

CHAPTER-I

Introduction

The present work “Chick Lit and the Novels of Shobhaa De: A Select Study” is an endeavour to study Shobhaa De in close association with chick lit writings. Etymologically the word ‘chick’ is derived from the American slang term which means ‘young woman’ and ‘lit’ is short for literature. The phrase ‘chick-lit’ was coined by CrisMazza and Jeffrey De Shell in 1995 for their edited anthology, *Chick-Lit: Post-feminist Fiction* which includes twenty-two post-feminist stories exclusively by female writers. In “Who’s Laughing Now? A Short History of Chick Lit and the Perversion of a Genre,” Mazza describes the style of these stories as simultaneously courageous and playful; frank and wry; honest, intelligent, sophisticated, libidinous, unapologetic, and overwhelmingly emancipated. Mazza explains the words “Chick Lit” and “post-feminism” in a totally new fashion, not to embrace an old frivolous or coquettish image of women but to take responsibility for their part in the damaging, lingering stereotype. The phrase was mockingly used by James Wolcott in 1996 in an article “Hear Me Purr,” published in the *New Yorker*, referring to the girlish style of writing used by female journalists in newspaper columns. It is generally accepted that ‘Chick Lit’ as a genre was inaugurated by Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (1996) and Candace Bushnell’s *Sex and the City* (1997) and helped establish present connotations of the term, even though the novels like Marian Keyes’ *Watermelon* (1995) preceded Fielding. In the twenty-first century the term has picked up popularity and is now applied to a variety of novels dealing with ‘chicks’ in their twenties and thirties and the different challenges they face concerning their career, family, conflicts within a marriage etc.

The term “chick lit” has been variously defined by different writers. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* by Chris Baldick (2008) defines it:

Chick-Lit novels are written by women about the misadventures of contemporary unmarried working women in their twenties and thirties who struggle with multiple pressures from reproachful mothers, inadequate boyfriends and tyrannical bosses while consoling themselves with shopping trips, chocolate, and erotic day dreams.
(53)

According to *Encarta Dictionary*, ‘Chick Lit’ is a “fiction directed at young city women: a genre fiction targeted to and written by or about, young and sophisticated urban women.” *Wikipedia* too

defines: “Chick Lit is a genre fiction within women’s fiction which addresses issues of modern women often humorously and light heartedly.” Likewise Ferriss and Young (2006) describe the genre, chick lit, as one that features single women in their twenties and thirties “navigating their generation’s challenges of balancing demanding careers with personal relationships” (3). Stephanie Davis-Kahl (2008) also defined the genre as “compelling stories ... about modern women struggling and succeeding with work, relationships, motherhood, infertility, finances and yes, the right shoes to wear with right dress” (18). According to Mlynowski and Jacobs (2006): “Chick Lit is often upbeat, always funny fiction about contemporary female characters and their everyday struggles with work, home, friendship, family or love” (10). All these definitions explain different colours of chick lit but still there is a common thread that runs through all of these. On the whole it can be summarised that ‘Chick Lit’ is a fascinating character study covering the heroine’s struggle at personal and professional level that leads us to derive an inclusive picture of the genre. It explores the personal, professional and romantic lives of highly challenging young often single working women, who primarily are in their twenties and thirties and discusses the life issues as, love, marriage, dating, illicit relationships, jobs (often in media, advertising, call-centres, fashion-designing etc.), weight, fashion, shopping, friendships, late-night glamorous parties, hypocritical corporate environment, frivolous talks, addiction etc. often in a light-hearted and humorous way.

The content, style and setting of the most of the novels that are now recognized as ‘chick lit’ are quite similar to Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (1996) and Bushnell’s *Sex and the City* (1997). Fielding’s novel is a first person narration about Bridget Jones, a thirty year old single woman living in sophisticated area of London. The professions taken up by the protagonists are based primarily in the communication industry i.e. publishing, public relations etc. and they often have problems at the workplace, either with the boss or from insufferable co-workers. The protagonist involves herself in frequent romantic entanglements but remains single throughout much of the text (and woefully laments such a status) until the ending. Frequently the protagonist is obsessed with her weight, strict dieting, looks, spending money and how other people see them as Bridget in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*(1996) is completely obsessed with her self-image, weight, looks etc. Some ‘chick lit’ novels may have interfering mothers who represent follies to their ‘independent’ daughters. In *Sex and the City* (1997) too, the events are described in an informal, funny and humorous way where the main focus is on the heroine’s daily life.

Within a very short span of time, many sub-genres have proliferated from ‘chick lit’ including, Teen Lit, Single-in-the City-Lit, Bride Lit, Mom Lit, Lad Lit, Christian Chick Lit, Widow Lit, Mystery Chick Lit, Hen/Matron/Lady Lit etc. and many ethnic chick lit’s as *Ladki Lit*, *Chica Lit*, and *Sistah Lit*.¹The Chief-factors which contributed to the popularity and evolution of diverse sub-genres are the girl centric T.V. shows like *Sex and the City*(1998-2004), *Ally Mc Beal*(1997-2002),*Desperate Housewives*(2004)and the novels like Marian Keyes’ *Watermelon*(1995), Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary*(1996), Melissa Bank’s *The Girl’s Guide to Hunting and Fishing*(1999), Sophie Kinsella’s *Confessions of a Shopaholic*(2000), Laura Zigman’s *Animal Husbandry*(1998), Suzanne Finnamore’s *Otherwise Engaged*(2000), Lauren Weisberger’s *The Devil Wears Prada*(2003), Candace Bushnell’s *Four Blondes*(2001). Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001) proved a super-hit when it came in the form of a film and it took \$ 5.7 million in its first week-end (Dir. Sharon Maguire, 2001), outstripping both *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (Dir. Mike Newell, 1994) and *Notting Hill* (Dir. Roger Michell, 1999) the previous benchmarks of British film success. Ultimately the movie took \$ 160 million worldwide, and the subsequent book and film sequel *The Edge of Reason* (Dir. BeebanKidron, 2004) have been equally successful. The growing popularity of chick lit has crossed the gap of generation, ethnicity, nationality, and even gender. Rachel Donadio in an article ‘The Chick-Lit Pandemic’ published in *The New York Times*, has proclaimed that from Mumbai to Milan, Gdansk to Jakarta, regional varieties of chick lit have been sprouting confidently and cheerfully by the demographic which is both their subject and readership and the novels deal with twenty or thirty something women with full time jobs, discretionary income and a hunger for independence and glamour. The basic characteristics of the genre can also be applied to the sub-genres; however it becomes very difficult for us to coin the definite formula.

The discussion of chick lit involves due elaboration of its place and origin in literary history to cover its various dimensions. Among critics too, the origin of chick lit takes the centre position and it is commonly accepted that the genre drew inspiration from Jane Austen’s novels like *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Emma* (1815), *Persuasion* (1818) and from Bronte sisters’ works, which include Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* (1847)etc. It can

¹Ladki Lit, Chica Lit and Sistah Lit refer to Indian chick lit, Latina chick lit, and African American chick lit respectively.

be equally admitted that touching female psychology is not prerogative of women writers only and men too have exquisitely explored such themes. Chick lit came much later to seventeenth century but more or less, it seems an advancement of the world that Pope created in his *The Rape of the Lock*. Pope has presented Belinda, a typical fashionable aristocratic lady of the time. She suffers from all the vanities, follies, and lack of moral scruple, and represents the upper class ladies of the eighteenth century. Her dressing table always remains overcrowded with the items of toiletry, she goes to parties, plays cards, and roams about anywhere she likes like a typical chick lit heroine. Some critics trace chick lit's generic origin to medieval prose romances as well. But Sarah Mlynowski and Farrin Jacobs consider its origin in the novels of Jane Austen and refers her as the "mother of all chick lit." (11)

Chick lit is closely associated with the romance fiction.² Romantic fiction is defined as one where the love story is the main focus of the novel and which has an emotionally satisfying happy ending. This may include different types of romance as sex and shopping novels, historical romances, erotic fiction for women etc. The basic plot of a romance fiction can be summarised as: a young, inexperienced, ordinary woman meets a handsome, wealthy man, ten or fifteen years her senior. The temperament of the hero is mocking, cynical, contemptuous, hostile and even brutal, and the heroine is confused. Towards the end he reveals his love for the heroine and her misunderstandings are cleared away. During the time heroine may go away from her friends and family to recover from a traumatic event, or even waking from a coma (to find herself staying at the hero's villa or castle). So the romance narrative progresses through the course of misunderstanding, loathing, separation and lastly reconciliation which brings with it complete transformation of the hero into an emotional being with a heart who declares his love for the heroine and the heroine gets a new social identity. Both genres are considered secondary, base or degenerate because these feature female protagonists and their search for love and self-development.

The Harlequin romance boomed in the early 1970s while chick lit established itself as a commercial genre by the late 1990s. Harlequin romance offered an archetypal, fixed image of women protagonists. Chick lit by contrast picturizes women who are sexually liberated and have

²The romances mentioned here are Harlequin and Mills & Boon, or the so called 'Hard Romances.'

professional choices of their own and in this way stand as direct beneficiaries of the women's liberation movement. Chick lit and romance both are read extensively because these provide us a kind of escapism, a distraction from the mundane and difficult real life experiences. The reader is always hopeful for the sense of transformation or completion in her own life, which creates a compulsion to re-live that moment again and again through stories. Though both genres look similar on the surface, yet they differ from each other on many grounds. In a romance narrative, the emphasis is on the heroine's love life only, whereas chick lit tends to focus not only on her love life, but also her relationship with family and friends, the experiences of professional life and on the development of the heroine. However, a great part of pleasure that women get from reading romance also centres on the growth or development of the heroine. These are not, the only differences that are pointed out between two genres; some other differences can also be traced.

Romances are usually written from the third person perspective, whereas, chick lit novels are written in the first person narrative. Chick lit usually focuses on a female central character and uses a variety of strategies to make her desires and motivations the focus of the story. *Bridget Jones Diary* and many other chick lit novels are written in first person narrative, in the heroine's voice, conveying the notion that these novels although fictional, are in depth portrayal of women's experiences. This shift from third person narration to first person narration is a significant change in heroine's position as an object of male gaze to an assertive subject. The shift towards first person voice in most contemporary chick lit novels not only strengthens the heroine's voice and increases the readers' opportunities to identify with her but also provides a temporary escape from the feeling of constantly being watched or controlled by a male dominated society. Owing to different demands of different societies, chick lit came in various sub-genres as Mom Lit, Lad Lit, Christian Chick Lit, Ethnic Chick Lit etc. The typical heroine in Harlequin/Mills and Boon romance of the 1970s was characterised by sexual innocence and passivity and she can only have it if she is seduced. Contrarily, chick lit heroines are sexually experienced, engaging themselves in one night stands and thus can be described as 'a great lay' as Stella, in *Don't You Want Me* (2002), says: "I'm not saying let's get married, Frank. But I am saying, let's go to bed" (225). Despite their spirited nature and intelligence, the heroines in traditional romantic novels are not generally seen as career driven, rather, are presented as seeking power and advancement through a romantic relationship with a man. In this regard, the female characters in chick lit novels are portrayed differently, they are shown as employed and committed to the idea of a career.

The beauty and body of the heroine within romance genre is depicted as 'effortlessly beautiful' - that is, the heroine possesses attractive physical appearance and is shown as completely unconscious about her beauty. Inversely, chick lit heroines are presented as completely obsessed with the shape, size and look of their body. In chick lit novels beauty is described under two different approaches. In the first one the heroine is beautiful, but she completely brings a change in herself from 'ugly duckling' to desperately gorgeous. Jamima, for instance, in *Jamima J.* (1998) undergoes a sudden weight loss to become beautiful. Jamima says, "If I had only one wish in all the world I wouldn't wish to win the lottery. Nor would I wish for true love. No, if I had one wish to have a model's figure" (2). The second type of chick lit heroines are those, who choose when to make herself beautiful and if she becomes beautiful, then only for herself. Finally, one more difference between chick lit and romance appears in the status of money in the marriage contract. In romance, the heroine does not run after money but believe in true love. Chick lit offers heroines who aspire for well-appointed males.

Chick lit can also be taken into account from a feminist perspective. This genre is generally defined as a type of post-feminist or second wave feminism that went beyond depicting female-as-victim to include fiction that covered the breadth of female experiences, including, love, marriage and gender etc. Feminist criticism was inaugurated late in the 1960s and went through many stages of development. The first wave feminists present female-as-subjugated, liberal feminism operates on the assumption that both sexes should have equal rights in the matters of career and family, and the post-feminists give the impression that equality has been achieved and now the feminists can focus on something else completely. The basic themes of post-feminism include shift from objectification to subjectification, femininity as a bodily property, the emphasis upon self-surveillance, focus upon individual choice and empowerment, and an emphasis upon consumerism etc. can apparently be traced in chick lit as well. In countries, where feminism has not fully taken root, chick lit is offering the feminist joys of freedom and the post-feminist joys of consumerism simultaneously.

One of the most striking aspects of post-feminism is its obsessional preoccupation with the body that can be traced from the most cursory reading of contemporary chick lit novels. Instead of caring or nurturing or motherhood being regarded as central to femininity (all, of course, highly problematic) it is the possession of a 'sexy body' that is presented as women's key source of

identity. But the body in chick lit novels is presented in a highly specific way: it is the body, the source of women's power and is always unruly, which constantly requires monitoring, surveillance, and discipline in order to confirm female attractiveness. It is the body which is constructed as a window to the character's interior life: for instance, when Bridget Jones smokes forty cigarettes a day or consumes 'excessive' calories we are invited to read this in psychological terms as indicative of emotional breakdown. Another linked aspect of post-feminism in chick lit is the shift from objectification to subjectification. In previous popular fiction women were presented as passive, mute objects of an assumed male gaze, but today in chick lit novels women are presented as active desiring sexual subjects. Women's subjectivities are constructed through the idea of 'pleasing ourselves' and if they make their body beautiful by shaving, waxing, dieting, purging, working out, making up etc. than only for themselves.

In chick lit novels a great emphasis is accorded to individual choice and empowerment, which is an important aspect of post-feminist sensibility. They value freedom to make individual choices about their personal life and career. Chick lit heroines are active protagonists in the sense of being employed, financially independent and initiating sexual relationships and their notions of choice, of 'being oneself,' and 'pleasing oneself' are central to the post-feminist sensibility. But most of the heroines silence their voice and empowerment ideas in order to be in the arms of the one they love. Bridget Jones, for instance, the protagonist of *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), rejects her own voice, before reuniting with Mark Darcy, in the fear of losing him and she cries out that everyone knows diaries are just full of crap. It shows that patriarchal ideology is still dominant and shows its power in one way or the other.

The heroines in chick lit novels are presented as financially independent, working outside the home and sexually assertive, like a post-feminist, but the hard and glittering appearance is not the real woman inside because most of the chick lit heroines define themselves in terms of their relationship to a man and escape themselves even from motherhood. Such as the female characters in *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), and *Sex and the City* (1997) claim to be liberated and enjoy their sexuality, but they are presented as searching for the man in whose relation they can define themselves. The five aspects of post-feminism³ as defined in Faludi's *Backlash* (1992) have been

³1. Women's general rejection of feminism in their lives, 2. Focus on the individual instead of a sisterhood, 3. The media's attempts to revive more traditional femininities that were not allowable

analysed by Michele M. Glasburgh (2006) in the context of chick lit novels and tried to find out the relation between post-feminism and chick lit. She also tried to find out whether chick lit truly presents modern women's picture or not. Feminism has made possible for real women and heroines in chick lit to enjoy social and economic independence. The broader horizon of chick lit and post-feminism seems to coincide somewhere. For example, the popular T.V. shows like *Sex and the City* (1998-2004), based on chick lit novels reject traditional gender roles imposed on women by patriarchy and the heroines represent contemporary women's desires and their attempts to investigate the gender roles on their own terms. It becomes apparent that contemporary modern women have been liberated to some extent by feminism and this is reflected in chick lit as well. But many of the core issues still remain as unattended is highlighted by UrvashiButalia on International Women's Day in *The Tribune*:

But today, a hundred years after this day began to be marked as being dedicated to women; it's worth remembering that history, and reminding ourselves that many of the issues women raised then, are still alive today... What's most disturbing though is the way in which women's day has turned into an opportunity to market different products. Today, the market uses this day to focus on those very things that feminists have long raised questions about – cosmetics, jewellery, decorative items for the home. (11)

Susan Faluditoo, in her book *Backlash* (1992), argues that feminism has come a long way but it has not yet achieved its aims of equality and sexual liberty and now media created post-feminist generation has hindered feminism in achieving its aims. Male dominated media has played a great role in raising women's fears of remaining alone and aging and they are again put under patriarchal domination.

Post-feminists reject feminism and believe that woman is still miserable due to feminism. They opine that the independence contemporary women enjoy undoubtedly has opened doors for them to have access to universities and a wider range of jobs but it has also led to multiple possibilities like, how to live their lives and the opportunities of more choices, which has created worries and anxieties on women regarding the decisions of their life. Faludi claims that the spread of male-dominated media has created a backlash to feminism and as a result contemporary women

through feminism, 4.Idea of a female identity crisis, which means that women today do not have an adequate relationship with womanhood because feminism has put it on the backburner, 5. Women facing overload when considering future choices

turned their focus back on finding security in a relationship. It is apparent in chick lit novels that they are constructed on the idea of failure of feminism as in each novel the independent and empowered woman finds security in a relationship with man because she becomes tired of dealing with life issues alone and needs tender love and support.

The genre, despite its popularity and variety, has not yet received much academic attention. 'Chick Lit' is widely popular on the internet and a popular topic of discussion for the book review sections of newspaper, websites, as well as on book blogs. Chick lit is well represented online with websites such as chicklit.com, chicklitbooks.com, chicklitreview.org, chicklitwriters.com, chicklit.nl and chicklit.co.uk etc. This genre due to its theme has suffered much academic ignorance and is considered incapable of presenting serious topics of literary significance. Beryl Bainbridge, a novelist and five time nominee for the Booker Prize, called the genre "a froth sort of thing" (quoted in Ferriss and Young 1). Doris Lessing, the Nobel Prize Winner of the year 2007 for literature, preferred women to write about their own lives as they really saw them, and not those helpless girls, drunken, worrying about their weight. The prejudice is in the view that chick lit is all about the desire to be thin, drinking too much alcohol, obsession for fashion etc. and nothing more, and it is not taken into account that 'chick lit' also touches upon the issues behind the desire to be thin and sometimes too much obsession for fashion, shopping, drinking too much alcohol, thus reflecting the serious perhaps grave issues that contemporary women also face while attempting to lead a satisfactory life as Malynowski and Jacobs (2006) affirm: "Contrary to popular belief, chick lit is not all about shoes. Or clothes. Or purses. ... but the chick lit story is about the main character's road to self-discovery." (10)

The internationally popular genre fiction known as 'chick lit,' popularised by *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) and *Sex and the City* (1997), now has an Indian avatar and is known as 'Indian Chick Lit' or '*Ladki Lit.*' The genre fiction most recognisable for its pink cover art of stilettos, martini glasses and lip-sticks, is now being colourfully presented with *bindis*, *saris*, and bangles. The increasing section of modern independent working women in India has led to the explosion of 'Indian Chick Lit' because modern women want to read something they can relate to their own life. All chick lit readers enjoy these novels because they find their own shadow in the central character, who has a career and a family and it appears almost real to them. Chick lit is flourishing in India because it has juxtaposed tradition and modernity. Various chick lit writers

have expressed their views regarding chick-literature in India. Swati Kaushal, the author of *Piece of Cake* (2005) thinks that chick lit is a very new phenomenon in India and the market is full of books that reflect the lives of confident and modern young women. Kavita Daswani, another chick lit writer, believes that a woman anywhere in the world is a Bridget Jones in the making, and that her angst is not much different from any working middle-class woman, who is looking for a boyfriend/husband, satisfaction in her career, good friends, enjoyment etc. Any twenty or thirty years old professional woman may have money issues, who gets involved with the wrong man and might face conflicts within her family, probably anywhere in the world. In India, a generation ago, the only route to independence for women from parental control was marriage but there also they were en-caged in several ways. Women now are working, living alone in the cities, enjoying both male and female friends, drinking, dating and having a lot of fun despite the enormous social pressure to get married. V. K. Karthika, the publisher and chief editor at *Harper Collins India* claims that the picture of modern Indian woman presented in chick lit is close to reality:

This is the story of the new Indian woman in the cities. She is single, has career and is willing to have fun, take risks and find a man her way. It is a woman we have read about in books from the western countries and now, suddenly we are finding her on Indian roads. (Laxmi 2007)

In India, the leading exponents of chick lit are Rajshree (*Trust Me*, 2006), Swati Kaushal (*Piece of Cake*, 2005), Anuja Chauhan (*The Zoya Factor*, 2008), Advaita Kala (*Almost Single*, 2009), Kavita Daswani (*Indie Girl*, 2007), Preethi Nair (*Beyond Indigo*, 2004), Rupa Gulab (*Girl Alone*, 2005), Shobhaa De (*Starry Nights*, 1992), Monica Pradhan (*The Hindi-Bindi Club*, 2007), Anjali Banerjee (*Rani and the Fashion Divas*, 2005), Versa Dixit, Namita Gokhale (*Paro: Dreams of Passion*, 1984) etc. The various themes the writers of these novels deal with are hope for those Indian women who struggle under the pressure of family expectations, arranged marriages and an optimum work life, and attempt to find a way out of the muddles of society. Swati Kaushal depicts how middle class young working women are torn between tradition and modernity, between what they learn from their mothers and what they learn from the internet. Arranged marriages in Indian chick lit and dating to western chick lit are full of comic possibilities. Swati Kaushal's *Piece of Cake* (2005) shows how the protagonist's mother is constantly trying to get her married to the right man. Kavita Daswani has highlighted the ways of the independent women resisting arranged marriages. Daswani, a California-based writer, discovers interesting shades in chick lit by Indian Diaspora. The writers of Indian Diaspora weave

in their chick lit novels, the cultural sensibilities, perceptions and observations into their work and write them from an Indo-American/Indo-British/Indo-European point of view, where they live. In Daswani's *Everything Happens for a Reason*, a Delhi girl, Priya, is married to a California boy, and she is made subservient at their wonderful California home. But the character of Priya manages to break through with a sense of subdued independence. Daswani herself says that the theme of arranged marriages is over done in Indian chick lit. She believes it is now the right time to tackle the challenge of finding unusual ways of telling those stories. Rajshree, a film script writer and director, writes chick lit novels by placing her protagonists with-in the milieu of the Indian film industry. Rajshree's *Trust Me* (2006) brings the theme of the big bad men, with a difference—she chooses Indian film industry as a backdrop to the theme of her novel. Preethi Nair too has depicted the social and parental pressures to be in the perfect job and find the perfect man, in her autobiographical novel *Beyond Indigo* (2004). Preethi Nair's heroine in *Beyond Indigo* struggles with the idea of marriage. She opts for the arranged marriage settled by her parents. Nina, the protagonist of the novel, chooses between stability and risk, arranged marriage and love, tradition and loving a foreign. Another chick lit writer Rupa Gulab's *Girl Alone* (2005) is about an intellectual girl who suffers from disappointment in love and takes the help of rock music and existential literature to divert her mind. Many of the chick lit writers are not writers by profession—they often come from varied backgrounds, and inspired by a story or incidents from their personal life, write successful chick lit novel. Since chick lit is all about working women in their 20s and 30s, who are juggling a career, a love life and social obligations, it is not surprising that these writers are describing whatever they experience in their daily life. Swati Kaushal is an MBA from IIM Kolkata and has worked with MNC's like Nestle and Nokia for many years. Her acquaintance with the corporate culture formed her research and helped her portray Minal's professional career accurately in *Piece of Cake*. Rupa Gulab, the writer of popular chick lit novel *Girl Alone*, also draws from her own experience of living in a hostel. Similarly Rajshree, a film writer and director, writes chick lit novels placing Indian film industry on the backdrop.

Chick lit is not limited to novels only, but it has made a mark in the Indian cinema also. We use the word 'chick flick' when a chick lit theme is depicted in a movie. Indian movies like *Fashion*, *Page 3*, *Life in a Metro*, *Anjaana Anjaani*, *Aisha*, *Turning 30*, *I Hate Luv Storys* etc. fall under this category. *Fashion* is all about the high aspirations of middle class young charming girl, who becomes a super model and how she faces and handles her career and life issues. Advaita

Kala, a chick lit writer and who has penned the script of *AnjaanaAnjaani* says that these are the stories which deal with women's experiences. *Aisha* is an adaptation of Jane Austen's *Emma* and its director RajshreeOjha opines that Indian cinema has not yet tried it because the genre is all about urban women with minds of their own. Now in India more and more women are becoming financially independent and make their own decisions and such films reflect their lives. *Turning 30* is another such movie where the heroine, GulPanag, the 31-year-old former Miss India, claims enthusiastically that it is an unapologetic chick flick. She enjoyed watching chick flicks like *Bridget Jones's Diary*, *13 Turning 30*, *Sex and the City* etc. The story is about an upper class professional Mumbai girl and her trials and triumphs in personal and professional life. Her boyfriend dumps her a few days before her 30th birthday and then she takes charge of her life. In all these movies, it is shown that though male has significance in the women's life—but without sacrificing the woman's worth and self-respect.

ShobhaaRajadhyaksha known as ShobhaaDe, was born in Mumbai on 7 January, 1948, in a conservative Brahmin family. She emerged upon the literary scene with her bestseller *Socialite Evenings* (1988), which was followed by *Starry Nights* (1990), *Sisters* and *Strange Obsession* in 1992, *Uncertain Liaisons* (1993), *Sultry Days* (1994), *Shooting from the hip* (1994), *Snapshots* (1995), *Small Betrayals* (1995), *Second Thoughts* (1996), *Selective Memory* (1998), *Surviving Men* (1998), *Speed-Post* (1999), *Sandhya's Secret* (2009) and her recent publication is *Shobhaa at Sixty* (2011). She has graduated from St. Xavier's College, Mumbai with a degree in psychology and after making her name in modelling, Shobhaa De began her career in journalism in 1970, during the course of which she founded and edited three magazines—*Stardust*, *Society*, and *Celebrity*. After the failure of *Celebrity*, the magazine edited and published by Shobhaa De, which brought her financial bankruptcy, isolation and even divorce from her first husband Sudhir, her superstitious belief compelled her to search her titles that begin with 'S,' the first alphabet of her name. The success of *Socialite Evenings* inspired her to begin her titles of all her writings with 'S'. At present, she is a well-known freelance writer and columnist for several newspapers and magazines.

Shobhaa De, also recognised as the Jackie Collins of India, claims herself to be the pioneer in the field of popular fiction writing and among the first to explore the world of urban woman in India. She has portrayed realistic picture of elite class glamorous women—the way they think, the

tabooed subjects they converse with each other when they are alone, and their problems, desires and aspirations and expose the hollowness of Indian urban life, family and society. Her novels simply represent the true state of city life, which is the mark of human civilization. She realizes many questions through her novels, such as: Is this the outcome of progress? Is this the life and place where we must be? Are we following right path in our life? Is this the civilization, we talk about? But unluckily such concerns, which are undercuts of her fiction, have been neglected by many critics. She has presented before us the realistic in-depth portrayal of life lead by upper class glamorous women because she is a former beauty queen, model, designer, celebrity, socialite and has closely experienced and observed the ways of living of sophisticated glamorous women. She affirms it in an interview taken by RavindraNathShukla that: "Subjects of my books are my own which I pick up from the people around me, my writing is based on ideas. I don't want to harm society. The rotten inside of society may be our subject" (1). Most of the female characters portrayed by Shobhaa De are economically independent and competent professionals who are conscious of their self-respect because they are working shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts. The women in her novels are enterprising, bold, innovative, and always ready to accept challenges in their lives. She shatters the myth that upper class independent women have a life full of happiness and contentment and probes into the psyche of her women characters to expose the trauma, insecurity and agony that lie beneath the gloss and glitter. ShobhaaDe, though writes about aristocratic women belonging to upper crust of society, but she is aware of the pathetic condition of women and expresses her deep concern for them. Shobhaa De wants women to pay attention to a few but requisite conditions for their freedom like honour, empowerment, betterment, health, rights, independence and security. In this regard she says, "I feel education and economic independence are keys to women's existence. Let her herself evaluate her freedom—self-help is the greatest help. If the woman on gross root is educated, she could help herself" (Patil 1). ShobhaaDe's idea seems similar to that of Dr. Radhakrishnan who opines: "Give us good women, we will have a great civilization, / Give us good mothers, we will have a great nation" (Quoted in English Prose 143). Shobhaa De believes that only through the upliftment of women a nation can progress and prosper because they will enlighten the life of all the family members. Children are considered the future of a nation and they may be called the backbone and maker of the future of a nation, society and civilization, which would ultimately result in the betterment of entire human kind. For the emancipation, empowerment and enlightenment of women we need for

them education, equality, opportunities, honour, co-operation and courage. Today, the needs of women are positive mind-set of males, their own spine for self-respect, family support and self-confidence. According to Shobhaa De, a woman can get all these things through the support of her family and society and with the help of mutual understanding of her male partner as Anita Katyal (2001) opines in a newspaper article:

The days of bra-burning a militant feminism of the sixties are now over. The women of the nineties are in a far mellow mood. They have not given up their on-going battle for equality, justice and development but there is a growing realization among the women that this journey cannot be covered on their own. That they have to work along with men, as partners and not as adversaries, if they are to achieve any of their goals. (16)

Shobhaa De adopts feministic-cum-humanistic approach in her practical life as well as her fiction. According to Shobhaa De the humanistic approach is concerned with the fullest growth of the individual in the areas of love, fulfilment, self-worth and autonomy. She stresses on the word 'trust' because it strengthens and harmonizes the human relationships between individual and individual, one family to another family and one society to another society. While most of the chick lit writers like Kavita Daswani, Preethi Nair, Swati Kaushal etc. depict the problems and experiences of young middle class working women, Shobhaa De too as a chick lit writer, presents before us upper class women who are highly obsessed with the desire for wealth, power and fame and explores the socialite life in Mumbai and many of the hypocrisies of the celebrities. Her novels are generally read to enjoy the characters aspiring their career in modelling, movies, journalism, advertisement and business.

Shobhaa De is a writer who is frank in her narration of incidents and believes in absolute open-heartedness. She has an intimate understanding of the psyche of women and her treatment of the contemporary urban women's position and the challenges she faces at home and at work, is not without significance. Many writers have commented on Shobhaa De's preoccupation with the feminist vision. Madhu Jain has highlighted that Shobhaa De's novels are a picture of protest against patriarchy, and she has completely shattered the complementary image of man-woman relationship. Geeta Barua considers her novels to be faithful portrayal of film world with all its perfidies, glamour, crimes, lies, deceits and sexual exploitation. Bhargavi Rao has commented on the feministic aspects in the novels of Shobhaa De. Another critic Saumyajit Samanta traced out how her women protagonists fight against the marginalization of women at the hands of their

husbands questioning the traditional sense of security underlying the institution of marriage. Urbashi Barat opines that Shobhaa De is a serious writer with her honest appraisal of human relationships and her novels depict the darker side of human relationships, the squalor and the evil in the society and in human relationships. Critics like Jaydipsingh Dodiya and R.K. Dhawan appreciate her and her work because, they think, Shobhaa De's all major or minor characters in all her novels reflect some touching aspect of human life. They consider her a writer gifted with extraordinary ability to discuss very sensitive aspects of human life. The manner, in which she narrates each and every aspect of human relationships in general and man-woman relationship, in particular, is really worth appreciating.

Shobhaa De is an important writer as far as research works are considered. In spite of all the researches being made on Shobhaa De, the relevance of the present research lies in its intention to locate Shobhaa De not only as a writer portraying luxurious lives of models, heroines, corporate women but also as the writer who points out the importance of relationships in the lives of sophisticated women and their endeavour to find the road to self-discovery. Though these sophisticated class women represent a very small portion of women in general and their problems are totally different from the problems of ordinary women, but at the same time they are a very crucial part of women taken as a whole and we can't deny their concerns and their problematic issues within family and at professional level, while talking about female issues.

Subsequent chapters make an attempt to analyse Shobhaa De's first two novels in the context of chick lit writings. Shobhaa De's first two novels *Socialite Evenings* and *Starry Nights* are evaluated on the basis of characteristics of chick lit. In the second chapter *Socialite Evenings: Self-Discovery*, Karuna, a typical chick lit heroine, belongs to a middle class family and aspires to be the part of aristocratic, wealthy, socialite elite class of Mumbai. To fulfil her ambitions, she becomes a model and marries a wealthy person, whom she does not love. Similarly her friend Anjali also belonged to middle class family, who married Abe, a wealthy playboy, in order to get out of her middle class background. Throughout the novel the issues of modern women relating to shopping, make-up, love affairs, extramarital affairs, money matters, work-place and working conditions, marriage etc. are discussed largely by Karuna and her friends Anjali and Ritu. But despite these frivolous talks on daily life, Karuna and Anjali find themselves on the track of self-discovery at the end of the novel. In the third chapter, *Starry Nights: Hope (Aasha) Conquers All*,

an endeavour is undertaken to show that how Aasha Rani, the hope of her mother's desires and an object of sexual exploitation for men in the film industry, becomes an independent, confident, assertive and hopeful person. Aasha Rani, her sisters and her mother suffered poverty and deception because her father deserted them. Her mother forced her into film industry for money and here Aasha Rani faced harsh realities of glamour industry. She is independent, liberated in the matters of love and sex. The novel depicts the day to day account of Aasha Rani's life from her teenage days in Madras, life as a leading actress, marital life and life after divorce, when she decides hopefully to resurrect her father's family studio again. Aasha Rani emerges out as a confident person and decides that she will conquer the world with her daughter Sasha and her sister Sudha Rani.

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