

A Feministic Analysis of Shobha De's *Sisters*

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Abstract: *Women since early days of civilisation have been subjected to ill-treatment, persecution and torture. As soft targets they have been put. Even to violence. They have chiefly been considered object for gratifying sex desire by men and in this their willingness has seldom been considered. In matters of deciding something their opinions are hardly been. Sought for or thought fit for any consideration. They have been struggling hard to free themselves from the male oppression. In fact, they have been, in most cases, nobody. Whether it be social, political or economic, power has been centred in men. And the women have been denied their access to it. Men have been dominating and. women have been forced to feel alienated depressed. Shobha De is one of the most astounding feminine writers in Indian English literature. Her novels are severely stinging the treatment of women in the male dominated society. De's female protagonists fight against the oppression and remain as examples motivating the women gender to empower them in such malicious society. Her characters bravely raise the voice against the maltreatments enforced on them. She has portrayed the women characters of variety imaginatively in her novels, trying to find their existence, meaning of life, their identity and their unfulfilled love and emotional self. Her third novel Sisters was published in 1992. It paints a picture of two corporate half-sisters, Mallika and Alisha, who strive to make a name for themselves in the business world*

Keywords: feminism, femineity, male chauvinism, patriarchal society, subjugation

I. INTRODUCTION

The words like feminist and feminism reflect the social and political movement. They have remained as the catchphrases for the movement of 1960s that projected the concept of the new women. It is also a social movement that instigates to go beyond the patriarchal dominance along with the sexism that is prevailing in the society. Feminist critics reveal the gender biasness over the females. Nagarajan rightly clarifies these issues as he says, *Feminist literary criticism aims to study the ways in which cultural representations, like literature, undermine and reinforce the economic, social, political, and psychological suppression and oppression of women in society* (206). Therefore, feminism is a movement of liberation. The women seek freedom from the domination of the power users because according to Millet the concept of power becomes the encompassing ideology of our culture. The concept of power always creates two groups. The dimension of power relation in feminism creates two sides. Males become the power user and females are supposed as the power used upon. Feminism studies the marginal and suppressed voices of the females. Feminist criticism in its development is *directed towards enlarging and recording the literary canon* (Prasad 268). Patriarchal constructed power with its encompassing nature has become the poignant base for this criticism. The trend of feminism is guided by patriarchal dominating voice.

Sisters exhibits the journey of characters from femininity to femaleness. Mikki's and Alisha's quest for identity centers the actions and major events of the novel. The novel discusses very sensitive sides of human life, reflecting social and psychological conflict in the man-woman relationship. It investigates exploitative base of patriarchal Indian social structure. The pursuit gives the birth to new females. These new females are Mikki (Mallika) and Alisha, the daughters of the businessman named Seth Hiralal. These women rebel to break the confinement laid down by Indian patriarchal society. They become new women because they revolt against inequality and subjugation prevailed on the basis of gender. They give their maximum to subvert the constructed discrimination. They even use their bodies as the source of power to uplift the condition. The women establish themselves as the new angels for women rights when they emerge

out of the cesspool. They break the wall of differentiation between sex and gender. They plead that sex is biological and natural while the gender is simply the result of patriarchal social pattern. Sex is related to nature while gender is related to the nurture. The pursuit of Mikki and Alisha clarify this dichotomy when they prioritize nature for nurture. Their journey from femininity to femaleness proves that they speak the voice of new women.

The story is full of sex, betrayal, hatred, intrigue and corruption. The narrative opens with the protagonist Mikki (Mallika) Hira Lal who has to face the trauma of her parents' untimely death in air crash. Society considers that tender feelings are attributed to female species, which limits her to come out from any shocking news but in spite of being loaded with worry or grief, Mikki does not lose her patience and courage. Boldly she prevents her maidservant to weep. *Gangubai, please stop that... what has happened has happened.* (Sisters 2) Mikki had courageously faced the intimate loss of her parents' sudden demise which validates the fact that an independent personality of a woman cannot be marred because of her feminine traits. Mikki, the young educated and modern girl takes over the responsibility of handling the affairs of Hiralal Industries. She asserts her independence and expresses great confidence in her own way, *Mallika Hiralal was all set to make her way in the corporate world as the undisputed queen of a cluster of companies her father had built from scratch* (18). Mikki not only begins to plough her way through the business world difficulties but also takes over the new subject position deconstructing the traditional patriarchal identity of a woman and the ideas that mark gender difference expressed in the words of Raman kaka:

You don't have time on your hands for apprenticeship. 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. (30).

But Mikki's words exhibit her newly acquired western culture and a typical feminist outlook:

Thank you for your advice Ramankaka. I appreciate and value your words. But I'd like you to hear a few of mine now. I can't change my sex, unfortunately. That is the one thing all of you will have to accept. But I can change just about everything else... and I intend to...I don't expect you or others to give up your prejudices but I want you to know that I will not let that stand in my way (30).

Mikki being poised, strong and mature girl takes charge of her business and begins to show her managerial skill. Surrounded mostly by males in her business empire, Mikki stands tall though aloof and not dependent and yet successful. Her father's 'Hiralal Industries' are on the verge to collapse and Mikki is determined to save the industries from going bankrupt. She has the single vision of saving her vast empire and in order to actualize her vision she was ready to undergo any trials and tribulations. Thus, Mikki is projected as a strong individualistic, self-reliant woman ready to face the challenges imposed on her by the male-dominated society.

II. CONCLUSION

Shobha De has best displayed the travails of the women from conventionally male-prejudiced society to self-satisfied individual beings. Her women characters, both in their participation in creative works and in their pronouncement as a self-governing entity, discard the idea of living a life of dejection. Through *Sisters* De has presented women who break all the age-old moral codes of the male dominated world. Through her women characters she mirrored liberated working women who are rebellious, wealthy, packed with confidence and affirmed for their position in society. The novelist has presented the harsh realities of the patriarchal society along with it she presented today's women who are being aware of their positions and rising from their eternal slumber. Her novels make a realistic portrayal of things happening in an aristocratic society. Shobha De's novels have a cultural background with the modern endings. Her women are from traditional society but they also have questions about their self identity. Shobha de focused on the real situation of women in society. Her characters are focused on independence for their individuality and solve their problems. Women of Shobha De are very strong mentally. They give core thought to the society to change the condition of women.

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