes tinted, nails filed, cellulite massaged, stomach muscles exercised. The whole performance is so highly tuned you only need to neglect it for a few days for the whole thing to go to seed. Sometimes I wonder what I would be like if left to revert to nature – with a full beard and handlebar moustache on each shin, Dennis Healey eyebrows, face a graveyard of dead skin cells, spots erupting, long curly fingernails like Struwelpeter, blind as bat and stupid runt of species as no contact lenses, flabby body flobbering around. Ugh, ugh. Is it any wonder girls have no confidence? (Fielding 30)

The cosmopolitan culture portrays women as eye-candies who are to be gazed and tasted by men. It places severe pressures on looks of women where women undergo arduous beauty treatments and cares to boost their confidence. Everywhere be it a bill boards, television

commercials, movies all portray women as an object and not as humans. Though it is partly the fault of the women, the media influences around us play a big part.

Another important theme is the treatment of the singletons. Women of this era are more independent – both financially and emotionally. In a country like India where the tradition and culture are given importance, when we come across single women who are independent, we become opinionated. Even the Western society is not spared.

Humph. Incensed by patronizing article in the paper by Smug Married journalist. It was headlined, with subtle-as-a-Frankie-Howard-sexual-innuendo-style irony: 'The Joy of Single Life'. 'They're young, ambitious and rich but their lives hide an aching loneliness...When they leave work a gaping emotional hole opens up before them...Lonely style-obsessed individuals seek consolation in packeted comfort food of the kind their mother might have made. Huh. Bloody nerve...' (Fielding 244)

When considered from the feminist point of view, Chick lit works are the critique of post feminism. Though there are several criticisms against the development of this genre, the universal phenomenon of celebration of imperfections for a happy and satisfied life finds identification among women all over the world. New women of today are more aware of what they want in life and how to be independent. Though they make some mistakes in their choices, once when they realise them they never repeat them. Above all they are not even aware of their true worth like Bridget who is so well above than many women always estimates herself very low. She is winning the heart of others because of her very imperfections. There are many choices for women nowadays. Women of today are more career-oriented but this doesn't prevent them to be open to choices and decisions which might be good or bad. The important thing is they get to choose and learn from their past experiences. They don't need a man to complete them. The norms are changing: if one is happy with what she has, loves herself with her imperfections and leads her life without causing problems or hurt to others, that itself is a big achievement and everything will come to her on her way. This is the ultimate message of our eponymous heroine Bridget Jones.

WORK CITED

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