CHAPTER IV
CREATION OF SELF IN SHOBHA DE’S
SISTERS

Shobha De, a feminist novelist, tacitly discusses very sensitive aspects of human life. Emphasizing the power politics in man-woman relationship, she lightens the exploitative base of patriarchal Indian social structure. One of the major reasons of her popularity as a writer confers to her ability to portray the psyche of an urban woman, threatening the paradigms of the patriarchy by exhibiting their sexual appetites and self sufficient natures. Through her fictions Shobha De attempts to turn the conventional social pattern upside down. “She constantly tries to shatter patriarchal hegemony and raises a voice of protest against the male dominance.”

As a modern Indian English woman writer, De has made her debut by publishing Socialite Evenings (1989); a journey of a prominent Bombay socialite Karuna, from marginalization to the self- sufficiency. It powerfully exhibits the subaltern existence of a woman in a suffocated Indian marriage system. The publication of the Starry Nights (1991) brought with itself an uncompromising title to De i.e. “the princes of pornography”. It is a candid and frank expression of love and lust of Asha Rani, a film star; being a realistic picture of contemporary India, in a male dominated society, it focuses on the sexploitation of women in a male-dominated society.

Strange Obsession (1992) forcefully depicts the lesbian relationships of two young women, Amrita and Meenakshi. Snapshots (1995) surprisingly exposes the snapshots of the past commonly shared by six women in the story, Aparna, Rashmi, Swati, Reema, Surekha and
Noor. Shockingly the memories bring to the surface the candid acceptance of their sexual appetites, lesbian relationships, exploitation and inner grudge against self-suffocation. Second Thoughts (1996) is an obsessive story of a young middle class Bengali girl, born and bred in Cucutta, who marries a Bambay based foreign returned Bengali, Rajan. It is a slice of Indian married woman’s life; after getting married life stands still creating potential platforms for betrayals. Though Maya involves in Nikhil, she discovers that it is uneasy to shake the firm foundation of her upbringing. Small Betrayals (1995) is a collection of short stories fairly explores “the average experiences of betrayal in its infinite variety and reached the core of uncertainties and complexities of life that never dissolves and resolve completely.”

Shooting From the Hips (1994) is again an exciting volume of essays and short stories which brilliantly delineates some prominent Indian figures from P. V. Naramsimha Rao to Asha Bhonsale and also discusses Indian social and cultural life. After all Selective Memory (1998) becomes latest landmark, an autobiography, in her literary career. She has honest expression to her perceptions through selective memories from her life.

In all her fictions, Shobha De has portrayed the anguished psyche of women who endeavours to struggle to acquire meaning in the male dominating world. The evolutionary feminist ideologies which are inherent to women’s movement are surfacing the conventional social patterns. Among all of the fictions by De, Sisters (1992) stands apart due to its peculiar mixture of acceptance of conventional notions and the inner urge of feminine soul to blur the boundaries of patriarchal inhibition.

The portrait of the urban woman has been delineated with great sympathy as she herself states “I feel very strongly about the women’s
situation.” She recognizes the displacement and marginalization of women in the male centred Indian society. Patriarchal hegemony, being a constant threat to women’s empowerment, has been challenged by the women characters of De. They search for the genuine identity and in the process conflicts with the power structure. This brings about the transformation in the subject itself and the power structure. De’s women are capable of the transfiguration in the suffocating patriarchal paradigms.

Shobha De as a writer and her fictions belong to the ‘female phase.’ This is a phase in which a subject searches for the genuine identity.

It is in this stage that the quest for freedom is turned inward and aimed at the goal of self-discovery.... the female phase of courageous self exploration, carries with it the double legacy of feminine self hatred and feminist withdrawal. It marks the development of a separatist, woman-centred literature of inner space.\textsuperscript{5}

Being the modern woman novelist, her women characters explores the utopia where the new notions of womanhood can be located. They are posed against the all forms of the traditional norms of marriage, morality and are more liberal in the sexual matters. It is due to the impact of psychoanalysis towards sexuality which has provided ample space for new women to find their own self through sexuality. These women not only enjoy the sex outside marriage but also enjoy lesbian form of sexuality. It can be said that the antagonistic woman-woman relation has been improved a lot in this phase as they are not apathetic towards each other but find solace in each other’s company; they do not enunciate on the behalf of patriarchal tradition, instead they promote the aberrations.
Shobha de’s *Sisters* is certainly a novel of sisterhood, journeys from antipathy to sympathy of women towards each other. It delineates the word of fabulous and intriguing business tycoons and the women portrayed in the novel belong to the aristocratic strata. Their economic status unquestionably provides them mobility to move from the patriarchal suffocation to the most liberal states of womanhood where they can cohabit with confidence in themselves as possession of money is the prime criterion of power. Hence the economic status of woman counts a lot for women’s liberation. The economically disadvantaged women spent their whole life in acquiring livelihood for themselves and their family. Being dependent on a man, they live their life more or less like a slave, serving their ‘men god’ while Middle class is nonetheless the more conventional class. Middle class women/people are the preservers of the moral and ethical values so the middle class women are more imprisoned in the power structure than the poor and aristocratic women are.

To speak about the elite stratum, it is governed by the capitalistic values and philosophy. Having based on the profit principle, capitalism does not count the ethical principles. In this stratum the individual pleasures and profits are more valued than any other moralistic notions. The individuals obtain more freedom due to the liberal principles. The scrutiny of the self is feasible in this environment since the pleasure and profit principle governs the mind-sets.

The women of this class too get the mobility like men to acquire pleasure; this pleasure principle drives them towards individual and sexual freedom. Shobha de is apt to say, “Eventually, everything boils down to money—that great leveller. There can be no talk of independence for women, without economic self-sufficiency. An
independent mind or free spirit is meaningless so long as the body and soul are being kept together by somebody else.”

Judged by the above criterion, though the women portrayed in the novel belong to the upper-class stratum; they are not devoid of gender discrimination. They face the humiliation of being a ‘second sex;’ the capitalist philosophy in India does not transfigure the fate of women. Shobha de writes:

Eventually, every relationship is a power struggle either on an overt or subliminal level.... Control over the situation has been a male prerogative over the centuries. Women’s destinies have been determined largely in that context alone.... It is time they were made aware of their own potential and power. 7

The position of women in India is largely determined by the patriarchal principles rather than capitalistic value system. The gender biased free mind-sets are absent. The society is based on power relationships where women are subdued, subordinated and subalterns. In Shobha de’s novels the value of equivalence of power has been emphasised. Whenever this balance collapses, there is “tension in the society and double dealings and hypocrisy predominate.” 8 The Indian social panorama has been transpiring providing more advantage for women to face the contemporary problems and efficiently compete with men but men are unwilling to accept the amendment, “many men expressed their anxiety over the changed power equation.” 9

The chairing of power by women has made a great difference not only to their own status but also to men’s. They have to accept the challenge to washout the prejudices about their capabilities and
intelligence in gender illiterate social framework. Men do not have confidence in women’s competencies and proficiencies. The feeling of being dominated by women haunts them as Men discover themselves being bossed over by ‘a woman’. At the domestic sphere they are the dominators and the women are the dominated while in the business sphere the scene changes to reverse which creates anxiety to watch the female body having acquired the power position. The situation creates struggle to acquire power once again by neglecting the accomplishments of women. The patriarchal prejudices have put forth the stumbling block before both men and women for equal power distribution. The modern women have to face the challenges of globalization at the same time they have fight against the conventional prejudices against them.

Shobha De’s *Sisters* powerfully delineates the modern woman who has the capabilities to menace the patriarchal subversive strategies. The author has projected the two aspects of femininity; the one, being a fine illustration of transition towards feminist position, projects the traditional aspect of womanhood and other is modern. Through two women characters she has transpired the ever changing core of femininity. De has portrayed the lives of the two half sisters, Mallika Hiralal and Alisha Mehta. Mallika is a combination of tenderness of femininity and force of assertiveness while Alisha is thoroughly strong headed and rebellious. The novel is a conflict between these two women who achieve at the end of the novel the desired ‘sisterhood.’ E. Satyanarayana views this novel as “the psychic conflict in its liberated woman-protagonist who is caught between a ‘personal self’ and a ‘social self’.”

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4.1 The Women of First Generation: Passive Receivers of Patriarchy:

Before halting to the modern portrait of the women, it is significant view the old generation of women who are more submissive to accept the patriarchal ideologies without questioning the credibility of its values. Mikki’s mother, Malatiben, is a representative of traditional Indian wife of the first generation, as Aleyooty Ammachi and Mammachi are. She is the passive recipient of the commands of her husband; she is treated like a doll for the exhibition of Hiralal’s industry; her position in Hiralal’s life is not much improved than Leelaben’, Hiralal’s concubine. Both of them are used for either as a commodity to show off or pleasure. As he is a fastidious man; he inspects his wife before going to parties and often tell her to change her sari or replace an old hand bag with new. Her mother is shown as totally confined to the domestic affairs and her father looks after the external affairs. Even she is aware of the illicit relationship between her husband and Leelaben, she cannot speak about it at all. She willingly accepts the authority of her husband over her life and does not think of interfering in his extra-marital affairs. Even Mikki thinks, “how ironic it was that her father should’ve spent a major portion of his day with both of them observing him, while his loyalties remained elsewhere—with two other women...”

Leelaben is too an exploited as she is kept as mean of sexual gratification. She too is conscious of the abuse she and her daughter suffer from. So she never dares to attend Hiralal’s funeral since she perceives the truth that socially she is non-existant in Hiarala’s life. Hence she prohibits her daughter to do so. The sexual licentious behaviour transport social deprivation only to women and not to the men. Hence Ammu is bereaved from the social as well as filial advantages.
while Chako is safeguarded by the system itself, instead he is provided with the ‘need’. The lives of women of the first generation are succumbed to the authorities of men.

Not only Malatiben and Leelaben but also the women from Binny’s family suffer the same fate. The portrait Binny himself portrays of his family and the duties of the women are conventional. Though he belongs to a business family, the watertight compartment between the womanly duties and the manly duties are clearly done to which he introduces Mikki after his marriage.

The study of the portrait of the women of first generation evokes the ‘feminine mystic’ image. The economical dependencies, the patriarchal attitude to view women as commodities and lack of consciousness among them have thrown them out of the sphere of being human. Hence the next generation transpires considerable degree of consciousness about the exploitative nature of patriarchy and its tools.

4.2 Mikki: A Combination of Femininity and Force of Assertiveness:

The novel opens with Mikki, the protagonist attending her parent’s funeral. Her father, Seth Hiralal was a successful industrialist in the Bombay industries who dies along with her mother in a plane crash that causes Mikki to turn to Bombay from America. She is not a traditional kin of sentimental woman; the death of her parents does not cause her a lot of troubles as she does not bother to be orphaned. Her self-sufficiency and self-reliance nature is shown through the reaction she imparts on the very day of the funeral.

The loss of parents does not make her lose her self-control since she does not mourn her parents’ death. When Gangu makes noise by crying, Mikki chastises on her foolishness and sentimentality. She chides
Gangubai by retorting, “what has happened has happened.” The fear of being orphaned never touches her sentiments; she perceives that she has to “wake up and face reality.”

Mikki exhibits a kind of critical ability to judge her father’s character. She recognises that “Her father had been a man.... Quite a bastard too.” She steps ahead from the patriarchal norms where the possibility of criticism was rare when the patriarch was adorned with the unquestioned conformity. De’s women are more conscious of the exploitation of the patriarchs under the guise of care and security; they can view the world from the women’ point of view, since her father, as a father patriarch can be scanned as an oppressor. On her father’s funeral his real character is revealed to her when she discovers his illicit relationship with Leelaben, his concubine, and her half-sister, Alisha. The discovery of her half-sister arises in her a sense of empathy and pleasure.

After her father’s death, Mikki has to shoulder all the responsibility of the Hiralal industries and without grieving on her father’s death she successfully mounts the burden of it. Though she wanted to continue her happy and blissful life in America; she does not shrug off from her responsibilities. In the first meeting with the board she passes off confidently. The most important thing she has to face while conducting the meeting is that “she was being taken seriously. Or, if all ten of them were pretending, they were doing a bloody good job of it!” The pronouncement corroborate her apprehension of not to be taken as incompetent of doing her father’s job –a man’s job. When Ramankaka becomes reluctant to reveal the real state of affairs of Hiralal Industries, Mikki turns imperative about her capabilities handling the business matters. She announces, “I’m in charge now. And I’m capable of dealing with whatever...”
The patriarchal ideologies always pose questions regarding women’s capabilities outside home. Though the upper class stratum provides ample freedom for women to acquire sufficient skills, still men suspect women’s proficiencies. The gender bias is prevalent throughout the class hierarchy. Ramankaka informs her that the solicitors are not taking her seriously and the reason is her being a woman. He also reprimands her role as a woman. What was and is expected from her are just womanly duties. He puts:

Had you been a son, your father might have taken you into his confidence from a young age and guided you properly from the beginning. But as a daughter, all he wanted for you was a good husband—that is all. Your training, if there was one, was to become an obedient daughter-in-law in some prominent business family... 

The modern context also views the skilled women from the traditional point of view; the outlook is hazardous to the healthy growth in women’s personality development, confidence in themselves and their sense of being independent. All the efforts for good education have been taken by Seth Hiralal to send Mikki to America only to mend her into the frame of a suitable wife to a business tycoon and a good daughter-in-law, not a successful businesswoman, his successor of the Hiralal Industries. The probable rightful descendant of his assets might have been his son-in-law as she is his only daughter. The post-modern period has created the educated and trained women but the minds to treat them seriously and confidently are missed to fashion. So women are always mistrusted in business by assuming them as ‘second sex.’ Instead of accepting the absurd remarks of Ramankaka, Mikki aptly answers:
I can’t change my sex, unfortunately. That is the one thing all of you have to accept. But I can change just about everything else... and I intend to.... I don’t expect you or the others to give up your prejudices—but I want you to know that I will not let that stand in my way. This is going to be my show and I intend running it on my terms.... My genes are the same as my father’s even if my gender isn’t.18

The force of assertion is more powerful in the women of De. Sanjay Kumar rightly asserts that Shobah De’s “women are not going to be emotional, subdued and weak ladies of manners. On the contrary, they are to be assertive, pragmatic and strong.”19 Shobha De is successful in investing the male prerogative into the female body, which is not going to be subdued in any way. The portrait of the ‘new woman’ having confidence in her is nonetheless the panorama of transformation of the Indian social scenario where a woman and a man stand on the equal grounds, on the equal terms to strengthen the more humanistic values and attitudes.

The representation of the prejudiced attitude can be viewed through the solicitors of the company who believe in Ramankaka more than Mikki. It is not just because he is an experienced businessman but because of the blemish of Mikki’s female body. The perspective demonstrates the primitive tendencies when sex was correlative to the gender attributes. The transfiguring equations project a ‘new woman’ who not only imitates the manner of dressing like men but their ideologies to control and exert power over others.

This is a phase of feminism in which women are not only internalizing the power structure but also initializing it for subverting
prevailing patriarchal ideologies. The women of this era just do not display the feminine traits but they are merging with masculinity. Though the biology could not be changed but the prejudices about feminine gender can be subverted and thrown out by proving the efficiency in every sphere of life. Mikki obliges Ramankaka to adhere to her authority over him and other men. She never adores to be treated like “a simple minded, spoilt girl out to play at being a businesswoman.”20 A sense of respect is not sacrificed over her sex attributes. She is conscious of her sex at the same time of her capabilities of doing the so called ‘manly jobs.’

After acquiring authority over Hiralal industries Mikki works as an efficient businesswoman; she proceeds to recruit new MBA students to save Hiralal Industries. She looks after the daily interactions of the business. It is noteworthy that while operating the office work her sex does not appear to impede the work.

Mikki comprehends the financial requirement to support the Hiralal industries. Hiralal Industries caught into such a mess that without outside financial support she cannot save the industry. The first man to whom she can run is Navin since she anticipates that if they are pledged in marriage, the implication of their engagement is to assist each other in each and every predicament. But Navin keeps away business from feelings neatly. Navin’s mother doubts her proficiencies by calling her novice which hurts her sense of self respect. The disappointment of the first effort drives her to Binny Malhotra.

The peculiar personality traits in Mikki such as being emotional drive her to run after love and affection while her business mind exorts her to safeguard the business. The emotional trait in her personality
becomes combative in business; her love for Binny Malhotra is just a part of her emotional attribute and romantic temperament. Though Binny, an old, experienced businessman succeeds in alluring Mikki for financial means which later proves to be fatal for Mikki and her future as he takes over the whole industries.

The condition, he puts forth before Mikki for the marriage is to sign all her property to him before marriage to which Mikki has no option and signs it out of mere necessity, having no other alternative to save the industries. By possessing the whole industry, Binny Malhotra disarms Mikki of her armours, the economical assistance, and the real saviour of women. A woman without any prospects is nothing but a bird without wings.

The decision taken by Mikki is considered as insensible and fatal both to her own life and Hiralal Industries. The blame of the wrong resolution has been ascribed to her due to her identity as a woman. Ramankaka already denigrating Mikki, chides her on being imprudent by stating:

I didn’t think that one day I would be ordered around by an immature chit of a girl like you. A girl I’ve seen in her cradle. If only your father had given birth to a son—a responsible son instead of you, I wouldn’t have had to stand by helplessly and see my life’s work being thrown away so casually.²¹

The sense of loss is ascertained in the proclamation. The birth of a girl is itself an undesirable incident which transports with itself the sense of inferiority, displacement and deprivation. Instead the birth of a son promotes the feelings of superiority with the assurance of the preservation
of parental asset. Hence sons are always desirable. In the birth of a girl child parents experience the pangs of being duped. The son guarantees the gain while a girl inherits only the loss. What Ramankaka discerns is the patriarchal ideological standpoint on which standards the character of a woman is judged to be of inferior quality.

However may be prejudiced the observation of Ramakaka, it proves fatally truthful that Mikki has committed a blunder by entrusting a stranger to whose character, history and temperament she is unknown. Out of blind faith and romantic notions about life she presents an immature comprehension of life. She never suspects Binny character. But unfortunately, to her disaster, in her engagement ceremony when she is being introduced as Binny’s would be wife, without calling off the ceremony, he drives after Urmi, his concubine from whom he has two children. Being deceived on both of the grounds i.e. emotional and professional, Mikki feels dejected. Although her fate is unalterable, she perceives the intensity of the mistake she has done so far. Being acknowledged the futility of her relationship with Binny, she desires to break the engagement but it is too late to do so. She is practically trapped in a ploy having no way out. The preposterousness of the resolution she has made, make her an absolute deprived.

She’d traded in all that for love. Everlasting love. And now it seemed to her that she’d had been short-changed. Cheated. A sense of panic convulsed her. It was too late...too late...too late...²²

Having accepted the inevitability of the fate, Mikki marries Binny by forgetting what has happened on the night of engagement. Though her sexual encounters with Binny after marriage brings to the front her real
self, ironically the very relationship captures her right to freedom. Mikki as an individual completely transforms after her marriage. After their honeymoon in Bali for four days, Binny abruptly starts with business. She asks Binny what she will do after their return to Bombay and his answer is an age old pronouncement of women’s enslavement:

‘Be my slave, of course,’ Binny answered.
‘Full time?’ she pouted.
‘Full time,’ he confirmed.

Mikki said, ‘Darling... be serious. I am used to a busy schedule, a business to run... I can’t just sit around doing nothing.’

Binny answered casually, ‘You won’t be doing nothing. Looking beautiful is a serious business...’

Hence marriage and slavery is compatible. A thorough businesswoman is impoverished from her power position in the exchange of parental care and love. Being a human being, Mikki recognises her secondary position in the rank of gender hierarchy. Now her husband, being a man, is trusted more than her and owes the potential of confidence. However seriously spoken, Mikki does not trust in the life of domesticity as she is habituated to the way of business living. Binny’s expression makes her feel being teased. But Binny is as much confident as she is in her destitute to blurt: “I haven’t married a business tycoon.” The term wife is clearly denotes the domestic sphere where women are supposed to be belonged. Mikki insists on taking part in the business but Binny pulls his eyeshades and declares tersely:

No. That’s not how it works in my family. Our women stay at home and make sure the place is perfectly run.
They fulfil their husband’s every need and look good when their men get home in the evening. No office-going. No business meetings. And you’d better get used to it.  

The picture of an ideal patriarchal society with its smallest and the most significant institution of family have been depicted. A man at field and a woman at home makes perfect combination to the running of patriarchy. Any willingness to subvert the structure invites humiliation and subsequently the resisting ideologies are discouraged by oppressing and denying the privilege. Oppressor exploits the oppressed as Binny controls Mikki’s life and her genius by depriving her from the participation in her business. Binny becomes her master to rule over her life and decides what she has to do in her life, a thorough patriarch born to dominate, exploit and rule. The class here does not confer any mobility to women. Hence Mikki as an individual dies in the marriage as her freedom finishes with it.

The aftermath of Mikki’s marriage and her life as a wife is more horrible than what she expected. Neglecting her altogether, Binny does not afford too much time for her. When Mikki complains about this, he catches her hand and threatens her not to ask him any question. He asserts:

In our family women are trained to obey their husbands. Thank your stars you don’t have a mother-in-law to please. You will never, I repeat, never question me... or complain about—got that? Your life is perfect. You have everything... everything.  

The atrocities done to women are prevalent in the entire stratum of the society. Shobh De is remarkable in revealing the truth of the Indian
society which primarily holds the notions of patriarchy instead of negation of gender inequality. Though educated and conscious of her rights, Mikki bears the injustices done to her on the one hand out of necessity and the other for love.

Maya in *Cry the Peacock*, Ammu in *The God of Small Things*, and Mikki in *Sisters* have been caught into the same mess of ‘ideal life’ for women. Mikki is in a perfect situation according to Indian norms, but she is as much disturbed as that of Ammu and Maya. Ammu dares to leave her husband but Mikki is effeminate to take decision to come out of the problem. Ammu can move to her parents but Mikki does not have any opportunity to avoid the oppression. Once again Binny reminds her that her ‘life is perfect.’ The perfect life for women implies getting married, having a ‘good’ earning husband to boss over, material prosperity to enjoy material pleasures and children to be brought on. All these delights she obtains by relinquishing her freedom, right to question or criticize. Such stipulations are called as ‘ideal womanhood.’

Binny not only gets hold of Mikki’s property but also of her sexual life. His next move is to take over her bodily pleasures. When Mikki missed her period, she goes to her gynae; the discovery of her pregnancy makes her jubilant. But Binny becomes furious to listen to the news; he does not want a child. The reason is not that he is not ready for fatherhood but he has already two children, a girl and a boy from his mistress Urmì. The news shocks Mikki beyond recovery as Binny intimidate Mikki to abort the child on the pretext that he wants her only for the sexual pleasure.

Thus not only Mikki’s sexual life is controlled but also her reproductive capacity. He decides whether she will have the child or not.
The right of recreation is denied to her. In the middle age, women nearly die because of excessive responsibility of child bearing. They were engulfed in their motherly duties. But in the modern period the means of contraception have given much freedom to women from the exhausting responsibilities from motherhood. But through the same method of contraception men can control their wishes of procreation, their right to become mother.

The marriage confines women more than men in sexual relations. After marriage men can easily slip to sexual relationships outside marriage. Mikki’s father and Binny Malhotra hold one blood of a patriarch. Seth Hiralal exploits women for sexual pleasures; he had concubine and an illegitimate daughter; Binny Malhotra crosses all of the boundaries of callousness and cruelty since he does not bother to press Mikki to live a childless life. She feels defeated from all of the grounds.

Though abominated by Binny, Mikki adheres to him as a loyal wife. The want of love makes her a dependent not only emotionally but also materially. She loses her sense of self respect on the prospect of morsel of love. Even Ammy displays astonishment over Mikki’s deteriorating sate of life as she bears every callous treatment meted out to her without any sense of disgust. The psychic slavery is more powerful than the physical one so what Mikki professes to Ammy is a fine illustration of psychic thraldom under the guises of romantic love. She asserts:

Ammy... you aren’t going to believe this... but I don’t want to fix him. Trouble is, I love the man. Call me a doormat, a slave, a victim, anything. But I feel hopeless and helpless.
It is as if I’ve forgotten what pride is... or ever was. He can, and does, trample all over me.²⁷

Patriarchy does not confine women physically, but they are enslaved and disabled psychologically to resist the hegemonic power. Mikki, a modern woman is disarmed due to the very patriarchal protective care and supervision, and orphanhood. To realize her ‘self’, she runs after the love principle since no one is there in her life of her own. But it cannot be overlooked that her ‘self’ is constructed through the deliberate efforts of Binny to make her “hopeless and helpless.” Her sentimental attitude towards love and marriage throws her to the domain of complete economical dependency. The reasons discussed above contribute to make her a slave to trample over. A well-educated woman surrenders her self-respect to the feet of her husband.

The discussion between Mikki and Ammy clearly reveals the derogating status of women after their marriage. A woman, completely dependent on her husband is likely to be called as a prostitute. It is viewed that she exchanges her sex and duties for economical safety. Hence they are not different from prostitutes. Shobha De rightly illustrates the plight of women being dependent on men. Binny never acknowledges Mikki in his life as a dignified being but just a thing to relieve him from the tensions out of sexual pleasures. Ammy recognizes the real state of affairs and endeavour to communicate Mikki her deterioration as she voices “You are nothing more than a legitimate prostitute; don’t you realize that?”²⁸ The question aptly recounts Mary Wollstonecraft’s opinion about marriage and the dignity of women. She criticises women’s foolishness to accept voluntarily their own enslavement. The portrait of such scenes in the twentieth century
literature clearly demonstrates the truth of the situation that it has not been transmuted from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century.

Mikki’s degradation does not terminate to the point of total surrender of herself; she is absolutely debarred from the business sphere and kept as a “canary in a gilded cage.” Then she retires herself to the more womanly occupations and trades of kitchen. On Binny’s advice she takes admission to “a six-week crash course in gourmet cooking being conducted by a visiting French chef in a suburban five-star Hotel.” This is the culmination of throwing back women many centuries to cope with modernity. In the most modern and enlightened period, they reside in the more ancient and dark ages of history.

The transmutation of Mikki from a business woman to kitchen takes place and she too relishes into her cooking business with Lucio, a gay with whom she has made friendship into the class. On Binny’s birthday, they both of them cook a cake in the kitchen for his birthday just to make Binny surprised. But the event offers Binny an opportunity to suspect Mikki as a characterless woman, to throw her out of his house and his life too. When Binny arrives unexpectedly to the home and enters into the kitchen to threaten them, especially Mikki. He thrashes Mikki, saying:

Fuck my birthday, bitch. And fuck you. If he is such a yaar of yours, you can leave with him. Defending another man in my house, you have guts... I knew I couldn’t trust you, whore. He throws Miki and Lucio out of the house by calling her whore. Binny is an egoist patriarch, a dominating husband who rules by the rule of Manu. Under her nose, Binny can enjoy his life with his mistress but a fair
friendship of his wife with another man he does not tolerate. A husband can share his extra-marital affair with his wife but a woman cannot make friendship with a man after her marriage. Her looking at another man is considered as the sigh of immorality and her friendship with another man brings doom to the honour of the family. Binny anticipates that as a mark of disrespect to his name and honour.

The most important development has taken place from *The God of Small Things* to the *Sisters* is that the integrated women’s movement is absent in the 1960s but the later period of late eighteenth century is more conscious of the injustices done to women at the same time they struggle to achieve the justice through women’s movement. When the patriarchal panorama of *The God of Small Things* is scrutinized the strife is solitary. There is no any women’s union against the repression, discrimination and violence they face in their life. Ammu and Rahel are the loneliest women without any support to defend themselves. This leads to Ammu’s tragic death and Rahel’s ever despairing life. *The God of Small Things* delineates the passive picture of women’s organization and institution. While the scene changes from Ammu to Mikki. Indian independence and the constitution has provided safeguard to women inside the domestic as well as public sphere. The violence on women in domestic sphere is an offence. Thus the inflicted women can get justice without any botheration of divorce. The modern woman is capable of procuring herself and her children without the assistance of any male member in the family.

Mikki at last realizes the outrage done to her and resolves to answer Binny’s vehemence. With the help of Lucio, Shanay and Ammy, she visits Bhawana, the activist-lawyer friend of Ammy’s. Bhawana advises her that wife abuse is a criminal offence. She says, “We can file complaint straightway—if that’s what you want—but I must tell you that
it will attract a great deal of publicity...”

Hence a wife is not a private asset of a husband. The domestic violence has been taken as a grave offence. Women get sympathy from the society especially from women. Men cannot dominate and treat them derogatingly as if their private assets. Women’s organizations which are wrestling against the gender inequity has brought the real period of ‘sisterhood.’

The notice of divorce from Binny which levels the charge against Mikki is that their marriage remained unconsummated and therefore stood annulled. Mikki cannot be convinced by the charges labelled against her which traumatize her psychologically. The trauma of deception and conspiracy lacerate her mentally. Conceiving the reality she promptly calls Bhawana for the further proceedings.

Mikki’s experience at Bhawana’s office compels her to meditate over the mass subjugation of women as she enters the office, observes the place crowded with petitioners, most of them are labour class women. “A slumdweller was showing her deep gash on her forehead, inflicted by a drunken husband the night before.... Mikki turned away. Was such a difference between her and the weeping woman?”

Thus the men from the labour class to the elite class hold the same kind of patriarchal mentality from which women have to suffer. The women of all of the classes suffer from the ‘wife abuse.’ Money or class does not have the ability to transform women’s destiny. The women themselves can change the outlook and attitude of the society towards themselves through acquiring economic independency and self-respect. Women have to contemplate about the necessity of marriage as a social tie to live delightfully just as their companion in life and not the Gods. It is a fortunate time that women from the labour classes to the elite are
conscious of their self respect, dignity and their husband’s brutality. The labour class women demonstrate the transmutation in women who use their legal rights to extinguish their husband’s abusing treatment.

Taarini, Mikki’s middle class former friend, romantic in temperament reveals middle-class women’s social position and their liberated lives. The most adherent and disciplined class which follows the laws of morality and ethics is the middle class. The middle-class women are more shackled to the social obligations than all the other classes. But from the instance of Taarini, it is evident that the renaissance has taken all of the spheres of life. Middle-class women too confess their true self by denying the superficialities of middle class ethical notions. When Mikki encounters Taarini in Bhawana’s office, Mikki astonishes to look her in the office. Taarini smiles wanly and says, “That’s what I’m here for. Yes, I do. I do have problems.” Taarini represents the middle-class women; she too does not want herself to confine to her husband’s clutches. What she does not get from her husband, for that she turns to “a humble trade unionist”, she confesses frankly. So she proves that women are not going to take the whole responsibility of keeping the vows of marriage. She shrugs off herself from motherly responsibilities. So it becomes difficult to imagine for Mikki “a middle class working mother betraying her husband and children.” Mikki shows reluctance to believe in Taarini’s confession. But Taarini openly declares her love for the man who is her lover. According to her he is the person who allowed her;

...to experience what love is. What sex is... with the right person. Now my husband is saying that I am a woman of loose, unstable character. That I can’t even visit my children on weekends. I’m here trying to get custody of the little one at least... he’s so small.
Thus women are on the expedition of discovering themselves who they are. The discovery of self is totally against the socially constructed image of a woman. The social code of being loyal to the husband they have broken down. The examination leads to the discovery that they have the same wanton and wild spirit as their counterparts have.

It is on the part of the society to recognize the true self of women without confining them to the traditional norms. The society still wants women to hammer down to the conservative social norms. Ammu, Mikki and Taarini are expelled from their consecutive husband’s house since they have not followed their husband’s words. Ammu does not endure Baba’s proposal to make her prostitute for his personal gains; hence she has to leave his house. Mikki threatened Binny’s dignity by making friendship with a man, the right she has lost in the commencement of the marriage itself; hence she is too exiled from her husband’s house calling a whore. Taarini is declared as a woman of loose and unstable character when she uninhibitedly pronounces her involvement in her lover. The further development against women is to declare them as unfit to bring up the children. Ammu is not permitted to see her children after the discovery of her love affair with Velutha. But Taarini has some hopes to get back her youngest son.

Mikki suffers from the alienation from the dearest people in her life. Being sentimental, after her parent’s death she pins for her half-sister’s company. The thought of having a sister provides her pleasure. She tries to make up with Alisha many of the times but Alisha’s hatred always hinders in making a good relationship between these two sisters. Mikki attempts to share Alisha’s grief over her mother’s death still Alisha tries to dominate her by insulting. It is only after Mikki’s departure from Binny’s house and Alisha’s utter disappointment in overpowering Navin,
both of them come together. Alisha cuts off her nerve and Dr. Kurein calls Mikki to look after her. Her caring and love wins over Alisha’s hatred. At last Mikki gets the most precious thing of her life i.e. her sister and her love.

The struggle to achieve dignity and justice from the atrocious deportment of Binny terminates on one afternoon when two of Binny’s senior executive informs Mikki about the news of Binny’s accidental death. The news gives an unexpected shock but her life is going to transform from negativity to positivity. She keeps her head up amidst the mess; she attends Binny’s funeral controlling her. Binny’s death confers Mikki the power over her own industries and life. The days in leisure are over and she loses back to the hectic schedule of office work. She calls back all of her previous employees including Ramankaka and Mr. D’souza. But she finds that “Her short life as a full time wife had spoiled her a little. She realized with a small shock that she’d got out of the work ethic.”38 The domestic life has ruined Mikki’s enthusiasm for office work. The sense of indifference begins to capture her spirits but she perceives that it’s no good for her and the business too. “The fighting spirit is missing. The killer instinct isn’t what it used to be.”39

Domestic life spoils women to the degree of passivity that they cannot find any wish to enter into the public sphere. Domestic life is a fare politics to keep women out of the claim of public sphere. Mikki was the successful, high spirited businesswoman but the life of kitchen has made her mind incapable to fight the challenges. Women do not get knowledge and hence they become powerless. Furthermore the powerful women accept the life of slavery. To make women self-reliant, they first and foremost should get knowledge and experience to fight with the
world based on new technologies and skills. Instead it is worthless to conduct the programmes of women’s empowerment.

Within some days Mikki takes over the whole business and overpowers all of the tycoons. This is a very new phase in Mikki’s life. She is just twenty-four years old but having a lot of experience of life. Binny’s death makes her more mature. She handles whole industrial affairs alone. In her personal life she is without any man to support her either emotionally or materially then also she is a quite satisfied and engrossed woman in her life. She does not pin down herself for a man for sexual satisfaction or economical backup. At last “Mikki would emerge victorious and free.”

As soon as Binny’s episode is over, the new chapter peeps in her life; the unknown phone calls disturbs her peaceful and hectic life. Mikki is courageous enough to face the mental torture of the unknown calls that threaten her life. She seeks the help of her father’s old friend, Ramankaka. The phone calls trouble her a lot due to the familiarity of the voice as she is sure to know the person who calls her but she cannot locate him easily. Soon after he kidnaps her only to discover that Ramankaka is behind all of the secrets. He reveals that he is responsible for the death of her parents through a plan and her husband too with the assistance of Bahadur Singh.

Bahadur Singh, a hurt servant of Seth Hiralal’s was working for him and through him he was threatening her life. Seth Hiralal’s, her father’s lust had destructed his life as he raped his beautiful wife. She died aborting Seth Hiralal’s seed. Due to the shock, Bahadur Singh became manic and decided to avenge on him. But Ramankaka stopped
him for murdering Seth Hiralal as he intended to use Bahadur Singh as a
mean to kill Seth Hiralal and take over his industries.

Ramankaka wanted all the Hiralal industries himself and he
thought that after Hiralal’s death he can be the real owner of the property
and Mikki will be puppet in his hands. He confesses:

If only you had cooperated, none of this wouldn’t have been
necessary. I was hoping you’d be a good, little puppet... I
would’ve pulled the strings smoothly. But no. You tried to
become a tycoon like your father.41

From Ramankaka’s confession it is evident that Mikki is beyond the
capacity of manipulation. She cannot be the puppet in the hands of men.
She is a woman who has the guts to manipulate the business and the men
too. She proves that though her sex cannot be changed but she has her
father’s genes. Her sex does not intervene to prove her as a business
tycoon like her father; Seth Hiralal does not need a son to save Hiralal
industries; his daughter is more than enough to save it, enlarge it and give
it a prestige.

Ramankaka offers Supari of lakh rupees to kill Mikki. When Mikki
has been caught in Ramankaka’s inescapable plan, she behaves like a
hero; she does not cry like a weak hearted person. Instead she bravely
faces the situation telling Ramankaka to kill her as early as possible. She
stands high among all of the other characters in her brave nature.

Eventually Shanay, Mikki’s well wisher rescues her from all of the
troubles and Ramankaka’s bullying. Mikki instantly recovers from the
shock of betrayal by overpowering the situations of her life. She instantly
takes hold of the situation sooner or later.
The striking parallel between Ammu’s and Mikki’s life is that both of them lives stand still at the age of twenty-four. Ammu gets sour experiences of married life; she hates her husband for what he has done for her. Ammu’s self-respect contrasts Mikki’s sentimental submissiveness. The difference of the background of these women throws them to two different destinies. Ammu could just move to incestuous affair with Velutha; she cannot remarry while Mikki can think of her remarriage. She mends her mistakes by choosing Shanay as her husband and she has better prospects than Ammu.

Mikki’s character moves from various ups and downs in her life. Some of the aspects of her personality are superfluous but her emotional aspect is more human and true to the nature. Moreover she cherishes some romantic ideas about love and reduces her life to the servitude. To some extent, her love for Alisha is too sentimental. Mikki is a blend of romanticism and intelligence.

Mikki is not like Karuna, the protagonist of Socialite Evenings. She does not negate the carnal bliss and communal love between husband and wife; she is not even a sex hunter like her sister Alisha. She is a kind of woman who tries to live a healthy emotional life within conservative framework of marriage. She does not think spinsterhood as the solution for women’s liberation. It is the understanding and love between couple leads them to better and happy life. Mikki stands as a defender of the tradition on women’s term. Marriage is not an institution where men can legally exercise power over women; it is a place where men and women not only get sexual pleasures but the most important thing is emotional backup. If marriage is itself harassment, then it is better to break it.
Mikki’s turn to remarry shows the changed social attitudes and the freedom women enjoy in the modern society. They are not the bearer of patriarchal domination. They have created their own power discourse to secure themselves. Women have been given economical, political, social and legal security. Now it is the time for men to take their hands off from women’s bullying. The creation of women’s new discourse has been validated and protected. Mikki has changed the mindset of the conservative people who think that women are unfit for business. Women have created their own identity as a business tycoon even they love domesticity, now it is on their own term. They cannot be thought as reciprocal to domesticity. Everything has now come up to their terms. This is an era of ‘creation of self.’

4.3 Alisha: An Aberration:-

Alisha is an energetic, harsh and practical woman. She is a stark contrast to Mikki. She also shares the business mind of their father. She cannot be called as a new woman but an ‘aberration’ as she exhibits all of the negative aspects of the woman’s revolution. Freedom should be compatible to morality but she sacrifices morality on the pretext of freedom.

She is a counterfoil to the patriarchal norms, uses the weapons of patriarchy to defeat it at its game. Patriarchy is a form of domination of male over female. The women like Alisha find the answer to subvert this hierarchy in women’s domination over men, an erroneous attitude that has been developed among women these centuries. The equality among sexes and access to better opportunity can only bring fraternity among men and women. Alisha is as domineering as that of a patriarch. So she cannot be called as an answer to the patriarchy.
Alisha, though Mikki’s half sister demonstrates the contrasting features to her half sister. Being “Seth Hiralal’s other daughter—the one he had fathered but never acknowledged,” Alisha recognises her marginal existence as a daughter from a concubine and courageously fights to acquire the identity as “Seth Hiralal’s other daughter” which has been never accredited by the society. Though a daughter of a concubine, she has the right to be identified as his daughter but the moral codes of the society deny social advantage to the children begotten out of marriage. Alisha being suffered from the injustices done to her by the society does not shut up her mouth by accepting the moral values prescribed by the ancient minds; she dares to question, oppose and rebel. She asks “What am I?”; she is more conscious about her rights and identity than her mother.

The duplicate policy of patriarchy which empowers men is all pervaded from The God of Small Things to the Sisters. Chacko can easily enjoy sexual pleasures outside marriage in the same way Seth Hiralal gets the privilege to have illicit relationship with a woman outside marriage, as is the case of Binny. On the one hand the society allows men to take advantage of women and on the other they deprive these oppressed women as a foil to the social norms. The moral code ostracise such women and their children on the pretext of being immoral.

Alisha and her mother are outsiders to the hypocrite mode of patriarchal lifestyle. Alisha has been suffered from the moral consciousness of her father. She remembers her mother’s memory in which she has been told how her father often mixed Mikki and Alisha. “He’d call her, Alisha, by other girl’s name. But was certain Papa must’ve been careful enough not to call Mallika by her name—at least not in front of people. And certainly not in front of Mallika’s stack-up
Hence Seth Hiralal was much conscious in distinguishing between a concubine’s daughter and his own daughter out of wedlock. However may be the freedom given to women the laws of morality and marriage confine them at any cost.

Alisha turns over the world full of injustice and humiliation for her. Being a daughter of a slut, she is abandoned from the respect from the society; she always pins for wealth, money, respect and status. Licentious relationships and the children out of such relationships are never favoured by the Indian society. Leelaben and Urmi are the perfect examples of such relationships. Urmi, Binny’s mistress, having children out of illicit relations is not approved by the society. She can get money, love, children but not the social approval and respect. Though these are the means of social control to check the immoral behaviour in the society, but the target of punishment to erase immorality confers to women only and not the men.

The feeling of hatred sprout out in Alisha’s heart for her half-sister, Mikki as she has everything which Alisha cannot posses. As their features are identical so people compare her with Mikki but she hates the comparison since she does not want to be measured by Mikki’s standards but by her own. She is an individualistic person who measures self-respect more than an alluring comparison. Obsessive and strong headed Alisha spends her three years of life to make Mikki inferior to her by hurting her loving half-sister.

Alisha hankers after self-reverence and her right over her father’s assets. When she desires to join her father’s funeral, she is prohibited to participate it. Alisha feels duped due of her father’s sudden death as she has now to sacrifice her dreams of going abroad. She attempts to find out
whether her father has left something for her. She bluntly refuses any one of the advances from Mikki; she just asks for her rights as a daughter of Seth Hiralal when Mikki offers her some fortune and wants to be close with her. Alisha proclaims: “I do see we are sisters. You have all the money, all the status, our father’s name, his home. Everything. And I have nothing.” The sense of negligence from society has builded hostility towards her half sister.

Alisha, a flat character does not improve throughout novel. Tough at last she accepts her sister’s love but remains as it is. She runs after sex and uses it as armour of domination. All of the sex scenes described by the writer display the power relationships. Though sex is a neutral phenomenon, the gender discrimination has sprout out of the sexual act, mainly the act of copulation; the discourse of sexual intercourse has given power to men. Men lying over women, the posture itself ascribes in women the sense of inferiority. Hence sex is not just an act of pleasure but the discourse of domination.

Alisha is assertive and domineering in sexual relations. In case of Mikki when Binny initiates, she enjoys the pleasure as a passive receiver; she enjoys the sex where a man lures a woman and she passes off into the territory where man takes active part and she poses as the receiver. Alisha totally subverts the pattern by holding sexual power in her hands. It is on her turn she enjoys the pleasure. Alisha takes Navin to bed only because he happened to be Mikki’s lover. “She wanted him only because Mikki had had him”, she uses her body to dominate men. Her sex with Navin is a fare politics to obliterate the reminiscence of Mikki. “She wanted to obliterate any memory Navin might have retained of his love-making with the woman she hated. The woman who consumed her.”
Fortunately Alisha gets more than Mikki from her father while Mikki inherits just the misfortunes for herself and Hiralal industries. The money she inherits from the trust, invests it into the real estate. She establishes a quick rapport with a developer- a young man called Altaf. “Within a month Alisha found herself on the threshold of an exciting and challenging career.”

Alisha is a fearless business woman. Though developer is not considered as a field for women, she successfully mounts the difficulties. Ramankaka too warns her against the involvement in this business; he cautions her by advising;

This is not for us. It is not for respectable people. The building trade is controlled by thugs, smugglers, gangster—all sorts of anti-social people with jail records. It is dangerous. Builders are goondas to evict people from sites. Enmities are settled through violence...

These discouraging words do not make her budge from her destination instead she overlooks what Ramanbhai advices. Hence there is no sphere of life where women could not be launched on. Alisha is much courageous to work with all men without any distrust on herself. She sets one enormous office for her work and appoints Sapana to look after her business. Thriving in her business, Alisha too proves as the daughter of a business tycoon, Seth Hiralal.

Leelaben does not get the respect and honour to be called as a wife of a gentleman so she has been suffered from the frustration of being maltreated and neglected from the society and throws herself to addiction. After the death of Seth Hiralal, Leelaben recollects her from mother’s words, “Leela, you will have everything in life, but not domestic
happiness. It is written here...” The most important thing in any woman’s life is not the money but the status which she gets from the marriage. Leelaben does not want her daughter suffer from the same fate as she works with “the mussalman”; getting involved in a person outside community stains the reputation of the family. Hence Leelaben accuses Alisha for spoiling her name.

Getting married to a good man is the first preference of the parents for a girl as status of a woman depends upon her being married. Leelaben is well known about the prestige Alisha holds in her community. She does not have father to call her own and his name with the reputation. In arrange marriages, it is important to acquaint with a girl’s parentage since it affects a lot to the in-laws reputation. Leelaben opines; “I wanted you to enjoy a respectable life. Get married into a decent family. Be a gentleman’s wife. Go to good clubs in good clothes. Have nice children. What else can a mother want for a daughter....?”

The women’s exploration of themselves is controlled through the discourses of marriage, morality and honour. Women who do not marry but enjoy inhibited sex and beget children are kept outside the norms of social respect. The social humiliation breaks their nerves by keeping them out of social modes of respectability. These social inhibitions intimidate them to cherish the conventional codes of ideal womanhood that is why Leelaben compels Alisha to marry.

The social institutions like marriage do not hold power today. Alisha thinks her mother’s brooding over marriage as “meaningless bak-bak.” As marriage brings slavery to the women so the women like Alisha gladly prefer the life of freedom without marriage; she enjoys her life freely without any check on adventures and explorations.
Dr. Kurein’s visit opens a new phase in Alisha’s life. She starts to take fancy in his handsome look. Her involvement in Navin and other lover is a fleeing affair for her but her feelings for Dr. Kurein are deep. She transforms herself for him by departing from Navin. But the discovery of his parents, wife and children devastates her hopes in their relationship. So she resumes her relationship with Navin once again.

Dr. Kurein is a catholic and “good man” who cannot betray his family. Though literally he is out of Alisha’s life, she continually calls him on Leelaben’s health’s pretext. For the second time when she initiates with Dr. Kurien she observes “a tortured look in the doctor’s eyes when they met and fervently believed he was stopping himself from getting involved with her since he was a ‘good’ man.” But he never encourages her by any means; the day her mother dies nearly finishes her chances to visit Dr. Kurein.

Leelaben’s uthamana gives Alisha a straight chance to hit Mikki on her face. Mikki really feels sorry for Leelaben’s death and comes to visit reluctantly to visit Alisha. Alisha expects her visit and has already ready for a punch. When Sapana informs her about Mikki’s entry into the house, she fervently makes love with Navin and purposefully accompanies Navin downstairs to offend her half sister. She insults Mikki and orders her to leave her house as early as possible. Navin feels sorry for Mikki and drives after her. Mikki, already on the verge of separation with Binny enters into a new relationship with Navin and Alisha once again feels cheated by her destiny. There is no one left in the world to love her or care her. The state of loneliness expels to complete destitute and desperation. Even Navin goes to the extent of offending her as she slashes her wrist to embrace death. Her hatred for Mikki nearly kills her.
For the third time Dr. Kurein enters in Alisha’s life. Dr. Kurein has been totally changed after their second visit before her mother’s death. He looks after her as if she is “Very special.” He himself could feel the depth of his feelings for her and confesses before Mikki; “I love Alisha. I love your sister.” He too confesses the dilemma in which he has been caught; he is a middle-class man with a family and helpless because at this stage of his life he cannot change anything. He endeavours to get Alisha out of his life but cannot do it hopelessly.

The day Alisha opens her eyes, she looks before herself her half-sister, Mikki, the most hating sight; she hates her presence before her. When Dr. Kurein walks into the room, his eyes shining with happiness “Without warning, he bent over Alisha and kissed her all over her face, like an over friendly puppy.” He himself informs Alisha how her sister nursed her all these days by bringing both of the sisters together.

Despite his middle class background, Dr. Kurein falls in illicit relationship with Alisha, a middle class man too can walk out of marriage. Mikki knows the futility of the relationship of her sister with Dr. Kurein as he himself confesses his inability to break his marriage. The very thought bestow Alisha a lot of pains; she notifies him bluntly that she cannot share him with his wife and family; she does not want to suffer in her life as her mother did. She opines:

I don’t want to fall into the same trap as my foolish mother and end up wasted her youth on a man who said exactly what you just said to me. And she also believed him. If you want to continue the relationship—get a divorce and marry.
Alisha is the woman of the second generation and is more conscious of the exploitation. She is more assertive than her mother. Both Mikki and Alisha suffer the fate of their mothers. Mikki’s life after her marriage with Binny echoes her mother’s married life with her father while Alisha too imitates her mother’s life. She is nothing but concubine if she keeps illicit relationship with Dr. Kurein. But the difference is that her mother passively accepts her fate and Alisha attempts to alter it.

4.4 Pornography: A Study in Sexual politics:

Shobha De is very candid in describing the sexual relations. She is blamed for the pornographic descriptions. Sex and body are the first places from where the discrimination starts so it is essential to analyse pornography in feminist mode. These are the earliest discourses which have paved way to the patriarchal discourses. In Sisters Shobha De has demonstrated two kinds of sexual behaviours; the first is heterosexual relationship which also exhibit different kind of behaviours; in Mikki’s case she adopts the submissive role while Alisha takes the role of a dominator; the second is gay relationship which is exemplified through the character of Lucio.

It is significant to study pornographic material in De’s novel as Shobha De is praised for fine portrait of urban woman and her “detractors dub her as the princes of pornography.” New Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines the word pornography: “books, videos etc. that describe or show naked people and sexual acts in order to make people find offensive.” In the novel Sisters, Mikki’s and Alisha’s sexual relations are described minutely. The first elaborate example of pornography in the novel appears when Mikki enjoys sex with Binny before marriage.
... he took Mikki into his arms and kissed her gently at first, and then with increasing passion. She felt her heart thudding against his chest. Slowly, he unbuttoned his shirt and cupped her breasts... At that moment the only thing that mattered was the feel of him over her slim body, the touch of his fingers inside her, and the slow, deliberate movement of his tongue as it explored her mouth and kept up steady rhythm, while his legs parted hers and he began his final assault on the woman he had already claimed as his own.

The description after Mikki’s marriage is too full of sensual descriptions. On the night she experienced sexual relationship makes her feel that she has discovered herself. “She felt liberated, uninhibited and aroused to the point of primitive abandon.” After some days of her marriage the same sex changes its meaning; it becomes the symbol of Mikki’s derogating status as a wife. In one of the scenes Mikki has shown enjoying sex as if a prostitute.

Roughly, he pulled her kimono off her shoulder and closed his eyes briefly as she took him into her mouth.... Mikki moved expertly over him, her thighs, gripping his waist, her hands in his hair, spurring Binny on to the gush into her as her own body shuddered with the intensity of their love making.

In all of the sex scenes where Mikki involves, the conventional set-up of male dominancy takes the charge of her body. But in Alisha’s case, in sexual intercourses she takes the charge of the situation and dominates
the male involved in it. On her mother’s uthamana, she enjoys sex with Navin:

Alisha grabbed Navin by the waist and pushed her crouch against his.... ‘Do it. You want to... go on! Do it,’ she commanded as she expertly slid him into her. Navin had shut his eyes and was moaning as much with rage as pleasure. ‘Bitch!’ he muttered, as Alisha quickened her pace. ‘Strike me. Hit me,’ she instructed, as Navin clutched her bottom savagely and finally struck her. Alisha squealed. ‘I like it,’ she repeated, ‘Do it, do it, do it.’

Hence the sexual relations are the power relations and can be used for the subversion of the hierarchy. The control of the situation itself brings to the front the oppressor and the receiver becomes oppressed. The sexual encounters, in which Alisha participates, are the relationships where a woman is delineated as a manoeuvre.

Alisha manipulates all of the men in her life; she dominates Dr. Kurein’s life. When he becomes frustrated by her oppression, he expresses it through abusing her sexually. Before the twentieth century sex was the matter which hailed inside four walls that could not be spoken on but the writers like Shobha De publicized the inside of the four walls where sexual politics takes place. Dr. Kurein avenges Alisha only through dominating her sexually.

He grabbed her hair and jerked her face back, ‘What more do you want from me?’ He asked roughly. ‘Aren’t you getting enough?’ His mouth attacked hers and his hands pummelled her body with such force she screamed... ‘Take it, take it, take it, he grunted, pushing into her. ‘All you
rich women are the same—you want more all the time. Nothing satisfies you. Here, take it all... it’s free.’

The above discussed pornographic descriptions which exhibit the power relations, in some descriptions men rule while in the others, women. Mikki succumbs to the power while Alisha poses threat to it. The last description of sexual intercourse between Alisha and Dr. Kurein projects the acquisition of power once again by the male through abuse and dominance.

The moral and radical thinkers denounce pornography. In India the movement of women’s liberation contrasts to the conventional thinkers’ philosophies who try to secure moral values. The pornographic writing is considered as the threat to the moral values of the society. Especially the female writers who produce pornography are dubbed as an enemy to the social stability of the prevalent notions. The erotic descriptions in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* compelled her to present herself before the court; same is the case with Shobha De. From so many centuries men are producing literature; their work too contains the erotic desires and descriptions. But the patriarchal mindset of the Indian people does not blame men for producing pornographic materials. It has been taken for granted that men can openly speak about sex and not women. So the women writers who express openly about sex are called as the worst enemies of the society.

Pornography is denounced on the basis of radical feminist Robin Morgan’s pronouncement, “pornography is the theory and rape the practice.” These radical feminists believe that pornographic material makes the subject morally degenerate. Pornography degrades women to mere sexual objects; it provokes men to abuse and rape women. Further
Catherine A. Mackinnon claims that pornography “institutionalizes the sexuality of male supremacy, fusing the eroticization of domination and submission with the social construction of male and female.” Dworkin and Mackinnon regard it as a lived world in which terrifying sexual inequalities persist.

Feminists against the censorship are against this view. They uphold that pornography provides women access to find out their own sexuality. To some extent these feminists too believe that pornography causes considerable offence to many women. Joseph Bristow has elaborately explained the view of feminists against Censorship:

...if feminists use legislation to protect women from pornography, then the consequences for the free expression of women’s sexuality could be considerable. To their minds, just at the point when women are beginning to take greater control of their sexual lives, attacks on pornography threatens to restrict even further sexually explicit materials that adult women may themselves enjoy.

Further he quotes “Many women are taking risks to produce feminist sexual images, images which do not exploit either the viewer or the producer.” Pornography imparts sufficient space for women to express or discover their sexuality. Thus the twentieth century women writers are exploring the new areas of identity, subjectivity, and sexuality through their writing.

The ever taboo subject for women was sex and sexuality. Now they are walking beyond all of the boundaries to prove them equal to men. The writers like Arundhati Roy and Shobha De’s contribution enriches the
feminist tradition of writing. The erotic scenes presented by both of the writers are written from the feminist point of view. It assigns new dimension to the imagination of women about their normal sexual behaviour. As a writer they have subverted the masculine discourse of eroticism where women are presented as the active producer of pleasures.

Though Alisha is feminist subversive force for throwing the sexual hierarchy, she cannot take hold of Dr. Kurein’s life. The failure in the love relationship with Dr. Kurein diverts her to drug addiction. To please her lover, she embraces the Catholic faith, his religion. She loses herself in his love to the extent that Mikki reminds her not to lose her individuality. She advises; “I don’t want you to lose your own personality, individuality, values.”69 As Mikki discovers the disastrous influence of Dr. Kurein’s episode on Alisha’s life, she endeavours to get rid of him out of Alisha’s system. Alisha does not bother for the moral values so the women like her are always despised by the middle-class morality of Dr. Kurein. Paradoxically the same spirit proves the futility and absurdity of the middle-class morality and value system.

The epilogue of the novel is symbolic to suggest that the women like Alisha will continually pose threat to the hypocrite morality. She is the feminist force who not only challenge, threat but also can enslave men. She does not believe in marriage and wantonly announces pointing at the two men, “One of you guys had better watch out. Your bachelor days are numbered. It’s all over for you now. Alluring Alisha is on the prowl.”70 The pronouncement is the direct challenge to the men who are aware of the women’s power of enslavement.

To improve the social relations among men and women, the moral principles should be operated. Defying social laws and enjoying sex with
multiple partners is not the token of changing situation, it can be counted as a fleeting episode in the history of human civilization. To change the society towards the new the codes of morality, it should be transformed towards gender equality where a woman and a man can cohabit with each other as a human being and not as a construction of gender traits. The free sexual behaviour based on the ethics of immorality cannot be supported under the guise of freedom.
REFERENCES


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