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# Ruminations on Indian Women Fiction Writers

By

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9.

**Anuja Chauhan's *The Zoya Factor*:  
Foregrounding Solutions beyond luck in  
Cricket**

**Dr. Neeta Chakravarty**

*The Zoya Factor* by Indian writer, Anuja Chauhan probes the role of luck in the game of cricket. With her background of ad making and slogan writing, she has creatively conceived of the novel which was later made into a film. She has enriched the novel as well the film version with witty one-liners. This paper is an attempt to probe whether the successes in cricket can be better explained by the method in madness as propounded in chaos theory or by using scientific methods like mathematical modelling rather than by using Zoya factor or even hard work.

*The Zoya Factor* by Anuja Chauhan turns its zone of display from readership to public entertainment as it changes its format from a novel in to a film. This is akin to the author herself who changes her identity from an ad maker who is famed with iconic slogans like “Yehdilmaange more” for Pepsi, “Darrkeagejeethai” for Mountain Dew and “Tedhahai par merahai” for Kurkureto a writer who used her prowess for creative thinking imaginatively in novel writing. The narrative, too, seems to thematically project both, sustained hard work as well as luck or Zoya factor as responsible for victory in the game of cricket, although it does try to argue in favour of hard



work. Also, surprisingly, three years after Anuja Chauhan's book was published, Indian cricket team won a Second World Cup as if allusions to the first World Cup victory and the fictional success in winning the second one set the tone and luck for a similar victory in the real world. So, this paper is an attempt to probe whether the successes in cricket can be better explained by the method in madness as propounded in chaos theory or by using scientific methods like mathematical modelling rather than by using Zoya factor or even hard work.

*The Zoya Factor*, the film, starts with a commentary by none other than Sharukh Khan who introduces the audience to the major theme of the film, cricket. He proclaims that the game is much a religion in this country. People eat cricket, breathe cricket but superstition too clouds their mind. He also foregrounds the importance of luck factor in the game. References to many superstitions like that associated with a cat crossing the road, scratching of the left hand versus right hand and many others are alluded to in the opening song.

The film seems to be episodic as it starts with a rendering of Zoya Singh Solanki's not so lucky life. Like umpteen number of teenage girls, Zoya expresses her desire to have someone fall head over heel in love with her. Unfortunately, her hopes are crashed when the dentist she was spending time with rejects her. This is followed by other unfortunate experiences for Zoya who finds life playing havoc with her emotions. Whilst her boss seems to hound her for her



incompetence, at the same time, she also seems to give her new assignments as she doesn't have anybody else to turn to. Zoya's family life too seems boring but fortunately happy. The two men, her father and her brother, Zoraver seem to dote on her. The brother-sister love is expressed through his pet name for her, his attempts at trying to help her in her love life, his annoying comments followed by his sister's outrage. This epiphany becomes the background for the movie, a refrain, as Zoya keeps returning to the safety and love of her family after every episode of her life. It's here that we see the definition of a family accentuated by the two men who do not hesitate to voice their disapproval with some of her moves while staunchly supporting her and protecting her by facing even the unpleasant consequences of her action.

While the novel is written in the first person, the film has many witty asides by the character Zoya who directly speaks to the audience through one liners that provide a glimpse of the inner workings of her mind. This technique of depicting inner monologues seems to be suitable for the linear narration involved in her story. Besides, these cues help the audience to empathize with her and to look forward to the next episode in her life.

Politics of cricket plays an important role in this movie. Captaincy is lucrative not just for the responsibility it affords but more so for the prestige it brings in. The concept of patriotism is linked to a sheer game which is fanned by the populist mob frenzy. The plot undergoes a serious twist on this note. While the



present captain is worthy of the position, the erstwhile captain resents being relegated to a position under him. He struggles to show him down and leaves no stone unturned in doing so. He connives with his uncle who is in a position of power and the major part of the film sees an attempt by nepotism to raise its ugly head.

This change in circumstances in the internal functioning of the cricket team leads to a major change in Zoya's life. While Zoya herself is shown to have an aversion for the game in the beginning itself, it may well be because she is relegated to the second position in the lives of her father and brother who were diehard fans of the game. However, as chance would have it, Monita, her boss in apparent annoyance at her having messed up her chance of working on an Ad with a famous film star, assigns her a project of accompanying the cricket team to Sri Lanka to carry out a photo shoot. Since the photo shoot consisted of capturing the images of team India adorning new world cup jerseys as an initiative by Pepsi who wanted to use the image on all bottle caps, its importance for the oft failed Zoya can hardly be belied.

As Cricket fever never abates, cricketers become heroes in the eyes of the common man. A peep into the insides of the dressing room reveals a plethora of different emotions pervading it. For instance, Shivy's anger supercedes the player in him, Harry's superstition based on astrology and widely believed things like luck being ushered in by the cracking of the coconut



at the first strike, Robin's belittling of junior players etc succeed in sponging off the goodwill for each other.

The film provides a peek into the working of minds shrouded in the perception of power. One finds that as Zoya's tryst with her own luck continues, the shoot cannot be completed on day one as time is wasted as Robin proclaims that his shoes are a size smaller and insists on a new pair in the right size of Asics shoes proudly proclaiming his status as their brand ambassador. While she continues pursuing the team members, she is given a glimpse of different shades of emotions of the captain ranging from outrage at team practice time being usurped upon on account of the shoot to kindness at her plight.

The Zoya factor actually factors in on day two, conversationally, she lets out the perception of her family which had two cricket fans in the form of her father and her brother in it, of being lucky for cricket whenever she shared breakfast with it before the match. Zoya explains that she was born at the exact moment when India won the World cup in cricket for the first time under the captaincy of KapilDev on 25<sup>th</sup> June 1983. The moment she lets in the cricket team on this secret, all havoc is let loose with the varied superstitions associated with the game being unravelled. As Nikhil wins the toss and Shivy plays unabated, the confidence of the other players is boosted and the result is a victory for the team after a long spell of losses. With this achievement being attributed to Zoya, attempts are made at delaying her departure leading to more victories as she continues



to share breakfast with them while she awaited a chance to complete her assignment. She soon finds herself catapulted to fame as a lucky mascot for the game of cricket.

Humour is interspersed all through the plot by different characters. For instance, Monita's unveiled threat to Zoya, Zoraver's playful banter with her, her attempts at creating false Asics and trying to garner the support of the captain in the same, the solemn declaration of conditions attached to talking with the captain prior to the shoot like no selfie or autograph or eye to eye contact etc. Yet, the romance angle makes its debut in the story with Nikhil Khoda, the captain of the Indian cricket team proposing to her through messages on the breakfast table amidst a room full of players. Zoya is caught unawares and incorrectly tries to guess who the sender of the message was, reverting to Nikhil's message with a hilarious one directed at someone else. The captain is quick to communicate her faux de pas and invites her for a date. He clashes with Zoya time and again and then makes up with her. In time, he begins to fall for Zoya's obvious charms. Yet the love story becomes a battle of ideologies. While Zoya begins to see herself as lucky for the team and the entire country and even the media does not hesitate to upgrade her to the status of a goddess with countrymen linking her contribution to patriotism, Nikhil attributes success to hard work and focus rather than on sheer luck. His single minded devotion to the betterment of technique and form is his answer to Zoya's successful jaunt as a lucky mascot. Zoya, on her part,



displays a simplicity that makes the audience want to see her happy and successful in spite of the immense pressure being built by her boss, the Cola majors and the uncle nephew duo of the Indian cricket board, Jagpal and Robin.


Games being transformed into win because the bells fail to fall off or due to unexplained failure of the bowlers, batsmen and fielders of the opposing team or due to natural phenomenon like rain continue to puzzle one and all. Can these truly be explained on the basis of hard work? On the one hand, it is often seen that Cricket has its own share of rituals, it is not always won by hard work and success is often attributed to luck factor. Complexity of matters increases with each individual match being unique, varying talents of the sportsmen, varying forms of the same sportsmen in different matches, changing equations shared within the team, perception of hostility with the opposing team etc. Looking scientifically at the game, one can surmise that some games may be lost due to errors in judgement by batsmen, bowlers or fielders. But some others are lost in spite of good performance, for instance due to bad light. So, how can sense be made of all these factors in the interest of betterment of the game of cricket?

Although *Zoya Factor* is very appealing with the right proportion of romance and logic and surprisingly does not lose its quintessential magic even in its film format, it also successfully draws attention to vital unaddressed questions related to outcomes of Cricket matches. Perhaps, it also



implicates a need to carry out more systematic study and scientific research in order to seek answers to these questions. A scientific theory that may be researched in this context is the chaos theory. Chaos theory does not talk about disorder. It tries to find order. The theory has been used to understand co-ordination of patterns of movement (Kelso & Schoner, 1988). Another technique that measures trends in recent times is Mathematical modelling. This technique involves considering different permutations and combinations of relevant factors to make a sensible interpretation in the form of an equation that will throw adequate light on the interplay of relationships between the different factors. Thus, by considering different factors impacting performance in cricket, it may be possible to make sense of the statistical data collected over time. Further, it may also be possible to change the focus to the process rather than the reasons for a win or loss in the game. This may enable us to put our finger on those variables that are responsible for unpredictable behavior. (Kellert, 1993). Moreover, going beyond the statistical figures, if it is possible to measure factors like perception of relevance of the match in the big picture and of hostility towards the opposing team and further, if these can also be incorporated while evolving a mathematical model, it may be possible to predict both the behavior of players as well as the result of the consequent match.

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