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Genre, Gender and Novel: A Study of Chick Lit

Tribhuvan University

Genre, Gender and Novel: A Study of Chick Lit

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Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Krishna Prasad Sharma has completed his thesis entitled "Genre, Gender and Novel: A Study of *Chick Lit*" under my supervision. He carried out his research from November 2011 to June 2012. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis titled “Genre, Gender and Novel: A Study of *Chick Lit*” submitted to Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Krishna Prasad Sharma, has been approved by the undersigned members of Research Committee.

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Abstract

This research studies the emergent genre of novel known as *Chick Lit* basically by analyzing Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) and Cecelia Ahern's *The Gift* (2008). This study explores the idea of chick lit as a genre of new women's fiction regarding modern womanhood and femininity. The genre has been accused of being frivolous trash with vapid prose that concerns more about 'chick' girls. This study claims chick lit as a genre of fiction by, for, and about new women, is concerned with the contemporary serious issues of modern womanhood such as: the issues of career, love, friendship without renouncing family, domesticity and romance. By comparing and contrasting this newly emerging genre with the genre of traditional romance this study also claims that chick lit is a genre of contemporary romance and therefore, popular. In addition, this study makes significant theoretical connection with feminism and post feminism in order to define this struggling genre as a genre of women's fiction of contemporary time. Furthermore this study provides spaces for expression of new women's experiences and desires with the opportunities beyond the traditional roles of women as mother, wife and so on. It empowers the women to construct their own gender prioritizing career, choice, female sexuality and self-definition against patriarchal culture. As a whole, this study tries to bring this challenging, often overlooked and dismissed genre, chick lit to the forefronts of other literary genre for its recognition and popularity and define its status in contemporary literary world

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I. Introduction to *Chick Lit*

Chick lit is a genre fiction that addresses issues of modern womanhood often humorously and lightheartedly. It is a genre of fiction written by, for and about new women. It talks about the new women's concerns of their individual identity as 'a woman' of postfeminist times rendering female characters in the story, where most of them are feeling pressure from the achievements of feminism: juggling their career with family, love, and marriage and at the same time undermining feminist ideology. Although it sometimes includes the romantic elements, it is not assumed to be direct sub-category of romance genre because the heroine's relation with her family or friends is often as important as her romantic relationships. Because of women readers' attraction to romance, it revisits romantic elements and mutates those elements in the story, where the female characters are presented often with traditional stereotypes. The genre has been able to establish its name to the fore-front of literary genres because of its own invention of literary styles and merits mutating the romantic conventions.

Chick lit is a newly emerging genre of women's literature that has marked its special beginning with Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, a novel published in 1996. It is a genre that has gained much popularity: women who do not usually take up a book, may read chick lit once in a while, and highly educated career-driven woman may have secret stash of chick lit to read on the subway or on the beach. Featuring pastel cover of shoes, legs, bags, and pretty woman, it has swamped the book stores with its abundant marketing towards female readers of twenty years to forty-five years of age in average. The fact that chick lit book mostly looks cute on the outside, does not necessarily mean that the content is merely sugar and spice, as is often misconception. The genre of chick lit is often overlooked, dismissed and

considered to be incapable of presenting seriousness in good literary writing. It is accused to be frivolous trash, which has vapid prose, often looked at as something without depth and meaningless. In spite of this, chick lit has gained popularity in British and American book- industries and mass media. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young in their edited anthology, *Chick lit: The New Women's Fiction* (2006), state, “[o]n one hand chick lit attracts unquestioning adoration of fans; on the other it attracts the unmitigated disdain of critics” in their introduction. Novelist Beryl Bainbridge, a five time nominee for Booker Prize, called the genre “a forth sort of thing [that] just wastes time” qtd. in Ferriss and Young 1). Doris Lessing, the Nobel Prize winner for literature in 2007, added, “[i]t would be better, perhaps, if female novelist wrote books about their lives as they really saw them, and not these helpless girls, drunken, worrying about their weight” (cited in Ferriss and Young 1-2). However, many women and girls of this generation, known as ‘millennial generation’ (Naugle 7) too worry about their weight, and at the same time also feel helpless or get drunk. The biasness in the idea that it is not taken into account that chick lit also touches upon the issues behind desire to be slim and drinking excess alcohol. Thus, chick lit also mirrors the serious issues and perhaps darker side of contemporary women who are facing obstacles while struggling to lead a normal life.

Likewise, literary figure George Eliot, calls women’s writing ‘frothy’, ‘prosy’, ‘pious’, and ‘pedantic’ in her essay, “Silly Novels by Lady Novelists” and blames their creation as ‘silly’(cited in Davis-Kahl 18). In addition, chick lit faces criticism of professor Lola Young, the chairperson of Britain’s Prestigious Orange Prize for fiction panel, when she made remark and called it the “cult of, being advances going to photogenic young women to write about their own lives and who they had to dinner, as if that is all was to life” (qtd. in Stephanie Davis-Kahl 19).

However, chick lit gets commercial success despite negative criticism, Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young call it ‘commercial Tsunami’ (2). Chick lit books earned, for instance, seventy-one million Dollars in 2002, prompting publishers such as Harlequin, Broadway and Pocket Books to create separate imprints for the genre. Rosalind Gill and Elena Herdieckerhoff state that the genre was well established with “distinctive title, heroines and narrative styles, clearly marked jacket designs” in the introductory chapter of their essay “Rewriting the Romance: New Feminities in Chick Lit?” (2007). Jeanette Winterson, defines her work as ‘unashamedly high art’ and admitted that she has ‘no problem’ with chick lit (cited in Ferriss and Young 2). Despite criticism made by both male and female critics, chick lit gets skyrocketing adoration from those fans and critics who favor it, thus reflecting the issues of contemporary women that they face.

Chick lit gets its name from anthology of women’s writing that initially used the name mockingly. When the anthology, *Chick lit: Postfeminist Fiction* (1995) was published the name was chosen by the editors Cris Mazza and Jeffrey Dessel, because it best encompassed the variety of stories exclusively by women writers. The term ‘postfeminist’ was meant to be ironic “not to embrace and old frivolous or coquettish image of women but to take responsibility of our part in damaging, lingering stereotype” (Mazza 18). The term was picked up in twenty-first century by British book industry to talk about novels dealing with ‘chicks’ in their twenties and thirties about different challenges of career, family, and finding a true love.

However, chick lit, by now cannot be specified with young women of twenties and thirties as main character. Ferriss and Young claim that chick lit has crossed the “divides of generation, ethnicity, nationality and even gender” (5). Due to the arising consciousness of female authors and readers, chick lit has carried issues of women

with color, race, ethnicity, age, religion and gender. Therefore, new subgenres of chick lit such as: ‘mum lit’ having main character as mother; ‘teen lit’ targeted at teen aged girls; ‘ethnic lit’ having main character as women of color, race, and ethnicity; ‘church lit’ targeted at Christian religious women and ‘lad lit’ having male as main character and targeted at gender roles are emerging under umbrella of chick lit.

Despite the diversity of many subgenres within the genre of chick lit it is possible to make an attempt at defining chick lit. The following definitions show that the heroine’s constant battle with both professional and personal choices. One definition that Ferriss and Young mention: chick lit features single women in their twenties and thirties “navigating their generation challenges of balancing demanding careers with personal relationship” (3). Stephanie Davis-Kahl describes 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 the right dress” (18). Cris Mazza, the editor of anthology, *Chick lit: Postfeminist Fiction* (1995) explains:

Chick lit books are entertaining, interesting and many women can identify with them. The plots usually involve a woman in her 20s and 30s, going through everyday problems and challenges with her boyfriend, job, living situation, marriage, dating life etc.

(qtd. in Ferriss and Young 24)

Likewise, *Oxford Advance Learner's Dictionary* (Eighth edition) defines chick lit as “novels that are intended especially for women, often with young, single women as main character”. In addition, the popular websites www.chicklit.co.uk answers the question ‘what is chick lit’? Chick lit refers to:

Modern literature for women that is written about late twenty and thirty something singles (aka singletons) as they search for perfect partner. These books usually reflect the lives of everyday working young men and women... and give fresh insight into relationships.
(qtd. in Ferriss and Young 24)

The above definitions cover struggling single women of twenties and thirties with the issues of love, life, relationships, marriage, identity balancing with career and path of life. These aspects are the defining elements of chick lit genre. Despite the fact that the basic characteristics of young women finding her path in life and love could also apply in subgenres. Imelda Whelehan mentions that when “looking at the diversity of chick lit available today, it would be fair to say that it becomes more difficult to identify the core formula” (17).

Many critical questions arise in the minds of readers: Was there the abrupt beginning of the genre? Were there not chick lit novels before? What distinguishes chick lit from regular fiction by female authors of contemporary period? The genre chick lit had not begun abruptly, though the term was named by the editors of anthology *Chick lit: Post feminist Fiction* in 1995. Only the trend of writing chick lit novels in mid-nineties novels was world-wide. Ferriss and Young argue, “[t]he entire chick lit phenomenon is invariably traced back to single novel” namely, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (1996) by Helen Fielding, as “a single ur-text” but this kind of trend of writing were to be found in eighteenth and nineteenth century (4). Anne, Emily and Charlotte Bronte, and Jane Austen are the founding forebears of chick lit genre. These authors apparently felt that revealing their real gender would prevent their work from being taken seriously, and at the same time thought that they could express themselves more freely about such “un-lady-like” topics such as passion, anger,

drunkenness, money and sex (www.gendercentric.org). Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) is the revision of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813). The character, plot is "twist borrowed" as Juliette Wells argues (49). Fielding has freely admitted her debt to Austen:

The plot of the *Bridget Jones's Diary* was actually stolen from *Pride and Prejudice*. I thought that Jane Austen's plot were very good and had been very well market-researched over a number of centuries, so I thought I would actually steal it. I thought she wouldn't mind, anyway she is dead. (Wells 71)

Therefore, the genre chick lit did not have abrupt starting point; it has been slowly maturing since history of women's writing from Victorian age to modern to post-modern era. The genre, only, is identified and named as chick lit in the postmodern era of nineties.

The question: what distinguish chick lit from other kind of regular fiction by women writers of contemporary period? Chick lit is fiction by, for and about the 'new post feminist women' and normally features single women in their twenties and thirties navigating "the vicissitudes of their careers and personal relationship" (genderecentric.org). It is fundamentally urban and metropolitan phenomenon. It is difficult and impossible to imagine chick lit set in field, farm, mountainside, forest and a country house. These are the aspects that make chick lit different from other regular fiction. Likewise, the key-words: cosmopolitan, consumerism and aspiration help to differentiate chick lit from other regular novels.

Another aspect, which contributes to distinguish chick lit from other regular novels of contemporary women authors, is characterization of female protagonist. The heroines of chick lit are intended to be just like our millennial girls. The website,

www.chicklitbooks.com defines: “It’s hip. It’s smart. It’s fun. It’s about you” (cited in Ferriss and Young 1). The chick lit heroines are flawed, funny, fallible and great emphasis is placed on the gritty reality of everyday material and materialistic lives. The plot focuses on the self development of female protagonists rather than love. The chick lit heroine, is unlikely to be involved with only man, but searches for true love. Chick lit life is ‘messier detail’ which questions characters’ virtue (Ferriss and Young 3). Chick lit heroines expect to have career or at least a job in the outside world as well as, eventually, romance and family.

Chick lit, the new women’s fiction, arguably pays more attention to characterization than to action. These novels are short. Many chick lit rely upon first-person narration through personal diaries e.g. *Bridge Jones’s Diary* (1996), emails e.g. *Gossip Girl* (2003), journals etc. Some chick lit focuses on world of work e.g. *The Gift* (2008). Almost all chick lit novel focus on the heady pleasure of consumption, shopping and fashion, for example, *Bridge Jones’s Diary* (1996), *Sex and the City* (1996), *Gossip Girl* (2003) etc. Chick lit books have visual identity too. Most chick lit books feature their covers with pink shade enhanced by drawings or pictures of shoes legs, heels, bags etc. These above mention aspects distinguish chick lit from regular novel of contemporary women writers.

Chick lit as a genre, has become highly popular. It has made a huge explosion in the marketing world. Why has it commercially boomed in the market? Since 2000, chick lit covers one third of book market in American and British book industries. Behind its popularity, increasing numbers of female readership and authorship, along with male readers too, are responsible factors. Mabry suggests that traditional romance readers’ age is “estimated to be about forty-five years, publishers began reaching out to the next generation of female readers” (193). The female youngsters

are looking for something funnier, messier and more romantic choices. Others prefer it because of its preoccupation with shopping and fashion and also because it compounds its relation with mass culture. The contemporary women readers find relax after reading about the women likely of their age in chick lit novels. Anne Marie Boing in her conclusion of her dissertation, “The Coming of Age of Genre: The slow Maturation of Chick Lit” (2010) states that “popularity of the genre lies in its relaxation and recognition” (46). The women readers find them identified with fictional characters that face the contemporary women’s issues of love, life, singleton, job, balancing career and relationships, marriage, dating with boy friend and finding true love. Not only these aspects are reflected to promote the interest of reader, but also, ‘relatability’ and ‘authenticity’ of text books are responsible (Glasburhg 4).

By relatability and authenticity of chick lit texts means its capacity of reflecting actual events that the boys and girls of millennial generation do. For instance, the male and female of twenties and thirties, and mostly teens’ groups use slang words like; ‘shit’, ‘bull shit’, ‘fuck’ etc. are prevalent in chick lit novels. The frank discussions of sex by the characters are relatable. Likewise, the use of humor, flawed protagonist, first person narration, and the use of blogger, websites, e-mails messages and phone messages in narrative in chick lit novels are also relatable with our generation. These aspects of chick lit are to give the impression that the protagonist is speaking directly to readers, so authentic. Thus, chick lit genre fulfills the expectation of contemporary readers. But, it does not necessarily mean chick lit is about vulgarity which readers have interest in, but the fact that in the idea of contemporary readers that, they seek for authenticity and relatability of text that they find only in chick lit, thus, it has become popular. Readers, fans, and students of

universities are expecting to study those texts, and demanding that academies should consider chick lit in the course of their study.

In recent years, the development of various sciences and technologies serves the extension of chick lit popularity. That is to say, chick lit genre also has been put into cinematography, photography and T.V. show. Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996), which helped to found the new genre, chick lit is now can be watched in screen. Likewise, Candace Bushnell's *Sex and the City* (1996) and Cecily von Ziegesar's *Gossip Girl* (2003) and its series are also adapted into films and T.V series in accordance with the interests of millennial boys and girls. Many chick lit novels have been converted into films since beginning. Chick lit genre, being adapted into movies version, serves watchers as per their interests, thus, becomes widely famous in scientific and technological literary world of popular culture.

Although, chick lit has gained sky-rocketing popularity and great diversity, this genre has not received much attention in the areas of academy. Online, in for instance, book review sections of newspaper websites, as well as on book blogs chick lit is popular topic for discussion. The genre itself is also well-represented online, with websites such as www.chicklitbooks.com, www.chicklit.co.uk etc. However, in the academia's world it has received "little serious or intelligent discussion" (Ferriss and Young 2). Stephanie Davis-Kahl says academia's reception of chick lit as a legitimate area of study has been 'lukewarm' at least in the area of research and scholarship. She mentions:

Reasons behind the reluctance to study the genre could include a distaste for a term itself, a belief in conventional wisdom that all chick lit is about stiletto heels, pink drinks, and men; or an assumption that

very popular, highly marketed and lucrative literature must be too 'low culture' to warrant scholarly consideration. (20)

She points out four dissertation and six master's thesis that have been written on chick lit in the subject area of American, British, modern literature and women's studies since 2005. Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young, editors of *Chick lit: The New Women's Fiction* (2006), recount the reaction to their call for proposal for their book:

But we also received an astonishing number of email messages from students grateful to see someone in the academic world taking their interest in chick lit seriously. We have since discovered that many of those women had been- and are being- discouraged by their (mostly female) professors in women's literature and women's studies from considering chick lit legitimate area of scholarship. (qtd in Davis-Kahl 20)

Ferriss and Young go on to list the themes of chick lit such as contemporary women's issues of identity, race and class, femininity and feminism, consumerism and self image along with balancing of work and relationship and suggests that academics should consider them seriously (2). The author's conclusion illuminates how chick lit could be used in classroom to explore not only generational difference, but also to explore and develop an appreciation for the intricate plot, subtle characterization, and memorable language of those works. By doing so, chick lit connects students to discussion and help enable their exploration into the genre by developing credibility to the works and authors.

Some scholars and critics called chick lit as having no literariness. It is accused of being 'chick but not lit'. By literally judging these books by their pastel covers, many critics are "tossing off the latest female voices to a corner of literary

world as fluff” (Glasburgh 6). It is important to determine from academic side whether this type of fiction is reflective of women today. Chick lit offers women readers the opportunity to connect with characters that are truly having the experiences they are. The light tone of the books even makes it easier to digest the idea that women readers, like everyone else, are influenced by ‘popular culture’ (Glasburgh 6).

The genre of chick lit has some interconnections with the genre of romance. These two genres seem as if they have genetic relation. It is described as “daughter of the romance novel[s]” (Merrick, cited in Ryan 8). Chick lit incorporates the conventions of romance genre and modifies those conventions into its own inventions in accordance with the context in order to create a greater sense of realism. Briel Nichole Naugle claims, “Chick lit is the amalgamation of tradition and invention” (67). Gill and Herdieckerhoff, Pearce, Harzewski, Kiernan and Whelehan are the critics, who make use of comparison of the two genres. Harzewski argues that “the genre has its origin as did the Harlequin romance” and states chick lit authors such as Melissa Senate are former romance novel editors and writers (36). Pearce Lynn considers romance genre is in ‘degenerate’ form just as chick lit, however, she argues “what is the most degenerate is also most defining” where “deep structures” are “laid most bare” (521). That is to say, in romance ‘Ur-narrative’ is most ‘degraded’ because it reduces nothing more than the formulaic use of narrative, so, the degenerate can be the formula. Ur-narrative is the story of “two lovers, who meet, misunderstand each other and finally re-unite” (Pearce 521). However, in case of chick lit, Ur-story can be slightly varied and modified. The quest for “self definition and balancing of work with social interaction is given more attention than relationship conflict” in chick lit (Harzewski 37). The love plot counts much in romance whereas chick lit gives it little

significance. Anna Kiernan describes chick lit as a “relatively new form of romance, offers, a more sophisticated insight into the lives, loves, and aspirations of women it speaks for and to...” (208). Therefore, chick lit features the female protagonists and their search for true love revisiting traditional Harlequin romance.

A difference, however is that, chick lit can also be characterized by its realism, while romance cannot. According to Michele Glasburgh romance tries to incorporate element of fantasy where as chick lit tries to create more or less realistic account of today’s world as it may be experienced by young women, (4). The fact that romance is always modeled after the so-called Ur-narrative where as chick lit may deviate from, or create variation on it. It is one of the examples of chick lit’s more realistic account of contemporary women’s lives. For instance, one deviation is that when the two lovers may not reunite. So, the novels “present a more realistic portrait of single life and dating exploring [. . .] the dissolution of romantic ideals or exposing those ideals as [. . .] unrealistic” (Harzewski 39).

According to Gill and Herdieckerhoff, the genre chick lit claims to “re-write contemporary romance” (1). They go on to list the five thematic aspects that romance and chick lit genre share: the construction of sexual experience, depiction of heroines’ intelligence and independence, beauty and appearance, work and singleness though these aspects come up with slight variation (11). In the romances of 1970s like: Harlequin and Mills and Boon, the typical heroine was characterized by sexual innocence and passivity. Pearce states, “sexually inexperienced heroine is preferred” and no attention paid to previous partner, if any (526). This means that she is virgin. She may want to have sex, but “within the codes of romance she can have it if she is seduced” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 11). This view as opposed to chick lit, where sex is considered “a necessary part of romantic aspiration” and a “chick lit novel without

few satisfying [. . .] sex scenes is hard to find” (Wells 50). The heroine experiences the sex “far from being virginal” describing themselves as “a great lay.” But in chick lit, heroines are “revirginized” themselves by “lying that they did not have experienced sex” before (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 11), if they have to establish new relationship with another male hero. In this sense chick lit resonates more with romance.

Likewise, the heroine of romance genre seems to be naive, spirited and intelligent which chick lit heroine lacks. But chick lit portrays strong friendships, in fact other women are frequently represented as competitors and therefore, not to be trusted. However, in traditional romantic novels, heroines are not normally seen as particularly career driven and employed in job, despite their spirited nature and intelligence. Gill and Herdieckerhoff state that in romance rather “the heroines seek advancement and power through a romantic alliance with a man” (14). In this respect, the female characters, in chick lit novels seem markedly different as they are invariably portrayed as employed and committed to the idea of career. But, in case of social security, the heroine of both genre fall in the lap of strong, protective husband or return to family when they feel insecurity to stand on their own.

According to Gill and Herdieckerhoff, ‘singleness’ of heroine is another feature that these two genres share (14). In romance, singleton of heroine is treated as positive, at least neutral because of heroines’ expectation of union with strong protective man. But in case of chick lit, singleton is treated negatively where, the heroines are unhappy being single and because of their obsession with marriage. They have fear of being single; they have fear of ‘man shortage’, ‘infertility epidemic’ and ‘dark sides of divorce,’ thus they involve in alcoholism and drugs addiction (Faludi, x).

Another aspect that both genre of romance and chick lit share, is portrayal of heroine's beauty and appearance. In both genre heroines are beautiful on their look but differ from each other slightly. In traditional romance, heroines fall into the category that might be described as 'effortlessly beautiful' (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 15). They are blessed with classic good looks with attractive appearance and innate or acquired beauty. But, chick lit heroines are 'less physically attractive' and beautiful than Harlequin counterparts (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 17). Chick lit heroines cost much effort to make their good looks. In romances of Harlequin and Mills and Boon heroines are beautiful but the purpose of their beauty is, to be loved by hero and for 'male gaze' (Guerin 235). The beauty is not for her self-happiness but is considered object and commodity of men to get entertainment. Whereas, in chick lit novel heroines effort to look beautiful and her effort to have slim body have purpose of either self happiness and improvement or for 'male gaze' to be loved or both. Gill and Herdieckerhoff cite the song "be young and beautiful if you want to be loved" (15). The former purpose of female beauty in chick lit falls under post feminist mantra where as the latter fall under the pre-feminist ideology of patriarchy. The commonalities of romance and chick lit and how chick lit may be varied from romance in order create greater sense of realism and authenticity will be explored in chapter two from my selection of chick lit novels.

The genre of chick lit has also been considered from the perspective of postfeminism. It is better discuss about feminism at first. Feminism is founded upon the belief that women suffer from systematic social injustices because of their sex. A *Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (2005) states that feminism "reflects concern with silencing and marginalization of women in *patriarchal culture* a culture organized in favor of men" and later mentions that it fought for "enforcement of equal

right and end to sex discrimination” (223). Feminism operates from the conviction that both sexes should have equal right and social structure to have both career and family. Feminism has assumption of more ‘choices’ or ‘having it all’ (Fielding7). This very ideas open one of the door that leads to a period of postfeminism, because contemporary woman is so overwhelmed by more ‘choices’ and ‘having it all’. She is struggling to have both career and family, so she rejects and blames feminist ideas.

Postfeminism is a term that has been knocked around for at least twenty years but one cannot be sure exactly when its inauguration occurred (Ferriss and Young 2006). The general understanding of postfeminism is a “shift away from feminist ideas of needing to right to wrongs of patriarchal society with regard to woman” (Glasburgh 7). The focus here will be on Glasburgh’s post feminist discussion related to popular culture from his adoption of ‘backlash theory’ coined by Susan Faludi in his bestseller, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (1991). Faludi claims that popular culture has been the direct cause of backlash on feminism known as ‘postfeminism’ by attempting to blame for the supposed misery of modern women today. Faludi argues that popular culture has invented the marketing scheme of body image, sex and the homes which are hot topics of commercialism and emphasized on return to traditional feminist through advertizing, fashion and news-media (*Backlash*, 1991).

The fact that, women’s multiple gains from women’s movement, women are grateful for freedom and equality made possible by feminist movement are now making women themselves miserable with high expectation. Women are forced to apply what feminism won for them: juggling career with family. The pressure of more ‘choices’ and ‘have it all’ is now ‘too much’ for women to handle and they ultimately long for freedom of choice (Faludi xvi). Despite the fact that second wave feminism

of 1960s can take credit for, for instance, chick lit protagonists' professional lives and their attitude to sex, most protagonist ultimately long for married life with own true love. In that sense chick lit seems more postfeminist or even patriarchal notion than feminist ones. This reflects that contemporary women are living in postfeminist times. For the women of this millennial generation dating is confusing because it is no longer clear that what men's intentions are. Moreover, the millennial women are so overwhelmed by study choices and then by professional choices. Boing asserts:

On the one hand we want to pursue a career and possibly travel the world, but at the same time we do not know how to combine this with our desire to stop dating and get married and start a family, and time seems to start running out according to our biological clock. (6)

Chick lit being the genre of new women's fiction of contemporary time, features the heroine with her freedom of choice, thus, rejecting feminist idea of 'having it all'. She wants to be independent rejecting the force to choose. The new women in many ways are no longer battling to come from margin into stream. Shari Benstock states that the phenomenological success of chick lit, featuring independent, professional protagonists testify to the extent that women have left such battle behind (253).

The long for patriarchy is another postfeminist feature of chick lit genre. Most of chick lit heroines search for own true love. They feel secure in the lap of strong protective men rather than being on their own. Most of them are single and are obsessed with man and marriage. They have problem of not finding a man. This is because of feminist ideology of 'man hating woman' (qtd. in Ferriss and Young 88). To illustrate, Law student Mona Charen, writing on article for the National Review is cited in *Backlash* (1991):

In dispensing its spoils women's liberation has given my generation high incomes, our own cigarettes, the option of single parenthood, rape crisis centers, personal lines of credit, free love, and female gynecologists. [. . .] In return it has effectively robed us of the one thing upon which the happiness of most women rest –men.

No doubt, the women are engaged with their respective job; get what they want but feel insecure and incomplete in the absence of men. The ultimate source of their happiness lies in 'men'. This kind of men-oriented tendency is nowhere to be found in other than chick lit genre. Traditional expectations about women's role as wives and mothers have proven remarkably persistent in chick lit novels (Benstock 254).

Michele M. Glasburgh, in his dissertation, "Chick lit: The New face of post feminist fiction?" (2006) explores the postfeminist features for his study of chick lit novels.

Drawing upon Faludi's "backlash theory", Glasburgh's study of chick lit has shown there to be five features of postfeminism. They are: rejection of feminism, focus on individual needs instead of sisterhood, a return to consumerism, motherhood, romance and domesticity, female identity crisis and overwhelmed by future choices (Glasburgh, Appendix 2). In chapter three, this thesis explores and analysis those characteristics in relation to chick lit that have shown to be most defining according to the current debates about it.

Chick lit novels, being written exclusively by, for, and about new women, there is no point in questioning on the representation of gender identity. Being so suffused production of women authors, chick lit represents the identity of female and their experiences of being women. Chick lit mostly talks about young women in their thirties or forties living themselves contemplating over the problem of marriage and men, motherhood, infertility and weight. The representation of female sensuality and

physical appearance characterizes the chick lit novels. Chick lit heroine wants to be beautiful; she wants to lose the weight. The body images of female now serve to show the identity as her own. The discussion of sex, beauty body, and the desires to be thin among friends by chick lit protagonists reflect the liberated attitude towards sex. Chick lit's focus on the external nature, outer appearance, clothing rather than internal nature, are more indicative of characters personalities than their inner psyche. Though, these above mentioned aspects reiterate the traditional notion of femininity, these help to determine the distinct identity as female swayed by popular culture.

The depiction of gender role is remarkable feature to identify chick lit as a genre of postfeminist women's fiction. The roles of women such as responsible motherhood, house wife and nurse are also suffused in chick lit novels. This does not necessarily mean that their identity is 'enculturated' and that they are conformed to traditional patriarchy (Guerin 237). They seem to have held job, lived in their own. Woman's individuality as an individual is not as defined by patriarchy. Though they accept the necessity of marriage and the role played by men as integral part of life, they assume that they themselves can make decision about what they want to be and how they should behave. This is why Mabry states, "masculinity and femininity are constantly changing" (237). Therefore, self-sufficiency, self definition and self-determination are related with women of contemporary time to form their identity as female.

Likewise, chick lit novels employ the techniques that make them 'feminine' and identify as 'female texts' both in stories they tell and the way they address their readers. Annette writes that one of the distinguishing characteristics of "women's genre as a textual system is its construction of narrative motivated by female point of view" (Mabry 195). The use of first person narration in personal diary trope, letters,

journals, e-mails and phone messages mirrors the chick lit heroines' personal intimacies and experiences directly addressing to the female readers. Chick lit novels not only focus on female voice and narrative point of view but also market and appeal to female consumers in patriarchal society. Mabry argues:

The move toward 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 offers at least temporary escape from feeling of constantly being watched or controlled by male-dominated society. It guarantees the genre as real representation of female experience. (196)

The style and structure of the novels reinforce the notion of intimate, personal woman's writing and at least show the understanding that it is a private form of expression that can be used by woman to document her own experiences and express her own identity in her own voice. In the same way, the visual identities of chick lit books also reinforce the notion of female texts. The outside covers of chick lit books feature the drawings and pictures of female body parts like legs, heels, faces and most often items of shopping such as sandals, shoes and bags. These are the remarkable features to reflect the new women inclination towards consumerism due to popular culture.

In this thesis, two chick lit novels are analyzed for characteristics that have been discussed previously in this section and that are pivotal to genre. The books that will be analyzed are *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) and *The Gift* (2008) by Helen Fielding and Cecelia Ahern respectively. They have been chosen for the reason of popularity and their status as best seller; also because these authors are established names in genre. The first book that will be discussed is *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996)

by Helen Fielding which is known as ‘single ur-text ’ of chick lit genre. This novel has been “sold more than two million copies and translated into more than thirty languages” (Ferriss and Young, 2006). The second book under my scrutiny is *The Gift* by Cecelia Ahern published in 2008. This book is taken here because of author’s popularity as the best selling Irish chick lit writer and widely known for her debut chick lit novel *P. S. I Love You* (2004) with its film adaptation.

In chapter two, I will address the structure of ‘Ur- narrative’ that chick lit genre shares with romance genre, though they vary slightly. The thematic strands like: construction of sexuality, depiction of heroines’ intelligence and independence, beauty and appearance and singleness as mentioned by Gill and Herdieckerhoff will be discussed here. Likewise, the occurrence of post feminist elements: rejection of feminism, focus on individual needs, return to motherhood, consumerism, domesticity and romance, identity crisis and overwhelmed by future choices- as listed by Glasburgh from Faludi’s *Backlash* (1991) will be explored and analyzed in chapter three. These two chapters will help to illustrate the notion of modern womanhood and the construction of gender roles in relation to women.

II. Revisiting the Romance

Chick lit as a genre adopts the traditional romantic conventions of Harlequin and Mills and Boon with its own inventions. It is the “amalgamation of tradition and invention” (Naugle 67). Chick lit burrows the romantic elements of romance and modifies those elements in accordance with the context of contemporary time. It revisits the romantic conventions in order to form contemporary romance. Therefore, the genre of romance and chick lit share some similarities in many aspects such as: the structure of plot, characterization of female protagonist and so on. For instance, chick lit may not present the elements of Harlequin romance like: happy ending and marriage; the novels plot may end with heroines’ “emotional [...] satisf [action]” (Harzewski 37). Thus chick lit modifies those conventions of romance into inventions of its own. In the same way, both, the genre of romance and chick lit shares other aspects such as: sexual experience, intelligence and independence, beauty and appearance, working girls and singleness of heroine though they treat those aspects differently. That is why chick lit “claims to rewrite contemporary romance” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 1).

This thesis will explore and analyze the use of ‘Ur-narrative’ as mentioned by Pearce Lynn and also explore how it is deviated from traditional romance in order to create greater sense of realism. Likewise, the thesis also explores the five thematic strands that the genre of romance and chick lit share: the construction of sexual experience, depiction of heroines’ intelligence and independence, beauty and appearance, work and singleness as mentioned by Gill and Herdieckerhoff in their article “Rewriting the Romance: New Feminities in Chick Lit?” (2007).

The Structure of Love Plot

The structure of the plot constitutes the use of Ur-narrative, which is an important characteristic of romance. The difference between romance and chick lit considering the use of Ur-narrative is that in romance the entire story revolves around this structure, where as in chick lit it may be of secondary importance, has been briefly discussed in previous chapter. Pearce Lynn considers romance exists in 'degenerate' form just as in chick lit. However, she argues that "what is the most degenerate is also the most defining" where the deep structures are laid most bare (521). She also claims that these deep structures, or 'Ur-narrative'- the story of two lovers who meet, lose each other through a misunderstanding or other impediment, but reunite in the end- "is no longer confined to Mills and Boon" (521). Harzweski claims that "the traditional romance presents a narrative that emphasizes action or plot over character development" and that chick lit "replicates romance conventions in the heroines union with Mr. Right, though this is not requisite" (37). It means chick lit uses conventional narrative but traditional ending of lovers' reuniting is not necessarily present. Therefore, ur- story exists in chick lit too but the story may not end with traditional romantic convention of marriage and 'happily ever after' (Mabry 192). Thus chick lit may deviate and create variation on Ur-narrative of romance of romance in order to portrait more or less realistic account of contemporary women's lives and create greater sense of authenticity.

Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* is based on the 'Un-narrative', but the structure is not used in its original form, thus creating a variation. Ur-story usually has two lovers fall in love, are separated each other because of misunderstandings and need to clear away misunderstanding before they get into marriage. In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Bridget Jones is living with her singlehood in the beginning of the story. She

falls in love with her boss, Daniel, whom she gets a job from. Daniel proposes her for dating but ends with non-committing promises. So, she misunderstands him. She furthermore, meets another hero, Mark Darcy, who tells that he likes her just a way she is. She has a feeling for him for he has helped her at interview in order for her to get job. Bridget and Mark are getting attracted each other. Finally, they make love and unite at the end of the story.

Bridget Jones's Diary creates variation on ur-story, when Bridget Jones is not “connected with one, only one man” (Ferriss and Young 3). She clears out the way for her former lover, Daniel and she, even quits her job in his company. Then, she establishes the new relation with another hero, Mark Darcy. At the end, by uniting Bridget with another hero, Darcy, *Bridget Jones's Diary* replicates the romance convention of happy ending of two lovers but the heroine, Bridget's “union with Mr. Right [...] turns out to be Mr. Wrong or Mr. May be” (Harzewski 37). Likewise, this novel presents Bridget's mother establishing relation with Julio and seems to be leaving her husband (Dad, in the novel) in her sixties. The roles of these characters contribute to the Ur-narrative. In this respect, ur-text is presented in traditional form with slight variation.

With regard to misunderstanding between them, Bridget and Daniel need to resolve their problems to create ur-story in its original order. But Bridget Jones does not trust him; she is self aware that Daniel is not capable of committing his promises for her. So, misunderstanding between them remains unresolved and Bridget leaves him. Furthermore, she unites with another man, Mark Darcy. Thus, *Bridget Jones's Diary* creates variation on Ur-narrative. It is to give the realistic account of contemporary women's experience of their unstable love relation that they face in

their lives. However, aspects of Ur-narrative, such as the focus on love story and the idea of happy ending are still present in *Bridget Jones's Diary* beside the variation.

Ahern's *The Gift* is also a deviation on the Ur-narrative. The focus is less on love story, unlike *Bridget Jones's Diary*. The main focus of the story is on work and family relationship. The story begins with the couple Ruth and Lou, already married and after they have two children. According to Wells "[e]very chick lit novel centers on a love plot, although the nature of that plot varies according to its heroine's age and marital status" (49). She suggests that if the heroine is happily married, "she will discover that her husband has having an affair and will either patch things up [...] or endure his departure" (49). Ruth in *The Gift* too, suspects Lou of having affair with his secretary, Alison; she also discovers that he is about to organize "taking [father's birthday] party out of [his sister], Marcia's hand putting it into those of women [Alison] who knew nothing" of his father's seventy years life- as a proof (76-77). She patches up the misunderstandings but she remains in trouble for he has not paid any attention to his children or to her and his parents from his workaholic habits. At the end, she "endure[s] his departure" because of his death (Wells 49). "Not all of chick lit ends with [...] modern romance's one defining constant, the inevitable happy ending" (Harzewski 37). On one hand, *The Gift* presents a serious deviation to the formulaic happy ending of Ur-narrative. Nevertheless, the novel does not end on an unhappy note. The final chapters present Lou's realization of family value, which satisfies Ruth and his family members. And it is through romantic elements of fantasy, the story presents Ruth getting "his child on the most magical night of the year- the true gift that Lou had given" her in "early hours of Christmas morning" (298).

Of the two novels discussed here, *Bridget Jones's Diary* follows romance in using the traditional formulaic happy ending though there is slight variation in the middle of Ur-narrative. The focus in this novel is love story. Likewise, *The Gift* presents different twists to the deep structure in the use of Ur-narrative from the beginning to the end of the story. In this regard, both novels incorporate the conventions of Ur-narrative and modify the conventions into their own inventions. Both authors, Fielding and Ahern could be considered example of “the [...] key to the enduring significance of romance as a discourse lies in its ability to adapt or mutate” as they use the adaptation of the Ur-narrative in chick lit (Pearce and Stacy qtd. in Gill and Herdieckerhoff 10). They show chick lit as a genre is indeed capable of using the power of Ur-narrative in mutating its deep structure.

Construction of Sexual Experience of Heroine

In traditional romances of Harlequin and Mills and Boon, the typical heroine is characterized by “sexual innocence and passivity” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff11). She does not seem to have interest in sex. Pearce states that in romance sexually inexperienced heroine is preferred and no attention paid to previous partner, if any (526). At least she hides the desire of sexual pleasure. Gill and Herdieckerhoff state that heroine of romance are virgin. They further mention that the heroine of romance can have sexual pleasure but within a code of romance if she is seduced by hero, whereas, chick lit genre depicts the heroine “experiencing sex far from being virginal” (11). She establish relation with new hero ‘re-virginizing’ herself by lying that she did not have experienced sex before. Likewise, chick lit heroine frankly discuss about sex. Juliette Wells argues, “[c]hick lit’s characters certainly talk and joke about sex and genitals” (50). So, chick lit is characterized by heroine’s liberated attitude of sex, which traditional heroine lacks.

In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Bridget is single girl, who falls in love with her boss, Daniel. When he asks her for dating she accepts saying, “yessssss! Yessssss!” (32). In the course of story she experiences sex with her boss Daniel, though she is not interested in his ‘emotional fuckwittage’. There is no explicit sex scene in the novel but through the remark of Bridget it is concluded that she has got sexual experiences with her lover, Daniel, “[i]t was inhuman to leave a woman hanging in air for two weekend after sex” (69). She further gives the readers a clue of her sex experience with him, “I told you quite specifically the first time you tried to undo my skirt” (76). However, she finds herself being chucked by him and tries to establish new relation with another hero, Mark Darcy though she ‘falls far from being virginal’. She ‘revirginizes’ herself in order to get nearer with him by paying no attention to her previous lover, Daniel.

However, *The Gift* presents Ruth as sexually passive heroine. She is not depicted as sexually experienced, like romantic heroine. Because of her role as a wife and a mother, she has to perform her duty in household activity. She is presented as already married and with her two children in the beginning of the story. *The Gift* presenting Ruth as sexually passive heroine differentiates from *Bridget Jones's Diary*. However, both novels whatever degree of their heroines’ sexual experience, revisit romantic conventions either through ‘reverginizing’ the heroine or through innocence and passivity.

Independence and Intelligence

According to Janice Radway, most of the romance heroines she studied were ‘spirited,’ ‘fiery’ and ‘intelligent’ whereas, chick lit heroines are less spirited (cited in Gill and Herdieckerhoff 13). Despite their spirited nature they are not committed to the idea of career. Chick lit heroines are educated though they are not spirited in

nature. They are committed to the idea of career and finding a true path of life. But in case of social security, chick lit heroine also falls on the lap of strong protective man. They feel insecure to stand on their own despite their social and economic independence that they have achieved. Gill and Herdieckerhoff state that the chick lit “heroines are presented as welcoming their rescue from social and economic independence” (15). They furthermore claim that the hero must help her in needy heroines’ work. Therefore, chick lit portrays the heroine with traditional stereotype of femininity, like romance heroine.

In *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, Bridget is single girl with a job and committed to the idea of career on one hand, on the other, she obsessively longs for a man because of her disability to live on her own despite her economic independence. Her paranoid situation for being single is depicted when she addresses the readers: “[w]hen you are partnerless in your thirties, the mild bore of not being in a relationships- no sex, not having hang out with on Sundays, going home from your parties on your own all the time” (143). Likewise, there are rescue scenes which involve the male hero, Mark Darcy revealing that Julio, Bridget’s mother’s lover is a con man. At the same time, Darcy presents Bridget and her mother as naive and gullible to highlight his superior masculinity as in romance genre. Bridget being socially and economically independent heroine, she is incapable of rescue her mother in her own. So, Mark has to come there in her need to rescue her mother and she no longer has to deal on her own.

Ahern’s *The Gift* also portrays Ruth as gullible and naive heroine in the sense that she confines her under her husband, Lou’s rule. She is not committed to the idea of career, unlike Bridget in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. Though she has completed Masters Degree, she is not presented as employed in any job. She is already married and has

two children. So, she limits herself to household as a wife and a mother. She does not seem to be independent. She also falls herself to traditional notion of femininity because she expects her husband, Lou's proper attention to his family from his workaholic habits. She laments for he has not paid any attention to his child for over a year. She remarks, "[y]ou have not prepared one bottle, made him one meal, dressed him, played with him. You haven't spent any time with him alone; [...] the child has been lying over a year" (80). This remark reflects that Ruth as a wife expects support from husband to run their family. She reminds, "you have family responsibilities too" and when he has declares his work responsibilities (95). Being chick lit heroine, Ruth is also presented as dependent woman whose happiness lies on her husband. Thus, she falls under the masculine strength of traditional patriarchy.

Beauty

The portrayal of heroine's beauty and body is the common aspects that the genre of romance and chick lit share. In Harlequin romance, "heroines fall into category that might be described as effortlessly beautiful" (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 16). They are blessed with particularly attractive appearance but they are not self-conscious about their beauty. Heroines of traditional romances are endowed with innate beauty. Whereas, the heroines of chick lit are "physically less attractive" than Harlequin counterparts (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 17). But they make effort and cost much toil to make their body beautiful. They are obsessed with their body shape, size and weight. So, they are self-conscious about their body and beauty. The beauty of traditional romance's heroine which they acquire by birth is considered to be an object or a commodity for male entertainment or for "male gaze" (Guerin 225). Whereas, chick lit heroines' effort to look beautiful is considered for their self-happiness and to be loved by male. They also cost much effort on their looks in order

to attract male hero. Gill and Herdieckerhoff cite the song, “be young and beautiful if you want to be loved” (15). This is applied in case of chick lit which characterizes its heroines with less physical attraction.

In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Bridget Jones is presented as physically less attractive. Despite her spinsterhood, Bridget tries her effort to make her body attractive. She dedicates to reduce her weight and fatness to make her slim in her New Year's resolution. She reduces the unit of calories on her dieting. Her obsession with beauty body is reflected from her personal diary in the beginning of New Year resolution: “I will [...] reduce circumference of thigh by 3 inches, [...] using anti-cellulite diet” (3). Another example of her worry about her looks is presented when she feels “so unattractive” and “horrible” among her friends and unable to attract the men around (16). Bridget, being the child of cosmopolitan is traumatized by “super models” (59). She is self-conscious of her looks and frequently tries her effort to make her look. She paints toenails, stands in front of mirror to make her up and plucks eyebrows. She even calls her friends to complain about diet failure and asks for suggestions. She feels it is because of popular culture's “too obsession with outward appearance” than inner psyche (82). Bridget wants to be young and beautiful to be loved my men but there comes a bar of her age. She remarks, “I look really old for my age” (149). She succeeds to get boyfriend, Daniel though, her relation with him sustain no longer.

However, Ruth in *The Gift* does not seem to make effort in order to make her looks good. She is already married with Lou and she has to perform her role as a wife and a mother. So, she does not care of her looks, nor does she have interest to make her up in order to attract men. The only thing she has made effort by performing her naked body in the middle part of the story is to catch the attention of her husband Lou

as he reacts, “you look beautiful” (212). But there is no other hint of Ruth’s concerns over her body and beauty in the whole story. *The Gift* varies from *Bridget Jones’s Diary* in the portrayal of beauty body because the song: ‘be young and beautiful if you want to be loved’ is not applied here.

Working Girls

According to Gill and Herdieckerhoff, the traditional romantic heroines are not presented as career driven despite their spirited nature and intelligence (15). They are not committed to the idea of career where the heroines of chick lit “are invariably portrayed as employed and committed to the idea of career” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 15). Benstock argues that women are now struggle to balance professional and personal satisfaction (254). On the one hand they are committed to the idea of career, on the other they are struggling with their personal satisfaction. Harzewski argues that “the typical Harlequin heroine either was just emerging from home or was a secretary or nurse who quit her job after marriage” (39). In this regard, chick lit heroine are progressive because they do not have to quit their job after their marriage. Gill and Herdieckerhoff also state that chick lit women are “often portrayed as dissatisfied and struggling’ in their job because of their underpaid and low position” (15). Chick lit presents the heroine’s struggle with job in her quest for finding true path in her life.

Bridget Jones, in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* is career driven women. She is committed to the idea of career and finding true path of life. She works in Daniel’s publishing company but as underpaid position. Being her lover, Daniel is not capable to satisfy her with her present job. Nor she gets satisfaction on forming functional relation with him. So, from the New Year’s beginning she is seeking to “improve career and find new job with potential” (3). Likewise she is committed to limit her drinks, smoke and waste for indulgencies. In the course of story Bridget gives up her

job from Daniel's company. Along with she also quits his "fraudulently flirtatious, cowardly and dysfunctional" love for her (83). Then, she finds new job as T. V. presentation program by the help of her mother, who is also employed there. She succeeds to establish functional relation with another hero, Mark Darcy who is divorced, expecting true path of her life and career.

However unlike Bridget, Ruth, in *The Gift* is not committed to the idea of job and career, though she has already completed Business Masters Degree. Like traditional romantic heroine, she seems to be emerging from home only to perform her role as a wife and a mother. She is committed to household, motherhood and the idea of good family relation. That is why, she tries her best to make her husband stop his workaholic habits and pay attention to family. The importance of family relation over work is emphasized through her saying: "we're not in this life to work; we're in it to live. We have to start doing things together, and that means you doing things for me even when you don't want to, and vice versa. Otherwise, what's the point?" (94-95). However, *The Gift* presents the secondary characters as employed in different sectors. Alison engages as a secretary of Lou in Patterson Development. Tracy is presented as a former secretary of Lou, though she does not make her presence in the story. Likewise, Louise works as a secretary of Mr. Patterson. In the same way, Jessica presents herself as employed in police station. By bringing secondary characters as employed *The Gift* slightly varies from *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Singleness

The portrayal of singleness in chick lit is also extremely negative according to Gill and Herdieckorhoff (15). They mention that the single person households are fastest growing group in which household forms are diversifying and the notion of friends as a new family emerges (16). Chick lit treats singleness of heroines

negatively where they are unhappy being single; they are portrayed as “cold and unfeminine” (Gill and Herdieckerhoff 16). But in traditional romance, singleness of heroine is treated positively where she has an expectation of “union with Mr. Right”. Chick lit heroines are obsessed with men and marriage; they are struggling with happiness. They have a fear of living with “man-shortage, infertility epidemic and dark sides of divorce” (Faludi x), thus they involve in alcoholism, drug addiction and so on to clear out their fear.

Bridget Jones, in *Bridget Jones's Diary* is a thirty something single girl with her own income, own flat and a group of supportive friends. She has man problems, career problems and so on. She is obsessed with love and marriage. She is suffered from her ‘pre-menopausal’ stage and “the pressure of impending childlessness” (134). She feels inadequate among her married friends who frequently inquire about her marital status. For Bridget, this New Year brings horror and humiliation, “[u]gh. First day of New Year has been a day of horror. Cannot quite believe I am once again starting year in a single bed in my parents’ house. It is too humiliating at my age” (10). Fortunately, she gets boy friend, Daniel with whom she has been in love affair. But she stands against ‘emotional fuckwittage’ on the behalf of datable man, Daniel, who wants to play games and embrace her single status. Bridget determines to be happy in her singleness and be “complete in oneself as woman of substance” (31). However, she gets humiliation from smug married couples. In response to smug married couples making Bridget feel inadequate for being single, Shazzer exclaims:

And because there’s more than one bloody way to live: one in four households are single, most of the royal family are single, the nation’s young men have been proved by surveys to be *completely unmarriageable*, and as a result there’s a whole generation of single

girls like me with their own incomes and homes who have lots of fun and don't need to wash anyone else's socks. (42)

Bridget feels happy with Shazzer's words and also exclaims, "Singletons... Hurrah for singletons" (42). But she cannot sustain her feeling of being happy for singleness. She is frequently hounded by "man-shortage, infertility epidemic and dark sides of divorce" in her life (Faludi x). She consoles herself sharing her problem with her 'family of friends'. But her inner psyche is in trouble over "not being into relationships" (143). So, she involves in cool and unfeminine traits like alcoholism, smoking and so on, though she has vowed to limit them.

However, *The Gift* presents Ruth as already married with Lou. Despite her marriage, she is suffered from singleness as her husband does not pay attention to her from his work, "[w]hen kissing his wife goodbye he was thinking of another. Every action, [...] was layered by another" (19). She has a fear of impending problem of marriage. She frequently reminds him, "[y]ou have family responsibilities too" when he concerns more on work (95). However, at the ending part of novel, *The Gift* portrays Ruth really as single women because of Lou's death. Despite her singleton, she gets 'emotional satisfaction' for he has already realized family values. *The Gift* magically presents Lou to declare his love for Ruth, "I'll love you forever" (297).

Likewise, *The Gift* presents minor characters like: Alison, Marcia, Jessica and others, who are living with their singlehood. However, they do not seem to struggle with singleness juggling with career. Marcia, Lou's sister is presented as divorced; she is living with Lou's family. Alison, the secretary of Lou is also single who is living with her own income. Jessica is also in her singleton with her job in police station, though she makes her presence with Sgt. Raphie. These characters in this novel have no concern about fear of being single unlike, Bridget in *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

III. *Chick Lit*: The Postfeminist Fiction

Reactions to chick lit are generally divided into two groups. The first group expects literature by and about women to advance political activism of feminism, to represent women's struggle in patriarchal culture and offer inspiring images of strong, powerful women. The other group argues that chick lit should portray the reality of young women "grappling with modern life and relationship" (Mabry 193). The generation of women coming of age after the women's movement of the 1960s find themselves in an ambiguous position. On the one hand they are benefited from feminism's push for education and access to profession; on the other they feel pressures juggling profession and career with romance and family.

Despite the fact that second wave feminism is credited for equal pay, voting rights and multiple choices like men, these achievements of women are now making themselves miserable with high expectation. The gift of 'more choices' and 'have it all' by feminism is now 'too much' for the women of this generation. The third wave inheritors of their predecessors' success in securing access to education, politics and profession, they take such gains for granted and have trivialized the effort that led to a period of postfeminism "devoting themselves to superficial self-transformation through make up or fashion" (Ferriss and Young 87). Now, women have achieved much of what they were fighting for seeing no need for feminism. Angela McRobbie states, "Postfeminism refers to an active process by which feminist gains of 1970s and 80s come to be undermined" (255). She further claims that by means of tropes of freedom and choice which are now inextricably connected with category of 'young women', feminism is decisively aged and made to seem redundant (255). From the definitions above, it is concluded that the new women of contemporary period attempt

to lead their lives in their own way by rejecting the feminist pressure of 'have it all'. Even they conform themselves to traditional stereotypes of femininity.

Chick lit as a new genre of new women's fiction of contemporary time, portrays single young woman contemplating with career, profession and personal relationship. She is overwhelmed by multiple choices and searches for freedom of choices to find the true path of her own life. Contemporary women, Glasburgh argues, "seem [...] to be grappling with the notion that they can aspire to be whatever they want to be, which can [...] dismiss feminist principles" (5). He further claims that feminism is outdated and out of touch with what womanhood means to these women. Michele M. Glasburgh has listed in his study of chick lit genre the five characteristics of postfeminism from Faludi's 'Backlash theory'. Faludi argues that popular culture inclination towards consumerism and commercialism has been the cause of backlash on feminism known as 'postfeminism' (*Backlash*, 1991). The popular culture, Faludi continues, emphasizes to return to traditional femininity through advertizing, fashion and news-media (*Backlash*, 1991). According to Glasburgh, the five characteristics of postfeminism are: rejection of feminism; focus on individual needs instead of sisterhood; a return to consumerism, motherhood and domesticity; female identity crisis and overwhelmed by future choices (Glasburgh, appendix 2). Here, this thesis treats and explores my selection of novels in relation to those characteristics of postfeminism.

Rejection of Feminism

The first characteristic of postfeminism is general rejection of feminism. Many critics and theorists have touched on the idea of feminism becoming a burden of women. Women today, are miserable because of feminism. The independence, equal pay, education that women today have, thanks to feminism but have led to more

possibilities how to run their lives and “the idea of more choices has led women to increase anxiety over life decisions” (Glasburgh 85). It has been declared that they are resistant to label ‘feminist’, although studies have shown that the majority of women support feminist principles. “I am not feminist but ...” is a common refrain heard among these women, many of whom want to be “more neutrally- recognized humanist” (Glasburgh13). Also many women are supposedly angry that feminism has weighed them down with high expectation, specifically with balancing a career and family life; they are miserable in striving to ‘have it all’ (Faludi x). It has done its job for providing gender equality thus rendering it irrelevant today (McRobbie 2004). New women are ready to move on.

There are several instances in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, where Fielding directly addresses this shift away from feminism. One occurs when Bridget’s friend Sharon goes on to criticize men and the emotional games they play, claiming that men try to “wriggle out of commitment, maturity, honor and the natural progression of things between man and woman” (20). Since they are in public, Bridget and friend Jude embarrassingly shush her, Bridget tells the reader, “After all, there is nothing so unattractive to a man as strident feminism” (20). Here, the focus is not on being annoyed at game- playing men. There is also specific mention of Faludi’s *Backlash* (1991), while Bridget and Mark are trying to make conversation at the Annual Turkey Curry Buffet. Bridget tells him that she is reading Faludi’s bestseller. He replies, “Didn’t you find there was rather a lot of special pleading?” (14). She has not actually read it but is trying to be impressive and scholarly. She gives a noncommittal answer and quickly changes the subject. Faludi’s *Backlash* (1991) is supposedly an important text, speaks directly to the popular notion of feminism being thought of as insignificant.

Ahern's *The Gift* is no exception to represent feminism as insignificant. She portrays Ruth as if she does not seem to dissatisfy with her role as a mother and a wife. Although she is benefitted from feminists' push for education, she remains silence as if she is satisfied with her husband, Lou. Despite feminist achievements she has, she wants her role as a traditional female. In the first half of the story, Ruth is trying to remind her husband about his responsibility to his children; her voice resonates feminist, "You have not prepared one bottle, made him one meal, dressed him, played with him" (80). It is to expect his support for her in order to run family relation well. She needs husband going against the feminist mantra of "man hating" women cited in (Ferriss and Young 88). She remains satisfying in traditional stereotype of feminity as if feminism seems to be unattractive for her.

No Sisterhood

The focus on the individual instead of sisterhood is another feature of postfeminism. The women of this generation are not involving in gatherings and groups for the sake of women; they involve for the sake of themselves individually. Glasburgh asserts that women today "are not interested in representing a movement or speaking for women everywhere; they are out to find their own voice on good time" (13). This idea as opposed to feminist discourse focusing on sisterhood, allows contemporary woman the space to explore the way "being true in their own desire instead of prescribing to others (Glasburgh 13). This allows women to emphasize lifestyle choices and personal pleasures. They are dealing with "who they've made themselves" (cited in Ferriss and Young 93). The contemporary women are contemplating on 'I' instead of 'We' and are trying to invent their own self. Angela McRobbie states that individuals must now "choose the kind of life they want to live" and plan "a life of one's own" (260). The women, she continues are "increasingly

called upon to invent their own structures” individualistically by the help of self-help practices like: self-help guides, personal advisors, lifestyle coaches and so on (260).

Bridget in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* has her own impending problem of childlessness and singleton in her life. She enjoys herself in pubs, bars and restaurant. Although she has many friends and she shares her problems to them, still she has fear of loneliness, “the stigma of remaining single” (McRobbie 261). She tries to invent herself by finding a true path of her life. In her personal diary she puts, “I will not... [s]ulk about having no boyfriend, but develop inner poise and authority and sense of self as woman of substance, complete without boyfriend” (2). Likewise, she has a plan to improve her career and find new job with potential. She vows to be confident and more assertive woman putting them in her personal diary. She has concern for herself and writes, “I WILL NOT...” and “I WILL...” at the top of her diary entries (2-3). Fielding by portraying Bridget’s concern on her own individually, tries to reflect modern women’s reluctance to collectivism, gathering and movement. Modern women are self-concentrating in order to make their future better by dictating their ambition in personal notes.

However, *The Gift* portrays Ruth differently. Ruth is presented as a housewife who has no concern for herself but has a concern for family. She is not committed to the idea of career and finding a true path of her life, unlike Bridget. Her own only concern is forming good family relation by making her husband return to family from work. Her individual interest is to split his workaholic habit for the welfare of family. She is not represented in gathering because her problem is her own. She does not like to share her problem with her friend, if any. If she has to share, it is only with her husband, Lou she express her dissatisfaction, “You don’t juggle anything, Lou. You choose one thing over another. There is a difference” (81). But Lou does not come to

the point; even he concerns more about work. He replies, “I can’t be in two places at once, Ruth. If you need a help around here, [...] we could have nanny here any day you want” (81). Though, Ruth is not presented as concerning on her own individual and personal anxiety, she seems to concern with husband-wife relation. But she does not take feminist path of leaving him to solve the problem, nor does she represent herself with collective sisterhood to revolt against him. In this way, *The Gift* presents Ruth with her own lifestyle choices and individualism.

A Return to Domesticity, Motherhood and Consumerism

The third characteristic is the media’s attempt to revive more traditional femininities that were not allowable through feminism. These include an unabashed return to men, a focus on consumerism, reconsideration of motherhood and attempts at domesticity. Men and motherhood are considered two aspects of female lives that fell under scrutiny during the reign of feminism; and neither of them was needed. Glasburgh referring to Braithwaite (2004) and Walters (1995), tells us that today, elements of popular culture are dominated by preoccupation with a particular definition of femininity, presenting images of women as engrossed with romance and trying to be attractive to men and with “motherhood, children and a desire to retreat from the work place in favor of ‘mummy track’- in short, with being ‘a woman again’” (14).

Domesticity plays large part in postfeminism urging women to return to men. According to postfeminism, women feel pressure to flourish domestically (Smith cited in Glasburgh 15). Glasburgh states that with the rise of domestic advice manuals and mass media promoting home goods as posh and necessary, women are freeing the tug of a return to men. Unfortunately, women of this generation are not preparing for the domestic life. Women feel pressure with feminism’s so much emphasis on career,

experiencing confusion of incorporating career and domesticity in their lives. They are “unprepared, unequipped and often pressured” in households and purchasing goods (Glasburgh15). These women are not concerned with cooking, organizing and decorating. They feel security and warmth that the notion of home encompasses, but are unsure how to reconcile that with their untraditional life choices. Likewise, consumerism plays great role in this ideology. Household goods still symbolize things associated with married life-order, security and everlasting love. These are important consideration of single women, who has not yet decided if she is happy being single. The women are spending money in indulgences and the act of shopping has been considered a female sport.

Bridget, in *Bridget Jones's Diary* meets all those issues above. “I will not...[s]ulk about having no boyfriend; but develop inner poise, [...] sense of self as woman of substance, complete without boyfriend, as best way to obtain boyfriend” (2). Although, Bridget has been told she can and should be strong without a man, she wants one. She is not afraid to say so most of the time. She wants a datable man, but she is more often blindly stumbling through relationship and confidence. However, Bridget imagines motherhood and rejects it in one sitting. At one point she thinks she is pregnant and begins to fantasize about her designer motherhood, “[a]m starting to get carried away with the idea of self as Calvin Klein style mother figure poss[ibly] wearing crop-top” (116). Bridget is describing the feeling that motherhood evokes, but not the realities. Her fantasy takes a turn when she realizes she would have to relinquish her childless extravagances like drinking, going out with her friends and wearing tight jeans. So, her confusion about motherhood is to be blamed on feminism.

Bridget daydreams of marrying a doctor for whom she will “cook [...] little goat cheese soufflés” (49). She is not concerned with actual act of cooking the

soufflés, but the sentiments invoke: those things associate with married life- “order, security and everlasting life.” These are all things she lacks in her single life and thinks domesticity brings her. We see this at her birthday dinner she decides to prepare for her and her friends. She is excited at the idea of becoming “known as brilliant cook and hostess” (82). But she makes mess of dinner and fails to become well-known cook. Here, Fielding shows how difficult it is for women to have both career and domestic life.

The idea of shopping and consumerism pervades Bridget much. Most of her purchases are for the sake of self-improvement. She buys self-help manuals, cook-books, fancy kitchen appliances and clothing, most of them will never be used. She begins her diary with New Year’s Resolutions list; immediately following not smoking and drinking, she resolves not to “[w]aste money on pasta makers, ice-creams machines, or other culinary devices which [she] will never use” (2). This is just one of the many resolutions she breaks. When she Bridget comes home with four items, all “unsuitable and unflattering.” Knowing that none of them will be worn, she has wasted good money. She says, “It is all a punishment, I realize, for being obsessed by shopping in a shallow, materialistic way instead of wearing the same rayon frock all summer and painting a line down the back of my legs” (123).

The idea of revival of traditional idea of femininity also pervades Ahern’s *The Gift*. But this book focuses a little on consumerism. Ruth is also characterized by her alliance with man. Though she is already married, she focuses on need of husband in family. She frequently pleads her husband to come home in early hours from work and to give time for his children and family. She says, “I mentioned it last week. I mentioned it yesterday morning, I’m like a frigging parrot with you and you still don’t remember. The school play and the dinner with your mum, dad, Alexandra and

Quentin” (93). She needs a husband attention and expects order, security and everlasting love with his presence in family. *The Gift* also presents Ruth continuing her responsibility of motherhood. She takes care of her two children, Lucy and Pud. She feeds them properly and put their dress on before school. She is affectionate mother, “[h]er maternal instincts were kicking in and the only voice she could now hear was that of her child, as his sleepy moans turned to full-blown cries” (79). This remark addressed by narrator shows her responsible motherhood.

However, *The Gift* does not focus on an attempt on consumerism and shopping of female protagonist, Ruth. She works in kitchen and prepared food for family. But there is no mentioning of kitchen appliances and consuming items she uses, eats and wears. She is not characterized as her obsession with shopping and consumption. Even, she does not seem to be buying anything and anywhere, throughout the novel. In the first half of the story she seems to be eating the items of food she made, “lasagne and salad, the pie next in line to be eaten”, which shows a little about her attraction on consuming pattern (78). As a housewife Ruth need not worry about being well known cook, unlike Bridget. In this way, these two novels, through the female characters show the revival of traditional feminities though they vary according to their heroines’ marital status.

Female Identity Crisis

The fourth characteristic of postfeminism is the idea of female identity crisis, which states that women today do not have adequate relationship with womanhood because feminism has backfire it. Women instead of turning their attention to career are conflicted about what actually makes them woman. Walters claims that popular culture is using motherhood to define womanhood; whereas feminism has striped women of the one thing that makes them women: the natural act of becoming a

mother (cited in Glasburgh 16). She further illustrates that popular culture's use of the argument of biological clock to depict misery of modern woman. The women's focus on career has led to disappointment. According to Glasburgh, postfeminism claims that women have real cause to worry that waiting for marriage or motherhood will result into spinsterhood (16). Faludi also asserts that the fear of 'man-shortage', 'infertility epidemic' and 'dark side of divorce' is afflicting the career woman (x). The women are juggling career with relationship instead of fixing their identity in one true path. This is because of confusion created by feminism.

Bridget Jones's Diary addresses the female identity crisis depicting Bridget's struggle between her career and love relation. On the one hand she wants to improve her career, on the other she longs for men, marriage and family. She is not fixed in her decision. She has a pressure of not finding a right man. Her parents' friends warn her by using the argument of 'biological clock', "Bridget! What are we going to do with you! [...] You career girls! Can't put it off for ever, you know. Tick-tock-tick-tock" (11). Bridget is constantly angry at her married friends for making her feel inadequate for being single. The conversation turns to men getting more attractive with age whereas it is opposite for women, while at a party with Smug Marrieds. Bridget sits, "head down, quivering furiously at their inferences of female sell-by dates and life as a game of musical chairs where girls without a chair/man when the music stops/they pass thirty are 'out'" (213). Therefore, Bridget feels that her identity is in crisis.

Bridget is also afraid of remaining alone if she sticks to her sexual morals, but she does not want to be used. Daniel, her boss, takes her out to dinner and then tries to get her into bed saying that it "is just a bit of fun, OK? I don't think we should start getting involved" (33). She tells him that she is not interested in emotional

fuckwittage. She immediately regrets saying, “I may have been right, but my reward, I know, will be to end up all alone, half-eaten by an Alsatian” (33).

Ruth in *The Gift* also feels her identity is in crisis when she finds herself alone despite her marriage. She feels helpless when her husband, Lou does not pay attention. She is afraid of impending marriage crisis. Though she is educated, she does not seem to concern on her career. She is limited to her traditional role of wife and motherhood. But she feels inadequate, insecurity and disorder in the absence of her husband. She feels as if her marriage is in crisis saying, “We’re not in this life just to work, we’re in to live” (94). According to Ruth, life is for living with family establishing good relation between loving husband, wife and children, which she lacks in her life. Therefore, *The Gift* presents Ruth facing crisis of identity of her role as a wife and responsible motherhood.

Burden of More Choices

The fifth characteristic of postfeminism is women facing overload when considering the future choices. It is due to feminism which has given pressure of more choices and ‘have it all.’ Women today are feeling “too much” and “feminism has been nothing but a burden” for them (Faludi x). Contemporary women are overwhelmed by lifestyle choices with high expectation that results into more anxiety for them. McRobbie explains that women have not grown up within a structure that is capable of dealing with mounting numbers of choices that have been supplied through freedoms of feminism and are therefore completely overwhelmed, ever fearful of future and unsure of their abilities to achieve (2004). These women are not equipped with the structure necessary to deal with responsibility of choosing a life plan from limitless choices which causes anxiety over choices.

Bridget's life consists mainly of bouncing back and forth between being confident and hopeless. On the one hand she feels herself co-independent modern "woman of substance" (43), on the other she falls herself with the feelings of "career[ing] rudderless and boyfriendless through dysfunctional relation and professional stagnation" (78). She contemplates her future from any number of angles, including a professional television personality, the wife of a doctor, the mother of Daniel's designer baby and a single and wonderful hostess, yet none of these aspirations is ever seriously considered. They all seem too far out of reach. Her lack of confidence over her future possibilities causes self-deprecating feeling about her seemingly bleak present situation, "I'm no good at anything. Not Men. Not social skills. Not work. Nothing" (224). When she tries to talk to her mother about how difficult it is to be a woman, her mother replies, "Oh! Honestly, darling. You girls are just so picky and romantic these days: you're simply got too much choice" (195). Bridget has a fear of future and unsure of her ability to achieve her true path with right choice.

Ruth has her own lifestyle choice. Being a mother she expects happy family life that consists of husband, wife and children. But she seems different from Bridget in the case that Bridget has more choices. It is because of marital status, Ruth does not seem to consider about her future from different angles, like career, job, finding a right man etc. She does not seem to be overwhelmed by more choices. Therefore, *The Gift* portrays her as if she does not have faced the burden of feminism varying from *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Of the two novels discussed here, *Bridget Jones's Diary* addresses the characteristics of postfeminism in its full extent, where as *The Gift* misses some elements. However, both novels attempt to illustrate the notion that chick lit is

currently an adequate mirror of the lives that modern women live. After analyzing these two chick lit texts, it is found that these works are indeed more or less indicative of this postfeminist time.

IV. *Chick Lit*: New Women's Fiction

Though, the genre of chick lit seems superficial and frivolous, it addresses the serious issues of modern womanhood. It is important to understand the depth and seriousness of women concerning their career, family and romance. The characters have been accused of being obsessed with superficialities of life such as chasing men, beautifying themselves, shopping and continuously aware of their appearance and looking fashionable. However, chick lit cannot be judged by its cover, as looks are so deceptive so are the covers of a book. Chick lit also deals with trials, tribulations, and perhaps darker sides of contemporary modern women making them aware of the difficulties that they still face in their everyday lives.

In addition, these novels show that the genre of chick lit is closer to the genre of romance. Both novels share the elements of Ur-narrative and the thematic aspects: construction of sexuality, independence and intelligence, beauty and appearance, work, and singleness of the heroines. However in these novels, these elements of romance are modified in the way to create greater sense of realism.

By showing everyday lives of contemporary young women and addressing a very clear type of readership, chick lit not only fulfills a commercial purpose but also sends female readers a hopeful message that they are not the only ones faced with high expectations, multiple choices, and assumptions about their life style and not alone in their struggles. Despite ambiguous ideological implication, chick lit tells female readers to choose what is best for her ignoring oppressive external forces.

If we take into account the message that chick lit conveys, it is a representative of some of the discourse of feminism denouncing negative aspects in new women's lives. But it is not feminist genre due to its lack of political intent. Therefore, the genre reinforces some traditional assumptions about social rules of women while

simultaneously exercising negative criticism over condescension of patriarchy with these young women.

As a whole, these contradictory elements show that these two novels of chick lit do not make final decision in ideological terms, as they mainly deals with choices. It can be inferred from the open endings of these novels that the writers refuse to provide definite political responses regarding social gender. The most feminist issues presented in these novels are a defense of women's right to choose. Consequently, the final message of chick lit that it is up to reader to decide whether to accept things as given by patriarchy and take for granted that the situation of women is fine as it is, ignoring critical messages included in these books or to become aware that women's struggle is not over yet. As a result chick lit is open to choice both conform to patriarchal expectations and simultaneously exposes pitfalls of this system. In conclusion, chick lit is capable of representing post feminist views, highlighting the importance of career, choice and self-definition for women without renouncing love, family and being alliance with men.

Chick lit demonstrates that while women have reached social positions in twenty-first century, they are still victims of inequalities that prove patriarchy still pervades their lives conditioning the way they live and the choice they make. Patriarchal assumptions, therefore, overcome the genre and can be shaping the lives of troubled female protagonists even in these progressive texts. Therefore, chick lit is still haunted by the ghost of patriarchy, but at least it highlights the importance of choice and self-definition of women.

However, chick lit novels are, after all conservative in the portrayal of women's concerns and are produced within the same patriarchal, male-dominated culture. They have been even more tightly bound by traditional ideas of what women

should be and how women should behave. Still these contemporary works provide new visions of women's voices, communities and experiences as sexual beings and desires, suggesting possibilities for women outside the roles of girl-friends, wives or mothers. In doing so, these, women's texts claim that they truly are for female identity, sexuality, and community.

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