



Exploring The Post-Feminist Perspectives Of Chick Lit In The Novels Of Jane Austen And Sophie Kinsella: A Cultural Camera

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Abstract

Perusing with the potent embodiment of Jane Austen's strong and radiant idea of womanhood – duly drawn and developed with her charismatic heroine protagonists, the study seeks to envision the beauty and strength of a woman from the cultural camera of the contemporaneous subject of Post Feminism; wherein it also paints and develops substantially with the calligraphy of a new woman from the candid narratives of the scholarly Sophie Kinsella. The world of Sophie Kinsella ponders on the requisites of contemporaneous finances, fashion, technological advances and consumerist approach encompassing the sociological milieu of her central characters throughout her narratives.

In lieu of this thought process, the present study seeks to design the approach with a commemoration of the idea of Post Feminism and Chick literature as a subject more of Sensibility and ethos, than that of the premises of a critical movement only. However Chick Literature is a genre written by woman, of woman and for woman. In the domains of which the female protagonists evolve as a strong personality of candid nature and ardent spirits – which all the more embellishes and decorates the idea of a new woman with fuming colours and strengthened belief in one's self.

Moreover, it also envisages a thoughtful development of the feminine discourse from the lens of cultural studies and popular media; where again it strives to fulfil the ideological finesse of the idea of womanhood in its absolute fullness and consolidated understanding.

Keywords: Post Feminism, Cultural Studies, Popular Media, Cinematic Approach, Chick Lit, Candid Picture of a Woman, Journey to Selfhood.

“Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her” [Austen: Emma 7].

While contemplating on the beauty and feminine insights of the heroines of Jane Austen, the present study seeks to unlock the ties of Post Feminist ideology canvassed charismatically in the cultural camera of Chick Lit Panorama – with the image of a new woman envisioned and pictured in the frame of a strong and ardent personality like Catherine Morland in **Northanger Abbey**; whose:

“...heart was affectionate; her disposition cheerful and open, without conceit or affectation of any kind – her manners just removed from the awkwardness and shyness of a girl; her person pleasing, and , when in good looks, pretty – and her mind about as ignorant and uninformed as the female mind at seventeen usually is” [Austen 12].

In lieu of this thought process, the present study seeks to design the approach with a commemoration of the idea of **Post Feminism** and **Chick literature** as a subject more of Sensibility and ethos, than that of the expression of a critical movement only. However, Chick Literature is reckoned as a genre written by woman, of woman and for a woman. In the domains of which the heroines evolve as a strong personality of candid nature and ardent spirits – which all the more embellishes and decorates the idea of a new woman with encouraging colours and strengthened belief in one’s self. The developing trends of Chick lit phenomenon is generally perceived in the aura of the young urban women’s culture; wherein the study ponders on the bewitching lifestyle of modern, cosmopolitan, single woman in her 20s or 30s and thereby the characters are portrayed with the everyday struggles of work place stifles, home, friendship, family and love – combating the maze of sociological predicaments.

In the wake of meeting with the innovative culture of the Post Feminist ideology celebrating the charisma of Chick Lit in abundance, the study seeks to unravel the mystic notion of feminine ethnicity with the significant words of **Suzanne Ferris and Mallory Young** – who once commented that:

“Reactions to Chick Lit are divided between those who expect literature by and about women to advance the political activism of feminism, to represent women’s struggles in patriarchal culture and offer inspiring images of strong, powerful women, and those who argue instead that it should portray the reality of young women grappling with real life” [9].

Penetrated with this comprehensive subject of social realism, the study traverses through the character analysis of Rebecca Bloomwood, Catherine Morland, Emma and Elinor to name a few in the feminist pedagogy of world literature. It seeks to explore the fertile subjects of *New Womanhood* and *Individualism* – duly propagated in the milieu of *Cultural Adaptation*.

Historically, it has also been recorded with a deep rationale which conveys that,

“the meaning of the word ‘feminist’ has not really changed since it first appeared in a book review in the *Atbenaem* of April 27, 1895, describing a woman who ‘has in her the capacity of fighting her way back to independence’ [Susan: Backlash 15].

The socio-cultural ethos of which is also reflected substantially when Nora from **Ibsen’s A Doll’s House** asserts that,

“Before everything else I’m a human being” [58].

Thus, this is the core idea which significantly resonates through the developing intrinsic of Post Feminist ideology and cohesively ruminates with the enhancing radiance of cultural pedagogy of humanistic probability.

To this immensity of the socio-political ethos of Post Feminism – profusely envisioned as an extension of the Second Wave of Feminist literature, **Andrew Milner and Jeffrey Browitt** has very rightly opined that:

“...the second wave feminism also came increasingly to define cultural theory itself as a matter of both particular interest and peculiar political relevance” [129].

While channelizing the imports of the feministic portrayal of contemporaneous literature, these narratives are substantially developed in the confessional style of letters and e-mails, and the intimacy of the first person narrative is also reckoned there in [IJASOS: Baykan 28].

In the light of this on- going thought process, the critics have verily conjectured that this world of feminine grace has its roots in the heroine centered novels of the nineteenth century Novelists – predominantly remembered with the names of the eminent Charlotte Bronte and Jane Austen. Imbued with the charisma of these writers it is very cogently observed that,

“Indeed, Austen’s Elizabeth, Emma and Elinor share many of the same concerns as Fielding’s Bridget on the level of everyday life. Fielding herself acknowledges that her book was inspired by Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*” [Smith 7].

Pursuing with these significant revelations, the present approach cohesively and substantially knocks at the gates of Austen’s **Sense and Sensibility** - to meet with the strong feminine self in the character of Elinor; who

“...possessed a strength of understanding, and coolness of judgement, which qualified her, though only nineteen, to be the counsellor of her mother. Her disposition was affectionate, and her feelings were strong; but she knew how to govern them.” [10]

And so the observation says that Elinor was there with blooming colours to exemplify the idea of contemporary feminism with the biological bond of **sisterhood** with Marianne as well ; where ‘they encouraged each other’ [10]

Similar reflections are perceived in the charismatic narratives of **The Secret Dream world of a Shopaholic**, where in the protagonist Becky meditates profusely on this cohesive bond with a beautiful notion exemplified as:

“...as David E. Barton says, you must treasure friends. He says the simple act of breaking bread with friends is one of the oldest, most essential parts of human life” [Kinsella 82].

Moreover this thread of social relations is beautified with the candid portrayal of the arrival of Suze’s cousins Fenella and Tarquin to the rented flat of Rebecca where,

“They do strange things,... They ride around on a tandem and wear matching jumpers knitted by their old nanny and have this stupid family language which no-one else can understand” [Kinsella 83].

Thus this is how the fertile idea of womanhood in rapport with the extensive threads of sisterhood is drawn and developed prolifically though conjectured in a lighter mode of candid narratives.

In the purview of these critical revelations, the study paints the thought process with the potent reflection of **Chick Lit panorama** – recorded as:

“Chick lit novels may also engender identification processes for women who look for emotional and social bonds with other women, by means of being more supportive and less competitive of each other. Many of these novels promote the value and benefits of female friendship and support, which might be considered as an empowering practice that resist patriarchy” [IJASOS: Baykan 30]

Pertaining to the form and structure of this ideological finesse, the study verily advances with a theoretical approach; designed as:

“Post Feminism is a new form of empowerment, and independence, individual choice, (sexual) pleasure, consumer culture, hedonism, fashion, hybridism, humour and the renewed focus on the female body can be considered fundamental for this contemporary feminism. It is a new, critical way of understanding the changed relations between feminism, popular culture and femininity” [Post Feminist Fiction in Chick Lit Novels]

While contemplating on the comprehensive measures of the novel idea of **Post Feminism**, the present approach is highly enamoured by the enhancing channels of contemporary subjects commemorating fashion and culture – which is indeed the thematic concern of Chick Lit Panorama as well; in lieu of which the present manuscript seeks to draw a cohesive sketch of womanhood on the socio-cultural canvass of the extending **Popular Literature**.

Abin Chakraborty has very prolifically meditated in this respect with his thoughtful words; conjectured as:

“Feminism participates in the study of popular culture by not only analysing the evolving nature of the representations of women, but also by locating their responses and tracing the role of women in producing forms of popular culture” [54].

Penetrated with this theoretical capsule of prolific implications, the vision proceeds further to allude the historicity of ideas wherein it explores the meaningful vision of **Elaine Showalter** – developed under the canopy of the Second Wave of Feminism- which is observed to have mirrored itself in the developing domains of Post Feminism.

Showalter in her book titled as *A Literature of Their Own*, asserted with the three phases of Women’s Writing; reckoned with the classification exemplified as:

1. The **Feminine Phase**- pondering on the exercise of the women writers who tried to write as men and specifically adhere to the notion of male values in ink. They were also observed to have adopted the male pseudonyms during this phase of writing.
2. Next is the **Feminist Phase** where the thematic concern of these writers was to reflect on the criticism of the role of women, her ethnicity and the fatal oppression and misery of woman in society.
3. Then the third wing of **Female phase** arrived where the justification of a woman’s perspective was no longer evaluated but rather it was asserted with a strong impression and a firm consolidation. Thus this frame of narratives lacked the anger and combative consciousness of the Feminist Phase [Traditions of Feminist Criticism]

Hence all of these three phases are verily envisaged in the construction of a new domain of Post Feminist ideology where in we meet with the reverberations of Chick lit charisma with new zeal and vigour – motivating the idea of a New Woman to be realized and enlivened in a Global purview.

In the wake of having a comprehensive understanding of this extensive ISM, the discussion further clarifies with a thoughtful wisdom; conjectured as:

“The Post feminist background generates complex and ambiguous portrayals of femaleness, femininity, and feminism, exploring the luminal and insoluble tension between these subject positions. The post feminist woman owns a non-dualistic space that holds together conflicts between her feminist values and her feminine body, between individual and collective accomplishments, and between professional career and personal relationship, and she therefore provides multiple opportunities for female identification. The post

feminist woman is independent, since she refuses to subdivide herself or to choose between her public and private, feminist and feminine identities” [De Gruyter: Alina Ilief – Martinescu].

While contemplating on this contemporaneous subject of Post Feminism, the study gets enriched with the rich and candid narratives of **Sophie Kinsella** who is known to have drawn the character of Rebecca Bloomwood in her **The Secret Dream world of a Shopaholic** – wherein the heroine is introduced as:

“I’m a journalist on a financial magazine. I’m paid to tell other people how to organize their money”[17].

Perhaps this is a paradox as the girl herself knows “nothing about finance. People at the bus stop know more about finance than me. Schoolchildren know more than me. I’ve been doing this job for three years now, and I’m still expecting someone to catch me out” [18].

So there’s a sense of anxiety and uncertainty envisioned in the inner recesses of this girl which she definitely wants to break away and thereon she is seen to mend up her ways though carelessly of course at first but eventually she succeeds in winning the time and space she has always been accompanied by.

Moreover, Becky – the central character is also coloured exotically and enchantingly with the flavours of the consumerist approach to the market of festive endearments woven in the web of her professional engagements – cohesively captured in a lighter vein of course. In lieu of which, we again meet with this world of feminine fantasy where Becky candidly admits that:

“It’s a habit of mine, itemizing all the clothes I’m wearing, as though for a fashion page” [21] Hence, this is how she is observed to have decorated her life with all the luxuries and sumptuous dreams beaded with the words saying:

“.....There’s a girl coming towards me and she’s carrying a Denny and George carrier bag” [33].

Thus with this expensive scarf of Denny and George she is seen to her ecstasy and happiness. And a kind of satisfactory pleasure is seen in this materialistic yet simple acquaintance of self accommodation.

Henceforth, Becky is all empowered with the inertia to travel and unravel the truth of her life and acquaintances with her deep fondness to perceive beauty in every speck of revelation she’s all surrounded by.

“Despite her apparently glamorous job in the field of marketing, advertising, law or fashion, she struggles to gain recognition within the company” [Cagne 6].

However pursuing with this intricate expression of accommodating to one’s self the pillar of career milestone, glamour of consumerism and feminine culture with the utter sense of self fulfilment and self recognition in this wide expanse of revolving universe; the study sums up the endeavour with the words encapsulated as -

‘The literature on post feminist reaction theory is well illustrated in Chick Lit Novels. Wherein, the women find a space to explore their own feelings and experiences in their daily lives regarding gender roles, relationships, sexuality and career etc via the characters of these popular texts.’

Besides Levine has also meditated profusely; with his proliferation of vision invested as ‘the popular culture invests in creating a profoundly close relationship between the audience and the meaning of the text’ (1379); where there is a dynamic connection which exists between the female readers and expressive chick-lit texts with which they interact” [IJASOS 30] .

Panoramicly, the idea of New Womanhood has been prolifically painted in the coming of age narratives of Sophie Kinsella and Jane Austen with the impeccable heights and it has indeed added to the sociological development of cultural insights. The horizons of Post Feminism has instead kindled the ascending vistas of

‘rationality in the formation of a better social order’[Mukhopadhyay 14], duly invigorated and enlightened by a strong faith in one’s feminine self. The contemporaneous world today is intellectually reverberated with the ethos of woman as an epitome of individualism – uncovered under the basking glory of the present day consumerism and substantially philosophised with the idea of universalism; duly embarked and widely discussed on the extensive forum of World Literature.

Thus imbibed with this eternal truth of Women’s thoughtfulness, the present paper endeavours to summarise the cannon of feminist criticism with the vision of the eminent Virginia Woolf who profusely meditated on the idea of women as a free soul – copiously commemorated as:

“As a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world” [Woolf: Three Guineas 313].

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