



RESEARCH PAPER

Repositioning Female Sensibility: A Postfeminist Study of Pakistani Chick Lit *The Diary of a Social Butterfly*

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ABSTRACT

The paper studies the complexities of contemporary Pakistani female sensibility problematized by Pakistani chick lit. *The Diary of a Social Butterfly* is an intricate work of postfeminism presenting new female visibility and sensibility by challenging traditional notions of Pakistani womanhood. The study explores the struggles, resistance, and agency of Butterfly as she navigates through intersectional socio-cultural and politico-economic milieu of Pakistani society, creating an inclusive space for nuanced discussions on power dynamics and gender roles within Pakistani gender topology shaped by hegemonizing nexus of globalization, neoliberalism, and popular culture. It is qualitative research that studies repositioning of Pakistani female sensibility using critical angles of Gill's postfeminist sensibility, Dosekun's transcultural postfeminism and Mohanty's agentic third world feminism. The study reveals that Pakistani chick lit not only problematizes the polemics of Western postfeminism, but challenges the tropes of Pakistani feminism, offers nuances of heteronormativity, provides re-positioned *desi* postfeminist sensibility and becomes an emancipatory paradigm in which Butterfly enjoys autonomy formulating a paradox of postfeminism.

KEYWORDS Chick Lit, *Desi* Lit, Globalization, Popular Culture, Postfeminism, Repositioning, Sensibility

Introduction

Female representation in Pakistani chick lit complicates and problematizes the contemporary practice of feminism in Pakistan. This subgenre of fiction engages in the discourse of postfeminism, offering a fresh perspective on female visibility and redefining the sensibilities of Pakistani women. It highlights the struggles, resistance, identity formation, and empowerment experienced by young urban women who challenge intersectional, stereotypical, patriarchal practices prevalent in this region. These narratives situate themselves within the social, political, and cultural context influenced by neoliberalism, popular culture, and globalization. The availability of limited scholarly attention towards Pakistani chick lit and its complex postfeminist angles makes it a significant platform to initiate inclusive and nuanced discussions on power dynamics, gender roles, resistance, autonomy, agency, and empowerment within Pakistani gender studies. Pakistani chick lit plays a significant role in reshaping the perception of Pakistani feminism, both within the local context and on a global scale. It challenges conventional feminist ideas such as patriarchy, otherness, oppression, victimization, servitude, and subalternity and explores concepts like female resistance, revolt, control, agency, choice, and other similar themes depicted in Pakistani feminist literature. As a genre, chick lit

highlights the complexities of female empowerment and independence by engaging with postfeminist debates, while considering the influence of neoliberalism, globalization, and consumerism specifically in Pakistani environment. These elements contribute to a reimagining of Pakistani women in popular culture and fiction by presenting "new feminist visibilities" (Gill 2016 p. 611) that embody a "postfeminist sensibility" (Gill 2007 p. 147). Pakistani chick lit does not perpetuate stereotypical portrayals of subaltern, subjugated, and marginalized women that have been observed in mainstream Pakistani English literature. Irfan observes the prevalence of issues such as rape, sexual harassment, and pedophilia in Pakistan. Feminist literature plays a crucial role in addressing these concerns, considering the deep-rooted influence of patriarchy in our society (Irfan, 2021). Pakistani female characters are influenced by postcolonialism's overarching theme that examines the impact of socio-political oppression while often overlooking individual experiences (Mehmood et al., 2021). Pakistani chick lit features young, uber, empowered women of metropolitans as protagonists and they complicate the ideal of traditional Pakistani womanhood by "dislocating the meaning" (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 7) and articulating "new sites of resistance" (Brooks, 1997, p. 10) for Pakistani females.

Mohsin's *The Diary of a Social Butterfly* (2008) has been selected to examine the problem. Moni Mohsin is a Pakistani female writer who adopts the journal writing format to create her first chick lit, *The Diary of a Social Butterfly* (2008). The book consists of a compilation of Mohsin's columns, originally published in *The Friday Times* of Lahore, covering an important seven-year period in Pakistani history, from 2001 to 2008. This Pakistani chick lit, or preferably referred to as "desi lit" (Daswani, 2018, p. 193), possesses a lighthearted comedic essence that stems from the consistent use of malapropism. The novel unfolds within a Pakistani urban setting populated by numerous characters, with Butterfly taking center stage. She is a middle-aged, affluent socialite residing in Lahore and married to a wealthy man *Janoo* and they have a teenage son named *Kulchoo*. Butterfly's persona is characterized by pretentiousness and an inclination towards frivolous social gatherings, physical appearances, foreign travels, and brand-conscious shopping habits. Although she appears to be disconnected from prevailing socio-political events within her country yet she becomes well-informed and critical when needed. TDSB (*The diary of a social butterfly*) comments on significant geopolitical challenges that Pakistan has faced, Butterfly seems impervious to these concerns yet aspiring for global conquest. She is portrayed as capricious and oblivious socialite who incessantly nags not only her husband and in-laws but also revels in vociferous commentaries on various geopolitical aspects concerning her country (Shaharyar, 2023). The novel covers an array of topics encompassing the global geopolitical landscape including events such as wars, militarization, 9/11, American presidential elections, Iraq invasion, the execution of Saddam Hussain, Musharraf's dictatorship, October 8th's earthquake the most catastrophic earthquakes Pakistan's history, murder of Baloch tribal leader Akbar Buggti, the assassination Benazir Bhutto, and fundamentalism in Pakistan. Additionally, it delves into broader socio-political economic trends of recent years including surge consumerism, growing cultural disconnect between affluent underprivileged segments of society gradual erosion of law and order, juxtaposition of civil society and military establishment, increasing presence of women in public sphere, palpable tension between traditional landed elites and emerging nouveau riche, and multifaceted joys tribulations of globalization. Pakistani chick lit does not confine itself to particular themes and issues specific for this genre rather it highlights a lot of socio-cultural and political concerns thus challenging its capacity. I propose that it not only problematizes the polemics of Pakistani feminism but also challenges the praxis of chick lit and postfeminism. It can be assumed that Pakistani chick lit paves way in repositioning female sensibilities within Pakistani feminist discourse and open debate for an inclusive colored women feminist space.

Literature Review

The development of Pakistani feminism can be traced back to the pre-partition era of the subcontinent when influential women such as Fatima Jinnah, Bi Amma, Begam Hasarat Mohani, Begam Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan, and Zaib-un-Nisa Hamidullah served as inspirations for their contemporaries and worked towards the national and political cause of Pakistan (Saigol, 2016). In post-independence era Zia-ul-Haq's "religious military dictatorship" (Zia, 2018, p. 4) put a great backlash on women development especially through offensive imposition of *Hudood* and *Zina* Ordinances (Gardezi, 2004). This dire situation prompted women from upper-middle, elite, and liberal classes in establishing the Women's Action Forum (WAF). Initially functioning as a "lobbying cum-pressure group" (Rouse, 1988, p. 7), WAF gradually expanded its activities to encompass radical activism and informative seminars/workshops that primarily focused on women's legal rights and health concerns. The event of 9/11 forced Pakistan to become an ally of America in War on Terror caused a rapid rise in religious fundamentalism which prompted a counterargument called "Enlightened Moderation" (Zia, 2018, p.130). This idea was supported by the Musharraf regime and propagated by Pakistani liberals with an aim to portray a moderate face of Islam. Women's empowerment became a driving force behind this project of enlightened moderation and resulted in the emergence and improvement of various gender-related laws and policies during this period. All these factors contributed in defining the course of Pakistani feminism that not only provided a cultural and political defense against Western liberal ideologies but also aligned with local women's religious identities. The *Aurat* March in 2019 sparked a significant discourse on women's rights in Pakistan. It highlighted the ongoing challenges faced by women in Pakistan with complex societal, cultural, and religious dynamics. The use of social media as a platform intensified the debate among different intellectual groups. The march aimed to empower Pakistani women to voice their grievances and work towards achieving gender equality (Tarar et al., 2020). Pakistani feminism has undergone institutionalization through the rise of NGOs, such as *Aurat* Foundation, *Kashf* Foundation, *Bedari*, Women Empowerment Foundation and many more that work for women's rights and activism. These NGOs often collaborate with international organizations like Oxfam and World Bank for Pakistani women development (Zia, 2009). In literary sphere Pakistani authors such as Sidhwa, Suleri, Koreishi, Hussein, Abbasi, Ghose, Shamsie, Kamila, Hanif, Shah and Aslam among others have intricately depicted the evolving social fabric in Pakistan. Their works offer context-specific narratives that delve into the complex socio-cultural needs of the nation. Collectively, they shed light on numerous challenges faced by Pakistani women including legal disparities, educational deficiencies, insufficient healthcare and employment opportunities. They also address issues such as domestic violence, sexual assault, dowry and abusive customs like *Karo-Kari* and *Wanni*. Moreover, these authors explore pervasive issues related to career choices and marriage decisions for women as well as the observance of *purdah* and the confinement of women within domestic spaces within Pakistan's specific dialect or language variety (Ahmad, 2021). Postfeminism is a prominent subject of critical debate of twenty-first century once seen as anti-feminist, is now a useful framework that combines feminism with other "anti-foundationalist" (Brooks, 1997, p. 1) movements. However, many feminists view it as a "backlash" (Faludi, 1991, p. 9) for reinforcing traditional gender roles and promoting unattainable beauty standards (Wolf, 1990). They believe that it avoids critical feminist input and political activism by focusing on consumerism and ignoring intersectional inequalities (McRobbie, 2009). Postfeminism equates women's empowerment with financial success creating doubly entangled "new women" (p.3) who have female pathologies and "post-feminist gender anxieties" (p. 22). On the contrary postfeminism is "the new normal" (Gill, 2017, p. 609) says Rosalind Gill and calls it "postfeminism as a sensibility" (ibid). Dosekun (2015) considers it as

transnational phenomena that challenges white supremacist hegemonic postfeminist critiques of “global girl” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 733) that perceive third world women as mere consumers of the Western cultural. Chick lit is a subgenre of popular literature that emerged in the early 21st century that caters postfeminist sensibilities. It is characterized by works written by young female authors, focusing on the lives and struggles of contemporary women. These stories typically depict urban women in their 20s or 30s dealing with various pressures, such as demanding mothers, unsatisfying relationships, and difficult bosses. The genre gets its name from the slang term “chicks” (Lu, 2014, p. 104) for young women. It is often perceived as a “white normative genre” (Butler & Desai, 2008, p. 2) that is apolitical and lacks diversity in terms of social and cultural differences. However, a growing corpus of scholarly critique, including works by Chen (2012), Donadio (2006), Ommundsen (2011), and many more, provide evidence of the worldwide popularity of chick lit. Reading of Pakistani chick lit is problematic, its sensitivity increases in the native context because of the complex socio-economic, politico-cultural situation. In Mohsin's *TDSB Butterfly* is a frivolous socialite who prioritizes high-profile social events, luxury brands, and foreign vacations over important national issues. Despite her privileged lifestyle, she faces daily sexism and misogyny. Her condescending husband and in-laws often overlook her efforts. Throughout the novel, *Butterfly* shows growth and transformation. The story begins with the elopement of her friend's wife but ends with a focus on the assassination of Benazir Bhutto (Chaudhry, 2021). The hypermarket world peddles the artificial as authentic, the *Butterfly's* narrative challenges traditional notions of identity within a techno-consumer culture, emphasizing the pervasive impact of hyperreal on contemporary society (Saeed & Abid, 2022). Laskar (2022) observes despite her indifference, *Butterfly's* unapologetic voice remains strong and represents a Pakistani woman's resistance against fundamentalism and dirty politics. Her presence gains significance in light of events like 9/11, Talibaanization, terrorism, and Benazir's assassination. *Butterfly* potentially paves the way for a renewed female voice and position in Pakistan.

Material and Methods

Theoretical Framework

It is a critical study that uses the notion of postfeminist sensibility proposed by Rosalind Gill. Textual analysis along with close study of the texts allows the data to be analyzed and interpret qualitatively. Gill perceives postfeminism as a cultural phenomenon and a modern day sensibility rather than a personal or political perspective. It focuses on agency, individualism, choice, empowerment through (self)surveillance and discipline. It probes the prevalence of a makeover paradigm, resurgence of natural sexual differences and traditional gender roles. It identifies femininity as a bodily property and shifts women from object to subject position; forming sexualization of culture, consumerism and commodification, these issues get complicated by intersectional elements like race, class, age, and sex. The roots of postfeminism lie in neoliberalism and globalization which complicate the visibility and sensibility of contemporary Pakistani womanhood. Chandra Mohanty's (2003) critique on white supremacist monolithic feminism declining the myth of universal sisterhood and accepting/ respecting differences and Simidele Dosekun's (2015) ideas of transcultural feminism focusing hyperstylized identity of colored women which is characterized by artificial aesthetic procedures that unknowingly domesticize and internalize Western culture, have been included to address complications of Pakistani chick lit. This concoction explores how this genre repositions Pakistani female sensibility, highlights new female visibilities, challenges stereotyping of Pakistani females, contributes to gender dynamics and expands the boundaries of this genre.

Data Analysis

From Objectification to Subjectification of Femininity

Postfeminist sensibility addresses the complex transformation of womanhood from objectification to subjectification in media and popular culture where women actively engage in their own re-sexualization and re-commodification (Gill, 2003). This shift raises concerns about the various forms of terror women may experience, anxieties about control over their bodies, and fear of sexual violence. The portrayal of women as autonomous agents who use beauty for self-empowerment often conceals a deeper exploitation, where women willingly adopt the role of sex objects. This blurs the line between externalized objectification and self-imposed subjectification. *The Diary of a Social Butterfly* (2008) discusses the subjectification of femininity in the novel, *Butterfly*, explores how women in her community transform sexual objectification into a choice, obscuring power dynamics. She reveals an encounter with a shawl seller who slips her to buy a *jamawar* (a kind of silk brocade fabric which is very expensive and marks the symbol royalty especially in South Asia) shawl in one lac and twenty-five thousand rupees but he has to convince her through "gaze mechanism" (Gill and Sacarff, 2011, p. 179). "But jamawars are so bulky, na, keh figure -shigure sub chhup jata hai. (jamawar hides well-toned female body) I feel as if I'm wearing a duvet" (Mohsin, 2008, p. 18). She shows her dissatisfaction with this shawl because it hides her figure. She enjoys being the center of attention at parties, her friend *Mullo* feels pride to be called "Yummy Mummy" (p.63) by her son's friends. The vocalization of these ideas through this novel, challenge traditional Pakistani feminist tropes and complicate the concept of *desi* postfeminist sensibility. TDSB views female body as an asset and offers nuanced perspectives on femininity as a bodily property making it is more complex than the societal and cultural construct of femininity.

Make-Over Paradigm

The women in TDSB strive to enhance their appearance and regain their youth through "make-over paradigm" (Gill, 2017, p. 617) which includes various cosmetic procedures and fashion choices. This is seen as a form of empowerment and agency that creates "the confidence cult" (Gills, 2016, n.p.) to make choices about their bodies to become objects of desire. Tonky's wife, Floozie, eloped with the husband of another friend despite being married for twenty years, "I should've guessed that something was up when she stared getting liposuction done on her bottoms and her chin, and started wearing see-through clothes in winter also After looking like an ayah for all this time, why would she suddenly change into a champ, I mean vamp, overnight, if not to phasao (to seduce someone) a man, hain?" (Mohsin, 2008, p. 2). The use of misspellings and Urdu words not only adds humor to the narrative but helps to add indigenous flavor to this genre. Botox injections have been mentioned by *Butterfly's* mother as a way to combat signs aging as a result she pledges to order two crates-full of this "*dawai* (medicine)" (p.63). The cousin *Jonkers* is described as being attracted to women based on their physical appearance rather than their morals. She describes *Jonkers* as "Always falling for the wrong types, with tight-tight shirts and lose-lose morals" (p.16). The new Pakistani women shown in this novel don't feel embarrassed in subjectifying their bodies, through surveillance, gaze mechanism than modifying them to create "hyperfeminine" (Yang, 2017, p.121) selves to become an object of desire. The new Pakistani women is not ashamed to become the "object of gaze" (Gill and Scharff, 2011, p. 209) through her postfeminist visibility as *Butterfly* says "I was all dressed up with everyone looking at me enviously (enviously)" (Mohsin, 2008, p. 119) she wants to be the "object of gaze" (Gill and Scharff, 2011, p. 209) and this acceptance of female objectification and turning it into subjectification is the discrete repositioning of Pakistan female sensibility.

Sexualization of Culture

This body obsessed femininity endorses “sexualization of culture” (Gill, 2007, p. 150) to allure the opposite sex. Butterfly describes one of the French polo team player, “All curly hair and *haraami* (seductive) smile and fat-fat muscles” (Mohsin, 2008, p. 5) and the effect this man is having on the women around is also described by Butterfly “You should see the Available Aunties purring in their slinky saris and plunging necklines” (ibid). The seductive reaction of the ladies show that they can’t help but to react to the polo player in a sexualized manner. She observed during an event of a cold foggy winter night in Lahore which was organized by one of the elites of Pakistan, “*Uff*, inside it was even more amazing, with all those thin-thin models in their little-little clothes and high-high heels. And all the silver-haired uncles lounging around on sofas watching them dance from under the lowered lid” (p. 35). TDSB reveals that the sexualization of culture is connected to consumerism and globalization. It highlights how these phenomena affect Pakistani society especially women and their *desi* sensibility she asks her son *Kulchoo* to “switch to sensible channels like MTV or B4U or AXN” (p. 24) when her husband *Janoo* constantly watched CNN and BBC during the incident of 9/11 and its global effects. Bollywood which has become a globalized phenomenon, has greatly influenced us, it has added glamour to our everyday activities and commodified our culture. Butterfly is also prominently influenced by Bollywood, she adores its actors, and its culture. She shows keen interest in “meeting Amitabh... and my favorite shweetoo-sha (very sweet) darling, Shahrukh” (p.47). During her visit to England Butterfly pays homage to late Lady Diana in her postfeminist way and i.e. by shopping expensive and globally acknowledged brands “Dior bag...four pink Channel ki lipsticks... Versace dark glasses... Goochy (Gucci) high heels six pairs. Just my little way of keeping her memory alive” (p. 78). The novel described an incident involving burglary and the thieves scolded family's daughters for wearing revealing nightwear because their female visibility was contradicting heteronormative Pakistani sensibility. The novel is filled with examples that refer to the naturalization and internalization of sexualization of culture comes out of globalization and consumerism. The *desi* postfeminist sensibility is further complicated by the formation of a nexus of neoliberalism and the status of a postcolonial state. Pakistani sexualization of culture is different from its Western counterpart it functions here through globalization, consumerism, foreign cultural influx and commodification brought by media, international luxury designer fashion and Western beauty products and procedures when it comes in contact with local culture, ideology and the system of values *Desi* chick’s sensibility gets further complicated and this complication gets more entangling when it comes with the temptations of agency, empowerment, choice and identity.

Consumerism and Globalization

TDSB shows that the repositioned sensibility is embedded in consumerism and globalization which is “commodity-based empowerment” (Harvey and Gill, 2011, p. 58) and they are rooted in “commodity fetishism” (Felluga, 2015, p. 51). It means that people ascribe symbolic meanings and status to branded products beyond their practical utility and attribute them with qualities like desirability, status, and identity. The protagonist, Butterfly, exemplifies this consumerist mindset through her desire for luxury items like Versace glasses and Dior's Saddle Bag “If it’s one thing you can never have enough of, it’s Versace dark glasses. And Goochy bags. And diamonds. And plots. And Prados. And servants. And bank accounts” (Mohsin, 2008, p. 137). She also prioritizes appearance over intellectual grace and valuing non-branded items less. The text highlights Butterfly's disappointment in not finding, a famous South Asian female writer and activist, Arundhati Roy attractive based on her standards of beauty and style. In her opinion, “She could look quite nice with high heels and ironed streaked hair and some of YSL’s Touché Éclair and

Landcomb ka mascara (Lancom's mascara) and MAC ki lipstick (Mac's lipstick)" (p. 59). Butterfly's laments over losing her branded cosmetic and styling products due to sanctions imposed upon Pakistan after 9/11, which emphasizes her tendency to buy things for their mythical value rather than utility in a globalized consumerist culture. The essence of commodity fetishism has an intricate interplay between globalization and neoliberalism, these two concepts mutually reinforce one another, shaping various aspects of societal life.

Neoliberalism and Postfeminist Sensibility

Neoliberalism has transcended its role as a mere politico-economic ideology, today it the modus operandi of "governmentality" (Foucault, 1984, p. 9) permeating diverse socio-cultural domains. The emergence of "postfeminist visibility" (Gill, 2016, p. 613) through the "new women" (McRobbie, 2009, p. 7) closely aligns with neoliberalism and globalization. This alignment has paved the way for a phenomenon known as "gendered neoliberalism" (Gill, 2017, p.609), which is swiftly becoming the prevailing norm within society (ibid). The novel addresses these issues when Butterfly goes shopping for international brands, meet international media figures like Shahrukh Khan, Amitabh Bachan, Hrithik Roshan, Mira Nair on her film launch organized by "Good Times magazine" (Mohsin, 2008, p. 127). The implementation of neoliberal market tactics has proven to be successful in bringing the international market closer together, establishing multinational business empires across the globe, constructing impressive mega structures, uplifting the living standards of people, and influencing the socio-cultural sensibility of modern civilization (Rottenberg, 2018). Pakistan has also experienced significant effects from globalization and neoliberalism. The TDSB accurately reflects this socio-cultural and politico-economic scenario primarily focusing on the lifestyle of the ruling elite. However, Butterfly also acknowledges the trickle-down effect of these factors by stating, "Every Tom, Dick and Hairy's got a car now. Even my wax-wali's (wax woman's son) son's got one. Janoo says it's because of all the car loans" (Mohsin, 2008, p. 135). Here she behaves like an elite snob who see the changing financial status has disrupted the balance between the wealthy and the less privileged which not only improve their living conditions but also aware them of their rights. She comments on one of the clerks of her father's office, "Like one of those clerks, all thin and reedy, who used to quietly, uncomplainingly work for hours and hours in Daddy's outer office where there used to be only punkhas (fans) and no ACs. And now they've got cars! And tongues! As Daddy says, 'Bhutto has a lot to answer for!'" (p. 136) It can be inferred that an enhancement in financial status corresponds directly with an improvement in self-awareness and rights these transformations are all attributed to neoliberalism as a gift or byproduct. Butterfly has mentioned former prime minister of Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto here, although he adopted nationalization as the economic policy for the country which generally aligns with neoliberalism yet he was successful in imparting human rights awareness among the masses through various welfare programs and labour unions. It has been observed in this novel that there is a strong nexus of neoliberalism, consumerism, and globalization which align well with postfeminist sensibility. On one hand they oppress and overpower the consumers but on the other hand they also enable them to assert their "visibility" (Gill, 2016, p. 613) and enhance their ability to make choices and exercise agency. In TDSB, Butterfly frequently expresses dissatisfaction with the changing traditions of Pakistani elite society due to globalization's influence: "...international markets were coming, Americans were happy with us" (Mohsin, 2008, p. 206). She exploits this cultural and market shift as a way to mobilize her agency, for instance, when America invaded Iraq, she participated in a protest organized by a local NCO in Lahore while donning her globalized attire. Her husband comments on her after watching her wearing Nike shoes "Marching against American imperialism in your new American shoes, I see? Still, I don't mean to belittle your efforts. Well done." (p. 74), it's her repositioned way of protesting against the empire. She gets angry at the double standards

of the West when they imposed sanctions against Pakistan in the backdrop of 9/11 “...our money’s welcome but we are not” (p. 75). These illustrations show that Butterfly is not a mere consumer of globalization rather she is politically woke and knows the dynamics of her agency and choice. She performs her social duty in her *desi* postfeminist way which is the repositioning of Pakistani female sensibility.

Pushing the Boundaries of Chick lit

Despite of all these conventional postfeminist sensibilities manifested by the character of Butterfly, the presence of local and global social, political, and cultural issues in this novel problematize the dynamics of chick lit as a genre. The exhibition of conscious activism by Butterfly regarding these issues complicates postfeminist sensibilities in Pakistan. Mohsin’s deployment of the character of *Janoo* is meaningful not only for the text but also in shaping Pakistani postfeminist sensibility. He is a foil of Butterfly by providing solid political standpoints and to balance the humor of the genre as well as the frivolities of Butterfly. *Janoo* hails from the landed feudal aristocracy of the Punjab and received education at Oxford. He espouses pro-democratic, equal-rights, left-leaning, and humanitarian ideals both in his beliefs and actions. Despite of his aristocratic background he invests significant time and resources in the educational, agricultural, and economic development of his villages in Sharkpur without seeking political advantages. He vocalizes his concerns by observing the increasing cultural influence of the Taliban in the region. He actively advocates for the democratic rights of all Pakistani citizens through various activist channels. Butterfly labeled him and his associates as "Human Rights Commission parhalkha, bore types (pedant or prig)" (Mohsin, 2008, p. 218) who make collective efforts for democratic causes. He has been seen taking keen interest in world politics and get seriously affected by it because it effects Pakistan. He shows his dismay at the reelection of George Bush as American president in 2004 due to the atrocities he caused in Iraq, Afghanistan and around the world. He kept muttering “How COULD they? How could they vote Bush in?... Look what he’s done in Iraq, what he’s doing in Guatanamo Bay, what he plans to do in Iran” (p. 124). On the state-sponsored murder of Akbar Bugti, a Pakistani Baloch tribal leader, *Janoo* was extremely disturbed “It’s not just Bugti, I’m mourning,’ he shouted ‘it’s my country” (p. 181). Butterfly also notices and comments that “not only the Bugtis but the whole Balochistan is up in arms against Musharraf now” (ibid). These examples highlight the relevance of the character of *Janoo* in this novel because chick lit is not a mainstream genre that can carry the weight of serious humanitarian or socio-political crisis in its plot but through this juxtaposed couple i.e. Butterfly and *Janoo* they have been addressed in a light hearted tone. Therefore, when Butterfly looks disinterested in regional or global politics *Janoo* takes the charge in this way, the issues are being addressed, simultaneously continuing the unchanged frivolities of Butterfly, and the essence of the genre is not lost. These differentiations sets apart Pakistani chick lit from Western chick lit due to the ability to address an array of complex issues. In Addition to addressing the typical elements of postfeminism like objectification of Pakistani woman, adherence to neoliberalism, and other bodily and material pursuits, Butterfly also speaks her heart out, she exercises her agency, vocalize her protests against changing values of Pakistani society therefore she becomes one of the Pakistani prototypes of a chick. This is where her *desi* postfeminist sensibility comes into action. Her foreign vacation trip has been disturbed by the impact of war on terror but she addresses that agony in her own way The characters of Butterfly and *Janoo* symbolically represents the ruling elite of Pakistan with all their grandeurs and trivialities. They strongly condemn extremism, Butterfly goes to an anti-extremism rally and she doesn’t care what other people think of her intensions because she knows her reason for participation. She enlists strong intersectional forces such as family, especially in-laws', class, gender, religious fundamentalism, societal norms, and particularly Talibaanization during Zia era, Kalashnikov culture, and militarization in Pakistan, which

have helped patriarchy maintain its hold in society and made women suppressed objects. This motivated her to participate in protest walks and processions, simultaneously making her prominent in her social circle.

Points of Departure: Repositioning Pakistani Female Sensibility

TDSB suggests a departure from conventional or Westernized postfeminist sensibility through its portrayal of Butterfly's activism within a *Desi* (Pakistani) context. Her agency and choices are cultural specific, she engages with tradition, although she is an object cum subject of modern day globalized lifestyle, yet she doesn't stop negotiating with her indigenous identity. This departure challenges dominant narratives about feminism, consumerism, and individual agency by emphasizing the complexities of gender politics within specific Pakistani cultural context. She has strong concern regarding the socio-political situation of the country, she points out the growing influence of Talibaanization in the region and cracks their ideology in simple words that "They tau are control freaks, yaar (they are control freaks my friend)" (Mohsin, 2008, p.199). The ways they impose their version of Islam and dictate culture is only to continue their control and hegemony over the oppresses. She mentions that they order men to grow beards and women to clad themselves and confine them to domestic space only, they stop all international trade, and interpret and mold laws according to their own wishes which favours patriarchy. She states that, "Then they will say that I can't inherit property... Then they will say *Janoo* can marry however many times he wants and I can't say no to him" (ibid). She continuously raises her voice for the women rights and against fundamentalism. She explains *Janoo* her reason for joining the anti-extremist protest, "THAT's why I went to the march. Because I've realized there's no turning a blind eye with fundos. Because they won't let you" (p. 200). Later in the novel Mohsin mentions the incident of Lal Masjid massacre and massive violence done in Karachi by a national political party, she openly criticizes president of Pakistan of that time and a famous Pakistani political party "shame on Musharraf, shame on MQM, shame on all the stupid who did this... I must remember the poor who died also" (p.205). Butterfly is so much moved by the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, former prime minister of Pakistan, that she didn't write a parallel bathetic title while entering her feelings in the diary. It is necessary to note one thing that she didn't show unconditional solidarity with her, she mentions that like all third world leader she had been a corrupt politician involved in fiscal embezzlement, abuse of power and creating ethnic discrimination but she evolved as a leader in the later phase of her life and above all she was a woman who was symbolically representing the empowerment of marginal groups in the third world. Butterfly is so depressed by her death that she says, "I don't feel like going to any parties, any weddings, any GTs (Get-togethers) even. Why? Because Benazir is dead... I feel like someone in my family is dead. I miss her" (p. 220). Owing to the complex webbing of modern lifestyle i.e. commodification, globalization, neoliberalism and consumerist culture she uses and endorses all international brands yet all these things never stop her to take a stand for the marginalized or the victimized. She has her idiosyncratic way of looking at things, which is mostly accompanied by puns, sarcasm and cynicism but this autonomy is a reflection of *desi* postfeminist sensibility in which uber, modern, educated, and chic Pakistani women, who is opinionated and doesn't feel ashamed in displaying them, is not blind of the happenings in her surrounding rather she is well aware of them and vocalize/channelize protest against tyrannical forces in her own way; and this apparently is not a part of our conventional trope of feminist struggle. Butterfly has her own way of displaying her political agency, which is actually the point of departure from the conventional feminist and postfeminist tropes. Mohin in a fun way refers conventional Pakistani feminist tropes in this novel when Butterfly urges to become a novelist. She mocks a famous Pakistani novel *My Feudal Lord* (1991) by Tehmina Durrani, in parodic way. She decides to name the novel "My Urban Fraud" (Mohsin, 2008, p. 9) and in the story

she actually mocks the life of Durrani herself, while revealing the hypocrisy of elitism, and the use of victim card by Pakistani feminist the following passage also reveals the comprador attitude of native intellectuals in stereotyping their nations and cultures.

It will be about a rich karobari (businessman) type, import-export wallah, who's been married thrice, dyes his hair, is 65 but has a thurki (flirt) gleam in his eyes. I fall madly in love with him and marry him, even though he's beaten all his wives before and beats me also. I have four or five children with him while he has affair with all my friends, and does huge ghupla (embezzlement), lootos (fraud) three banks and runs away with a maid while I'm on the janamaaz (praying matt) praying. And then I write a book and tell everyone about how I had a horrible mother, horrible sister, horrible friends, went to horrible school, married a horrible man and had a horrible life but still stayed innocent and trusting and religious. (p. 9)

This passage not only brings smiles on our faces but it also highlights another aspect of Pakistani chick lit and how it also departs from conventional Pakistani feminist tropes. Through this story line Butterfly reveals the secret recipe of a successful novel in Pakistan. The story portrays a deeply troubling and abusive relationship, where the narrator is subjected to physical and emotional violence by her husband, who also engages in infidelity and criminal behavior. Despite the narrator's innocence and trust, she is ultimately betrayed and abandoned by her husband, leading her to contemplate sharing her story through writing. Therefore, the themes of power dynamics, abuse, betrayal, resilience, recognizing and confronting toxic relationships, the potential for personal growth, empowerment and resistance have piled up the traditional Pakistani feminist tropes. Contrary to this Butterfly does not conform to docility, she expresses herself with voluble and often comic flair. She fearlessly challenges the traditional power dynamics within patriarchal family structures. She casually labels her husband a pedant and secretly names her mother-in-law "The Old Bag," (p. 120) and her sisters-in-law "Gruesome twosome" (ibid) Butterfly not only mocks them for their outdated ways, but also deconstructs the traditional structures of familial and patriarchal authority. Such elastic display of Pakistani or *desi* postfeminist sensibility defamiliarises the familiar and I assume such nuances as the paradox of postfeminism, that Butterfly's modern, elite lifestyle and silly socialite behavior must not be perceived as a smoke screen to her political awakening and activism rather her "entrepreneurial subjectivity" (Banet-Weiser et al, 2020, p. 13) enables to challenge traditional Pakistani female sensibility. Her confidence whether gathered from her rich financial status, bodily appearance or from other material things empower her to demand her right, stand for the marginalized and makes her a subversive character.

Conclusion

The complexities and contradictions explored in this Pakistani chick lit illuminate how notions of empowerment, agency, and gender dynamics have evolved in Pakistan and problematized the traditional tropes of Pakistani feminism. This novel not only discusses the intricacies of Pakistani postfeminist sensibility affected by globalization, neoliberalism, and consumerism but also redirects contemporary socio-political, cultural, ideological, familial, gender and individual experiences contributing to a richer understanding of the intricate interplay between feminism, postfeminism, and contemporary culture. The article started the debate with the conventional definition of postfeminism where it has been considered a misnomer and a tool of recycling and reinstatement of patriarchy in Pakistani society. Ann Brooks (1991) deviates from conventional criticism on postfeminism and considers it as an anti-essentialist standpoint. Rosalind Gill calls postfeminism a sensibility that contemporary woman owns today. The acceptance of these sensibility by colored

women compelled Doeskun to observe it as a transcultural and transnational phenomenon. The addition of Mohanty's critique on white supremacist, monolithic feminism and accounting third world women agentic complicates the idea of Pakistani postfeminist sensibility. Through rigorous reading of TDSB I have deduced the following observations which I call the paradox of postfeminism. The scope of this repositioned sensibility must not be belittled by considering it as a tool for re-oppression rather it needs to be re-conceptualized on the same pattern in which Foucault re-conceptualized the concept of "power" (Foucault, 1978, p. 98). He was less concerned with focusing on oppression rather foregrounded resistance to power. He described power as productive rather than solely repressive. In this paradigm, resistance is not always direct opposition or reaction to power but manifestations alternative ways of resistance and struggle. The initial allure of chick lit showcased high-spirited humorous independent young women cleverly engaged in funny captivating narratives. When compared to Western chick lit which often focuses on consumerism, fashion, and individualism *desi* lit establishes emotional connections that navigates through complex intersection between tradition and modernity, individual vs family societal expectations, while retaining chatty humorous gossipy characteristics of chick lit genre. However, *desi* chick lit has multiple tasks at its disposal; challenging tropes of domestic feminism, problematizing polemics of postfeminism, exposing nuances of postfeminist sensibility, and providing contextualized (re-positioned) understanding of female sensibility. *Desi* postfeminist sensibility can be seen as an index of empowerment which enables Pakistani chicks to demand their rights, speak out for the oppressed groups or at least give a voice to their issues and provide an alternative way of thinking and resistance. On one hand, *Butterfly*, stereotypes Pakistani chick as a rich female socialite who belongs to the class of ruling elite, indulged in self-pleasures, brand consciousness, frequent foreign trips, extravagant parties and a highly individualistic self-centered person but on the other hand she is a loving mother who loves her son *Kulchoo* dearly, an activist who goes to anti-extremist protests, who grieves at the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, who cares for the future of Pakistan.

Pakistani Postfeminist Sensibility— A Paradox of Postfeminism

The slogan "personal is political" (Hanisch, 1969, n.p.) has been utilized to its full potential in Pakistani chick lit. Owing to the limitation of the genre Mohsin has tried her best to voice gender issues of Pakistani women, the idiosyncratic style of the author not only expands the genre towards inclusivity but also problematize and challenge the conventional female portrayals of Pakistani women in mainstream Pakistani literature. Mohsin has included personal concerns of *Butterfly*'s life like her preoccupation with her body, religion & superstitions, in-laws, international vacations, shopping, designer-wear, BMWs, weddings, divorces, scandals, get-togethers, Bollywood, estate affairs, and above all money i.e. cash-in-hand but she didn't ignore the reverberating issues of her country. *Butterfly* took political position without losing the laughter when it came to address the issues like 9/11, American invasion of Iraq, Kashmir earthquake 2005, the tsunami, Lal Masjid, Talibaaanization, Benazir's assassination and how they have affected her. TDSB also records the conflict between civil/military establishment of Pakistan, rising consumerism, foreign cultural influx, deteriorating situation of law and order in Pakistan, media, globalization and women empowerment. I call these understandings the paradox of postfeminist sensibility which means that postfeminist nuances offered by Pakistani chick lit are not just reduced to the adherence to oppressive tendency of globalization and neoliberalism only. I see Pakistani postfeminism as an emancipatory paradigm which enables young, educated, uber women aka chicks to execute their agency, take political positioning, without compromising their freedom since globalization, consumerism and neoliberalism have become a normalcy and their impact can be seen on third-world countries. Therefore, instead of condemning them as patriarchal and oppressive paradigms

only, Pakistani chicks have adapted this sensibility appropriating them according to their context and work forward in acquiring empowerment and executing agency. Pakistani chick lit does not follow the pattern of typical white supremacist chick lit, rather, it has problematized and complicated the genre because of many reasons e.g. its protagonist is a woman of color who asks for inclusivity among other chicks, the novel *TDSB* not only displays the personal accounts of the characters but also harbors the local socio-cultural and politico-economic critiques of Pakistan. Mohsin through her novel reveals intersectional forces, institutional practices and hegemonic strategies that grapple the marginalized communities and genders. On one hand, the new woman, showed in this novel doesn't feel ashamed of her material pursuits, she is not embarrassed to prioritize herself and her physical needs, she is not uncomfortable in vocalizing her emotions and making her social circle jealous of her success and she cannot avoid the impact of globalization, neoliberalism and consumerism, although they work together making a subjugating nexus against women but on the other hand, this new woman is intelligent enough to use the same power structure in her favor by creating new female visibility later maturing it into a repositioned female sensibility which gives her the confidence to face patriarchy, resist against hegemonic powers and establish her agency. Pakistani postfeminist sensibility is different from its white counterpart because Pakistani female identity is more rooted in its culture and more grounded in its context. *Butterfly* has a tendency to get involved into the mundane routine of her life simultaneously got the ability to criticize, comment and struggle against patriarchy and oppressions. This genre is still unexplored and I see it as a potential site of resistance and relatability in parallel to mainstream fiction.

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