Chapter -IV

Female Bonding

Female bonding is spontaneous and natural. In real life and in literature, one comes across scores of women with strong bonds among them. Sometimes, these women are sisters born to same parents; sometimes as mothers-daughters, sometimes as classmates, and finally, colleagues in the working place. They come together to share their life stories, their moments of agony and ecstasy and above all, they find the bonding between them, a liberating one, liberating their suppressed selves and enabling them to articulate and rejuvenate.

Countless fictional works of World literature feature female bonding. In the context of Indian English Literature, Anita Nair’s Ladies Coupe depicts the strong bonding among the women-inmates of a railway compartment. The novels of Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De and others portray female-bonding. Critics even go to the extent of calling the mother-daughter relationship as the mark of the first lesbian relationship. Marian Engel’s novels feature strong female-bonding of which this chapter aims to analyze.

Engel’s Sarah Bastard’s Notebook depicts female worlds and Engel’s commitment to writing about women’s experiences. The novel opens with the death of the father. This symbolic end of paternal authority or patriarchy, allows for an exploration of the relationship with the mother and with other women notably sisters. Paternal fictions are discarded as maternal realities are explored. While on the one hand, the novel questions traditional notions of female identity, through an
exploration of the protagonist’s ‘Bastardy’, on the other hand, it represents an imaginative and suggestive attempt to re-envision female subjectivity in a different way.

Modernity’s displacement of the ‘paternal fictions’ is well illustrated in Sarah Bastard’s Notebook. Sarah Bastard is the protagonist’s chosen surname, one she considers more appropriate to her than her family name, ‘Porlock’. Her conscious embrace of the ‘illegitimacy’ of bastardy pushes Sarah onto the social margins and into the space of the m/other. Entering the space of the mother, Sarah Bastard is the first in a line of Engel’s protagonists who probe the relations between mothers and daughters. “I have had, now, time to recover; a smooth week in the womb “(SBN 7) is Sarah’s symbolic opening reflection. Her father’s funeral has brought her back to the family fold – a firmly female space, inhabited by her mother and three sisters.

Sarah has three sisters: Rosemary, the eldest has a Porlock sense of propriety, a pretty face. She was widowed at the age of twenty-two and she got married again. Her second husband was rich and they raised six children ‘Peg’ - a quiet sister was the botanical artist and she married Eldon who was a lecturer. Next one was Leah and the last one was Sarah. Leah and Sarah almost resembled one another and the difference of their age was only ten months, Leah was a naughty girl and Sarah always was jealous of her sister Leah “I can’t be remote, I suffer from agoraphobia. Yes Mother, no mother, yes Rosie, no Regi; I hate, I love, anything but silence Just for attention, I take the blame for Leah, until they find me a clownish masochist. But if I fake illness, hers is real; I earn praise, but their eyes are on her naughtiness; get the hell out, Leah, let me live “(SBN 22). One day Leah left
a note; “I have gone away to get married, I am not coming back, Don’t worry – Leah “(SBN22). Hearing the elopement of Leah, mother wept a little and Sarah was satisfied that she was gone from her life.

After some years, Sarah met Leah in France, Sarah was both detached and in a panic of disappointment. The old ambivalence towards Leah had returned. The threat of rivalry was no more since they were completely on different levels. Even then Sarah envied Leah as she was a glorious object. Her husband Sandro was handsome and she had two sons. The good behaviour of Sandro made Sarah to move towards him and she fell in love with Sandro which led her to the abortion of Antonio. Sarah felt guilty of cheating Leah and she decided to move away from Sandro. From the childhood Sarah envied her sister Leah, even this may be the reason for her relation with Leah’s husband Sandro. When Sarah met Sandro for the first time she got envied on the happy life of Leah. But Leah was a normal as before. This made Sarah to feel guilty and she moved away from their life.

Engel’s presentation of the mother-daughter relationship suggests a vital role for the mother in the formation of female identity and artistic expression. Maternal embrace in Engel’s work is more a reconciliation than destination. In this novel, Sarah moves away from the father(s) towards reunion with her m/other(s). In Engel’s work both daughters’ and mothers’ voices are heard. She allows both daughters and mothers to speak. Their voices express love and admiration but also dislike and irritation. Thus her novels articulate a rejection of idealization and dichotomous choice. She reveals the rich texture of women’s lives by exploring both sides of their relationships and experience as mothers and daughters.
Sarah was away from her family due to her studies and her job as a lecturer at the University. In that period she was revolving around with men and there was no female friend for her. She was in love with a married friend Joe and then she falls in love with her brother-in-law Sandro. At that stage, she came to know about the death of her father. After a long period she entered into her family for the funeral of her father. Moving in to the maternal space of the womb, Sarah leaves the sphere of men in which she has been revolving. Her father’s death coincides with the dissolution of two affairs. The first with her brother-in-law Sandro had resulted in the abortion of ‘Antonio’. The second involved her married friend Joe.

Sarah though lived away from her mother for long time, she loved her much. Her sisters Rosemary and Peg though lived nearby her, were not in so much of love with their mother. Whereas Leah, “never had a love-hate relationship with her mother’s flesh – colored corset strings “(SBN 96) she also observed “no snugness of armpits for her, no glorying in repellent love “(SBN 97). Sarah has had intense emotional dealings with her mother, alternating between love and hate “until a certain age, hers or mine I never found out, I discussed hashed, argued, with my mother “(SBN133), “For a time we had hated each other, later and before, there was an element of fear “(SBN158).

As she had grown up, she began to understand the love and care of her mother. As her reflections unfold, her mother emerges as an increasingly imposing figure, “a big and not gentle personality, fear having constructed hard edge”; but a gentle mother “(SBN132). Sarah understood that wherever she go, she was always looking for a pair of arms “(SBN145). It becomes clear that her mother has played a more significant role in Sarah’s life, than the initial focus on father and brother-in-
law suggests: “Mother was us, and underneath all she believed in-love, mercy, magic – she had a toughness and a fear. . . she was all poetry, magic, power and strength you could light candles to her and make incantations. Now we have all expiated her, like a sin” (SBN132-133).

With this description, Sarah evokes, almost a divine image of her mother. Like some mythological goddess, Mrs.Porlock has power and magic, Sarah was totally upset in her life because of the breakup of her two love affairs and her self-determination of illegitimacy. She was in need of love and care. She has also decided to move far away from her family. This crucial step occurred towards the end of the novel. Sarah and her mother spend an evening together babysitting: the setting is overlaid with symbolic maternal signifiers. Remembering her mother in her maternal role, Sarah calls forth her own m/other self-the creative self, which has almost been lost in the land of fathers.

By legitimizing the sinful mother, Sarah facilitates her own assumption of self. To her surprise, her mother did not oppose her resigning from the university and the decision of leaving Toronto. She encouraged Sarah to take decisions on her own. This unexpected reaction of Mrs.Porlock sealed Sarah’s decision to represent herself. The socially admissible Dr.Porlock, “lady Ph.D”, is reconfigured as the less “legitimate “, Sarah Bastard-the woman writer,. The emergence of woman writer in her made her to depart from her mother and her family.

Another person who impressed her much was Dr.Lyle, her mentor in the university. Dr.Lyle was a woman of integrity and vision. Sarah desired to become like her, but she couldn’t. When Sarah’s interview with Toronto Star was published,
Dr. Lyle was shocked to read the message given by Sarah. She gave a quite different image of herself. The interview depicted Sarah as a vigorous and energetic woman. After that Sarah went to Dr. Lyle and gave her resignation. "Sarah, Sarah, you’ve never been able to distinguish between personality and principle. Before the high court of all angels. I could not defend your moral position. On the other hand, you have done your work well" (SBN32) replied Dr. Lyle and she found no way except accepting her resignation. Professionally Sarah was good but morally she failed to be good. As a lecturer of university she must be the role model to the young graduates. But she was not. Sarah compared Dr. Lyle to her mother, "When I was an undergraduate, I loved her, she was what I wanted to be" (SBN30). She described Dr. Lyle like this. But as her life path was changed she moved away from Dr. Lyle as well as from the university.

Though Sarah had two lovers in her life, it was only a for a short period of time. Her life mostly revolves around her mother Mrs. Porlock, her mentor Fr. Lyle and her sister Leah. Thus the female bonding has been portrayed in this novel.

Engel’s The Honeymoon Festival in many ways, replays the mother-daughter relationship. Minn Burge, the protagonist was a housewife and mother, awaiting the imminent birth of her fourth child. Her husband Norman Burge was a journalist and he was away. Minn Burge was living alone with her three children. Just as Sarah’s story revises the image of the dutiful daughter, Minn’s story explores and explodes the stereo type of the good mother. Engel is careful in expressing the mother-daughter relationship in her novels and the importance of mother in the life of her protagonists.
In the novel, Minn’s world was only superficially focused on her relationship with men. Honeyman—the Director was dead and her husband Norman was absent and Minn’s father remained in memories. As in *Sarah Bastard’s Notebook*, the men in this novel also were the back drop to the more important exploration of the relationship with the mother. This novel was deeply interested in the bond between Minn and her mother Gertrude Williams. Everything in the novel leaned towards this. Though the novel insists Minn as the mother of nearly four children and repeatedly drawing attention to her pregnant body, it also presents her as the daughter of the indomitable Gertrude.

Gertrude Williams was an imposing woman—“nearly six feet tall and her hair is crimped in a cruel marcella wave” *(THF 63-64)*. She attended university before her marriage—“first girl in the district to go” *(THF53)*. She remained first and foremost a perfect housekeeper and disciplinarian. She was also a strict mother as Minn recalled, “she had commanded battalions. You knew that from the way she stood” *(THF93)*. Minn was taught to make lists and finish things “Build! Organise! Preserve! “were the guiding concepts of her mother’s world, together with the belief in progress *(THF 68)*. Minn’s was a stern upbringing. She had grown up “in orthopaedic shoes and school uniforms and being fed shepherd’s pie and Lancashire hot-pot” *(THF135)*. But nobody laughed at her as they were all scared at her mother. Even at university also the guys used to say, “she’s a great kid, but don’t let her take you home for the weekend, she has this mother” *(THF 81)*. Thus Minn remained alone without friends.

After marriage, Minn began to live on her own way. She was not a perfect mother or disciplinarian as her mother Gertrude. She was an imperfect mother and
undisciplined house keeper. But to her surprise, she discovers that her house reflects her mother’s style more than her own. “Did she so much love Gertrude that she made her house again? Was she like her, staunch, starched, domineering, hiding all hurt? It has to be done, it shall be done: and firm feel approaching. Were the children wild because she refused to be Gertrude?”(THF 124) she wondered. Though Minn wanted to follow her own style of housekeeping practically she followed the way of her mother. The practice and teachings of her mother were fixed strongly in her mind,. Thus unknowingly she lived on the terms of her mother. Another incident which happened in Minn’s life also reflects her mother’s behaviour.

Once, at about two o’clock in the early morning hours, Minn heard a knock at the door, announcing “Police constable here.” Minn immediately replied that “Mrs. Williams here”(THF149). Mrs. Williams was her mother’s name. She took on her mother’s identity, momentarily, incorporates her mother’s authority and met the law head-on. She also informed the constable firmly that without a search warrant he would not enter her home. The commanding power she acquired at that moment, was her mother’s. She refused the police officer to enter her home physically. She lunged her sizable pregnant body –her mother’s body- at the officer. She got all this courage as soon as she took the authority of her mother. Thus Gertrude impressed her daughter in all ways.

Minn being a mother, yearns for mothering. She lived alone with her three children, haunted by her past memories at the time of her fourth pregnancy, she struggled to fall asleep. In that situation, she neither longed for Norman her husband or Honeyman her lover, she longed only for her mother. She understood that
nobody could replace the love and care of her mother, the formidable Gertrude Williams. Thus the mother played a significant role in the life of Minn.

Minn’s need for adult company during her fourth pregnancy while her husband was away, was ironically met by a volunteer visitor who turned out to be her childhood nemesis, “Jane Regina Magill, the only girl she had absolutely hated in her life, the bitch-goddess of her year at boarding-school “(THF13). Genteel White gloves and administrative skills that symbolise her running “her house as if it were an empire “turn Jane-Regina into an imperialist symbol that creates resentment in Minn (THF 25), “She came to people and talked for therapy, she was an active woman and good at everything she did “(THF25). Her role articulates the cultural representative of oppressive and colonising historical British values.

Everything about Jane-Regina bespeak an imperial presence, and the narrative effect was to place Minn in the position of resistant Canadian, Minn was a cultural inheritor, apparent from her house and the furniture that recall ‘an older life style’. As the Canadian inheritor, Minn found her own house attractive partly because everything was deteriorating. Nothing was kept up the way it would be if there were the slightest hope of perfection in Jane-Regina’s terms. Minn’s lax housekeeping and lack of control over her children were implicit rebellions against Jane-Regina’s regal pronouncement about how a domestic ship should be run.

Jane-Regina’s character would never match with the character of Minn, they were not friends despite their shared past: “The meeting of minds was always difficult. There were ice bergs in the seas between them, ideas about class and competition, values, and the matter of Jane-Regina’s eyes which were fine and blue
and emotional looking, so that Minn stared at them hard while Jane-Regina talked, hoping that the words would go away and what made them so emotional would finally be revealed”(THF24). Minn resisted imperialist pressure, and she remained a Canadian. At Minn’s party, Jane-Regina’s empire crumbled in a pointedly personal way when her husband sneaks off with one of Minn’s nineteen years-old boarders. Jane-Regina thought that she controlled her household but she evidently failed to control her husband.

The relationship that Minn had to Jane-Regina was exactly the dynamic that Minn wanted to avoid with her own children. She recognised, that if she exerts power, her children would be determined in some way by that power, because revolt is inspired by the exercise of power. Minn’s wish for her own children doubled as a hope that future generations of Canadians may avoid overwhelming and emotionally crippling expectations from the past. Yet Minn’s response to Jane-Regina was to wait, not to make a heroic stand to battle her imperial influence.

Annabel McGregor was another friend of Minn. She was a doctor. This friendship also had some controversy. Annabel and Minn had different opinions on the way of living. Once when Annabel wrote a letter to Minn she quoted that Minn was not living realistically. Minn queried, “who lives realistically?. Whence comes the gift for realism? And Annabel. Anyway, what is reality? “(THF 38-39). Minn’s interrogation results in numerous lengthy reflections in the novel on what constitutes “reality “. “All I have got is what reality I know, Western civilization is founded on plumbing and toileting and may founder on them., I take my kids and I stuff one end and tend the other . . . Call me an engineer of alimentary canals. Annabel, and don’t get huffy about me and reality “(THF40). This was the long reply of Minn to
Annabel. According to Minn, reality lies in mothering. She explained Mothering lies at the root of reality, along with other experiences specific to women. Physical experiences in particular female corporeality-constitute reality. Many fail to understand this. Thus the opinion of reality of life varies between Minn and her friend Annabell. Apart from the relationship with her mother, all the friendships which Minn had in her life, were not deep or enjoyable. She was not close with them and she did not share any of her past memories or present life with them. Thus the female bonding has been beautifully shown in *The Honeyman Festival*.

The novel *Monodromos* differs from Engel’s *Sarah Bastard’s Note Book* and *The Honeyman Festival* which revolve around the life of the protagonists, their likes and dislikes. *Monodromos* revolves around the life of the people of the Greek island. The protagonist Audrey Moore tells more about her new island surrounding than about herself. Indeed she seems almost bodyless. The ‘I ‘of Engel’s first two novels is thus whittled down in her third novel to an “eye “. Thus, Audrey Moore differs from Engel’s earlier protagonists. She is an independent observer of the world and its people. Engel herself described that this novel was written and narrated by a woman and “He “is impossible for her in that book.

Audrey came to the Greek island in search of the dog-headed saint ikon for the sake of her lover poet Max Magill. But very soon she discovered the limits imposed on women in that island. The women were not allowed to express their views and to live free as a woman. She came to know this truth by her only friend Aphroulla in the island. Aphroulla was an artist-the sole artist of that island who lived independently.
Aphroulla is herself a rebel. As a child she had wanted to become a painter. But it was unthinkable to her parents to send her to art school. The only way she could realize her dream of attending art school was to marry the island’s madman: “In order to become a painter I had to marry that madman, who was so weak and so much in love with me that he took me to study in Paris “(MD 75). Aphroulla explained to Audrey that she married, “merely to pick up a paint brush is a form of cultural rebellion “(MD 75). She struggled a lot to survive as an artist in that island with her son Alexis as her husband’s business have failed. But she didn’t get back from her aim. One day Aphroulla came across an article about a weaving woman. She wondered “my God she was doing beautiful things “(MD 77). Then she went to her aunt and got her grandmother’s wide loom. “I am a weaver now “(MD 77). Thus, Aphroulla succeeded in her life as an artist, Audrey admired Aphroulla and was drawn to her. She becomes Audrey’s psychic other in the latter’s halting evolution towards becoming an artist herself.

Audrey got some friends in that island through Aphroulla, Petronella a British school teacher, Maro a young girl and Dympna wife of Major Peter Barnes. Dympna was in love with Mr. Loizos Speridakis under whom Audrey worked for some time in that island. There was no deep relationship between them and Audrey was not close to them. In the novel, Aphroulla remained the close friend of Audrey. When Audrey left the island for England Aphroulla too left the island for Paris.

The novel Bear transformed Marian Engel’s career, making her more widely known. The attention Bear has received is due in part to its controversial content, which depicts a woman involved in sexual relations with a bear. The protagonist Lou is an archivist and bibliographer and turned forty, which displeased
her more than she had thought it would. As the novel unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that Lou is experiencing significant psychological problem and is in the grip of a serious depression she engaged herself in work, because she had no friends to share her feelings. Her husband Dick could be considered an understanding man and her three children were grown up and engaged in their jobs.

In this situation she got an opportunity to catalogue a library in the estate of Pennarthis island. The only companion she got there is the Bear. To Lou, the bear at first is no more than an idea, one that strikes her as “joyfully Elizabethan and exotic” (B18). She soon discovers that it is an idea with an appetite, it is not a toy bear but a real bear. She observed that it is “indubitably male” (B24). At the same time, the bear appears female, it has “a scruff like a widow’s hump” -(B24). Described as “a large hipped woman, dragging his bottom on the stones” (B55), “a fat dignified old woman with his nose to the wind” (B119). Thus the bear is portrayed as female and male in the single sentence that defy gender based rules of grammar.

The resemblance between Lou and the bear, reinforced by descriptions of their physical appearance, contributes to an otherwise possible confusing shift between the bear’s maleness and femaleness. Lou decides that the bear is “not creature of the wild but a middle aged woman” (B 25), “Oh Bear, we’re a funny pair” (B58). She laughs, Certainly the two are the oddest of twins in Engel’s work. Lou got the love and care from the Bear which she longs for. She feels loved and curiously peaceful with the animal and comfortable in the world. The bear helps to ease protagonist Lou’s tension and anxiety. Thus the bear helped Lou to satisfy her sexual desire and also served as a consolable companion in her loneliness. Though
there was no direct female bonding expressed in the novel, the bear was portrayed both as male and female companion to the protagonist Lou.

Women’s self redefinition, a major theme of Engel’s work, was also a personal experience, With ‘The Glassy Sea‘, the links between the author’s life as a woman and writer and her fiction are reinforced. This novel is mostly autobiographical. Diving into the depths of personal experience, Engel’s protagonist Rita Heber churns up muddy troubled waters below the calm surface of the glassy sea. Rita is a member of a rural family who are Catholics. As Rita’s mother repeatedly tells her they were “plain folks, country people“(TGS20). The family is famous for its puritan virtues. In this novel also the mother-daughter relationship plays a significant role. But when compared to Sarah Bastard’s Notebook and The Honeyman Festival, the mother daughter relationship in The Glassy Sea is patently painful. Indeed this is Engel’s darkest depiction of a protagonist’s rapport with her mother. Whereas Sarah Porlock and Minn Burge eventually achieve some understanding of and reconciliation with their mothers, Rita Bowen and Eleanore Heber (Rita’s mother) end up irrevocably split apart.

According to Rita’s family, they have to follow and satisfy the social expectations of women in her milieu. That is marriage and motherhood were the path, women should follow. The ideal for womanhood was not ‘Mary but Martha‘. But Rita wants to become Mary against the wish of her mother. Rita’s behaviour and outlook on life are a source of major conflict in her relationship with her mother. Mrs Heber was frustrated by Rita’s poor housekeeping skills and categorical about Rita’s decision to join the Eglantines. In Elanor Heber’s eyes, Rita is an escapist. In the bleakest of mother-daughter relations in Marian Engel’s work, Elanor Heber
rejects Rita and never reconciles with her. Despite her mother’s disapproval, Rita embarks on a new stage in life as Sister Mary Pelagia.

Rita chose the life of Mary instead of Martha because she was afraid of womanhood. During her education at University she had a friend Christabel. She was the perfect, beautiful daughter of a rich knitting mill owner. They were roommates and they became close to each other. Towards the end of the summer holidays Rita spent a week in Christabel’s house. Rita described it as a painful week. After that they returned to the university and resumed their old relationship. At the end of the second term, Christabel cried to Rita and John (Rita’s cousin) that she was pregnant. Immediately they arranged for the marriage between Christabel and John. Rita explained, “If girls got pregnant then they got married..... I felt about the lives of women; obviously a large portion of a growing fear of sex-in those days one was damned if one did, damned if one didn’t and I have always wanted to have things bothways – but I think it also contained a prophetic quality”(TGS50). Her fear came true when Cristabel’s life went beyond repair. Afraid of the married life, Rita decides to become a nun by joining the Eglantine house. And so began the happiest and most innocent ten years of Rita’s life.

The Eglantine House gave Rita a new name as Sister Mary Pelagia. Sister Mary Rose was the head and heart of the Eglantine House and she loved Rita so much. Mary Cicely and Mary Agnes took care of the garden, they grew flowers and vegetables. Mary Benedicta was interested in cooking and she was in charge of the kitchen. Mary Flora was the very old sister of the house. Mary Dorathy and Mary Beatrice did exquisite embroidery and brought income to the convent by making copes and vestments Mary Elzevir attached herself to Mary Rose and guarded her
fiercely. Thus all the nine sisters of the Eglantine House enjoyed the spiritual life. Rita (Mary Pelagia) also took a job as a teacher and helped to increase the income of the convent. In due course, Mary Rose fell ill and Mary Pelagia took the charge of Sister Superior. After some time Mary Rose returned from hospital and the sisters thought that their happiness would be resumed.

Then happened the terrible thing. One afternoon Mary Cicely ran away with a young labourer, she met while she was working in the garden. The same day at six O’clock the police came to the Eglantine House and informed that in their excitement that had run through a red light and been killed in an accident. Again Mary Rose became sick and they decided to close the Eglantine House. She also informed Mary Pelagia that there was no future for her in that house and she advised her to go to Maggie Hisbert, a social worker who could make arrangement for her better future. Thus the change in Rita’s life was swift and brutal.

Rita’s sister Shirley was totally different from her. She loved a luxurious life whereas Rita loved a spiritual life. As Rita entered the nunnery life there was no contact between the sisters. When Eleanor Heber died, Shirely came from Texas for her mother’s funeral. She could not found the address of Rita but however Rita came after two days to help her sister in vacating their house and disclose their small properties. After a long period Rita had a good time with her sister Shirley. She felt warm of being with her family. Thus Rita did not have any close female bonding in her life. She shared all her life experiences only with Philip Yurn, the Bishop of Huron through a long letter.
Marian Engel’s *Lunatic Villas* is a work of transition. While her previous works focused on an individual’s experience – one woman’s voice – *Lunatic Villas* presents several voices, both male and female. Engel herself described this novel as “[Lunatic Villas is] a domestic novel. It deals with the ‘everydayness’ and the ‘nitty-gritty’ of women’s domestic lives “. *Lunatic Villas* renews Marian Engel’s commitment to representing women’s reality in art. The narrative revolves around Harriet Ross, a single free-lance writer and her seven children. The chaos and confusion generated by seven children is magnified by Harriet’s dealings with neighbours and family, social workers and lawyers, psychologists and doctors, ex-husband Micheal Littlemore, friend Marshallene and last but not least. Mrs. Saxe an elderly English woman, who shows up on a bicycle one wintry night and stays.

Harriet Rose lived in a house Numbered 10 of Rathbore Place, in downtown Toronto. Nearby lived her friend and writer Marshallene and many others especially Sylvia and Vinnie with their aviary. Harriet though lived with her seven children she was the biological mother of three by two different men and the remaining were unrelated by blood. In this situation one wintry night there came an elderly English lady Mrs. Adelaine Saxe on her bicycle to stay with Harriet. Mrs. Saxe had one daughter and she was unable to trace her address. Harriet gave accommodation to her also in that house. Including Saxe, nine members lived in that house.

In a short period, Mrs. Saxe became close to Harriet and she shared everything with her. She introduced Saxe to all her neighbours and friends and took her to the aviary of Sylvia and Vinnie Palmer. Harriet shared her experience of past life with Mrs. Saxe. She told her about her childhood, her friendship with Fenella—Mrs. Saxe’s cousin at England, about her first loving husband Tom by whom she got
the black tempered son ‘Mick’ and also about her second husband Michel Littlemore, with whom Harriet lived for a short period and gave birth to twins Peter and Patsy. Harriet explained Tom as a kindest man she had ever met and Michael Littlemore, just opposite to him. “I was a fool to marry him, but a lonely fool, and he kept me company “(LV104) was her remark on her marriage with Michael Littlemore.

Harriet had two elder sisters Mrs. Magde and Mrs. Babs. Mrs. Babs spends all her money in drinking without hearing the advice of Mrs. Magde or Harriet. Because of her drinking habit she failed to take care of her daughter Sidonia and her husband Harry left her. Harriet adopted Sidonia and brought up her one among her other children. Magde helped both her sisters with money for some time. At last one kept a note to the lawyer before her death that each of Harriet’s children would receive a thousand dollar cash after her death. Magde loved all the children of Harriet and she was good to all. Thus the three sisters though lived at different places has affection on one another. When Harriet went to the funeral of Mrs. Magde she searched for the note by Madge for the distribution of her property and her funeral. At that time the lawyer gave her an envelope marked with her name and Bab’s in Magde’s crisp and spiky prematurely elderly handwriting. Out of Harriet’s fall three one-hundred dollar bills, and note that says, “For good shoes for my funeral “(LV 185).

From this small note we could understand the deep love of Madge for Harriet. Harriet was the single earner for her seven children. Though the neighbours and Children’s Aid Association helped her she could not live a luxurious life. Hence
her sister Madge, even after her death, gave 300 dollars separately to Harriet to buy good shoes for her funeral.

Marshallene was a friend and neighbour of Harriet. She was a fiction writer. She wrote about the residents of Rathbone Place, the ordinary common people. While Harriet wrote a column called ‘Depressed Housewife’ for ‘Household words’, Marshallene made her effort to express the truth of the lives of the ordinary people. Hers were the novels about the darkest selves of the people which they want to take away from them. Not only in writing, they had different opinion in politics also. Harriet gave her support to Roger one of her neighbours who was the member of “The Ratepayers Association”. But Marshallene who was not active in any political party hated Roger. When Harriet informed Marshallene that she was going to attend the Task Force Meeting and to vote Roger, the latter argued with Harriet “Look, I’ve told you a million time it’s a bad project, a colonialist cop-out and you keep stringing right along with them., I don’t know what to think of your “(LV 106). Harriet replied “My city has asked me to be on the Task Force designing a housing project for my neighbourhood. I ’ve accepted, I am not part of some neo-socialist-capitalist cop-out; I’m a member of the major’s Task Force, that’s all.......I believe in doing good. We need low-cost housing “(LV106-107).

Though they were different in writing and in politics they remained friends till the end. When Harriet was affected with parrot fever a highly contagious disease, and was kept separate in her house, Marshallene and all her neighbours took care of her. Marshallene served her with food, liquid and pills. She also went to the library and collected some books for Harriet to read in her loneliness. With the love and care of her friend and neighbours, Harriet soon recovered from her disease.
Sylvia and Vinnie Palmer lived in the opposite house of Harriet. Sylvia spent her life in a wheelchair and Vinnie was a lawyer. They had no children and they raised birds in their house. Vinnie and Harriet had a love affair and they met on Thursday nights for sex at Harriet’s house. Vinnie was in need of sex and Sylvia could not afford the need. Harriet too was living without her husband, hence it was easy for them to meet at Thursday nights and they did not feel guilty for their adultery. As Vinnie was a usual visitor to Harriet’s house the children too felt it normal and there was no doubt among them. As it continued without any problem for some days. One Thursday night Sylvia came to Harriet’s house and began shout at Harriet and Vinnie. “Vinnie come home “ says Sylvia. . . “Vinnie either you live in this woman’s house, or you live in my house. Vinnie, I know what’s been going on, and I don’t like it. Screwing Harriet is an act of adultery. Vinnie and it’s grounds for divorce “(LV171).

Like trapped school children, both Vinnie and Harriet examined their fingernails at length. Melanie came to their rescue “You can’t sleep with him, Sylvia and it’s not as if Mum’s doing something awful like one-night stands. Adult’s are very bad-tempered when they don’t get their sex “(LV172). Harriet felt sorry for that moment and she said, “I’m sorry. It was a practical arrangement and we thought it wouldn’t hurt anybody. But I can see we were wrong”(LV173). Sylvia expressed that she was a bad mother and hearing that Mick grew in anger suddenly and turned against Sylvia, “Gerah .... geddout. Yer a mean old bitch “(LV173). Vinnie pushed her wheelchair back to their home. The misunderstanding between Harriet and Sylvia lasted for some time. When Harriet was affected by parrot fever at the end of
the novel Sylvia felt guilty for that. Again they all joined together happily at the recovery of Harriet Rose.

Susan Forbush, a well-to-do social worker. Married Harriet’s second husband Micheal Littlemore. Towards the end of the novel she filed a case against Harriet Rose that she was having too many children in her house with low income. Her complaint was, as Harriet could not afford all her children a better future, she claimed the twins Peter and Patsy who were Micheal Littlemore’s children. Though Harriet did not wish to give her twins she accepted the judgement that the children should spend the summer with Susan and Michael and if they wished to stay with them forever they could stay otherwise they could return to Harriet Ross. Harriet’s only consolation and happiness in the world was her children only. But she accepted the judgement. At the end Peter and Patsy wished to return to Harriet. Thus Harriet Ross won the love of her children, and remained good to all.

Thus, female bonding in all its hues has been both realistically and imaginatively portrayed by Engel in her works. The next chapter deals with the serious search made by Engel’s protagonists to carve their own identities.