

Chapter IV

Enterprise Culture and Postfeminism in *Sisters*

Individualization need not always act as process of severing an individual self of a person from a collective horde but it also acts as a social process in which the individual acts as an active agent who initiates the change. This kind of progression is relevant for young women in contemporary society;

processes of individualization and detraditionalization mean that not only are a wide range of options available to them in terms of their self-definition, but that an active negotiation of positions which are potentially intersecting and contradictory is necessary.(Budgeon 10)

There is a shift from a socially prescribed life of women who historically have been disadvantaged by the mere fact that their gender identity is produced by literature created by men. Women have the ability to rewrite their destiny according to their aspirations.

“As a result of this process, the individual transforms as ‘an entrepreneur’ or ‘an enterprise of the self’ that remains constantly and continuously engaged in a project to shape his or her life”(Gay 156).The conception of the individual as an entrepreneur has been influential in different spheres of life which stress the importance of personal choice and self-determination. As Nikolas Rose proposes, “today’s ‘enterprise culture’ accords a vital political value to a certain image of the self that aspires to autonomy... strives for personal fulfillment...and interprets its reality and destiny as matters of individual responsibility” (141-142).The enterprising self of a person is motivated by a desire to maximize his own power, happiness and the quality of life by enhancing his sovereignty and also by releasing his potentials.

The strong need to understand and later on to assert one's free will and autonomy can be attributed to the political transformation termed as neo-liberal rhetoric. Stephanie Genz and Benjamin A. Brabon in their book *Postfeminism: Cultural Texts and Theories* explain the ideology of Neo-liberalism thus:

. . . prevalent in late twentieth-and early twenty-first-century Western capitalist societies. . . it is generally understood in political economy terms as the dismantling of the welfare state and the expansion of the global free trade. Its importance for cultural analysis lies in its extension of market values and rationality to other areas of life, including its construction of the individual as an entrepreneur and consumer-citizen who should self-regulate and self-care. (170)

This ideology of enterprise culture reverberates with postfeministic beliefs of empowerment through realizing one's potential to achieve as well as to project themselves as potential candidate for a successful life and not to denigrate themselves to a victim status.

The protagonist Mikki who has a very strong will power and determination to succeed does not stay as a dormant individual. Instead she emerges as a very determined person who is seen as enterprising her individual self as well as she surfaces as a successful entrepreneur. Postfeminism and enterprise culture are strongly evident in the novel *Sisters* and Mikki is portrayed as a postfeminist who achieves it through the enterprise culture.

Sisters is the story of Seth Hiralal who is an industrialist and his daughters, Mallika (Mikki) is his only daughter by his legitimate wife. He has another daughter Alisha by his concubine, Leela Ben. Seth and his wife die in an airplane crash. As a

result, Hiralal Industries is in trouble. Ramanbhai, the senior executive of Hiralal Industries explains to Mikki that a trust was established ten years before, but the company was in huge debts.

Sisters is a novel which affirms the individual self and protagonists search for an identity in the male dominated world. The novel encapsulates the dynamic inter-relationship of two urban young women Mallika (Mikki) and Alisha confronted with conspiracies and betrayal in the corrupt business world of Bombay. Both Mikki and Alisha move from a bound selfhood shaped by circumstances and society to a free selfhood born out of love and experience.

Mallika Hiralal abandons her studies in US and returns to Bombay following the death of her parents in an air crash. During the funeral of her parents Mallika is least emotionally upset and never cries but recollects the past events. She even silently calls her father “quite a bastard too” (S 4). Mikki the legal heir to Hiralal industries is vain, narcissistic and spoiled but very much eager to shape her own identity in the corporate world.

‘The Times of India’ publishes a two column photograph of Seth on the front page with the heading - ‘Industrialist and his wife die in air mishap’. The Chief Minister and the Governor expresses their deep condolences as: “‘a great loss’, ‘a severe blow’, ‘his place can never be taken’ and so on. Survived by his only child, a daughter, Mallika, studying at present in the U.S” (S 3). Her aunt, Anjanaben and Gangu, her servant stand by her in her sorrow. From her infant stage, Gangu looked after her and nurtured her.

A few miles away from Mikki’s bungalow, in a small suburb of Bombay, Alisha and her mother stay there. On reading the news column repeatedly, Alisha questions her mother: “‘only child’ they have written in the paper,’ what about me?”

‘What am I?’” (S 3). Alisha is full of worries about their future. Alisha thinks whether her mother will be able to send her to America as they don’t have enough money. When Papa was alive, he promised to send her to America and finance her studies. As her father is no more, her dreams of going abroad slowly melts away. She hates college as it is boring. She wants to assert herself and make the world realize that she is the other daughter of Seth Hiralal, the one he has fathered but never acknowledged. Alisha asks her mother whether they will allow them to attend the funeral. Her mother is unsure if they will be permitted to attend his funeral.

Two dead bodies are kept out on an impressive carpet in the main hall. Ramanbhai also arrives early to observe the arrangements. Suddenly, there is some sort of disturbance near the gate. It was Alisha who was trying to barge in but her attempt is in vain. When Mikki looks up, a tall, slim young girl is arguing with Ramanbhai. On seeing her, Mikki feels that she could be her sister because Alisha resemblances her in many ways. On inquiry about the girl, he says that she is the illegitimate daughter of Seth Hiralal and her name is Alisha who is born four months after her and lives in Vile Parle. Then Mikki starts investigating everything about Alisha.

Soon after the funeral Mikki takes charge of her duties and visits Hiralal industries. Ramanbhai waits for Mikki in the library and explains her about the future of her father’s industries. He arranges a meeting with the solicitors, chartered accountants and the various boards of Seth Hiralal companies. When Mikki stares at him blankly, he also tells her not to sign anything given by anyone, without checking with him first. He arranges the meeting in which she acts as a lady boss. Ramanbhai appreciates her way of presenting herself in the business gathering.

Ramanbhai also clearly explains to Mikki about her father's property and the will. Her mother's will is fortunately very clear and states that she inherits everything-all her jewellery, assets, properties, but her father's legal papers are not as organised as her mother's. He also tells her that her father formed a trust ten years before which is not in her name, but in her mother's name. She catches the thing that it might be in Alisha's name. Alisha is his daughter, poor girl, but she will never get that recognition. A great deal of money is deposited in the trust. Alisha will inherit all that whenever she turns twenty. Nobody has access to that money, not even Alisha's mother. At the end of the meeting Mikki comes to know that the industry is drowned in huge debts. In order to save the business she decides to sell off a few assets to raise the money required.

Finding herself almost bankrupt she decided to turn to Alisha for help, her only blood relation, and her step-sister. Mikki decides not to get any help from any male member among her friends or family circle. But Alisha hates Mikki: "Just the thought of her half sister made Alisha screw her face" (S 6). The illegitimacy of Alisha prevents her from becoming the heir to Hiralal industries and she resolves to fight for her rights and to get equal share in her father's business.

One day, Mikki calls for Alisha but her mother answers the phone. When Mikki tells her about her details, she is pretty nervous. At last, Alisha answers to the phone when Mikki introduces herself in a vague manner requesting Alisha that she would like to meet her in her leisure hours. Alisha answers:

What for? I think it's important for both of us to get to know one another. Don't you? Really after all these years...I know all about you,

even though you may not have known about me. I see no reason why I

should go out of my way to meet you when I have survived for so long on my own. In any case, I did see you at the funeral when you people did not have the decency to allow me to pay my last respects to my father. (S 15)

Mikki replies that she has no knowledge about her. Alisha curses that her father had cheated her. He promises to send her to America next year to study there. She tells Mikki that she does not want to meet her ever and requests her not to phone again. Mikki is stunned by Alisha's rush of bitter words.

The emotional violence inflicted on Alisha affects her so much that her understanding of herself, others and the world is affected. Hence past memories intrude and often disrupts her. As repressed childhood, the callousness of her father, Alisha's inability to restrain her overflowing contempt towards Mikki, the thought of revenge and animosity towards her for enjoying all the comforts and legitimacy which she equally deserves, establishes despotism over Mikki.

Mikki moves simultaneously in two directions; she tries to have a firm grip over her father's business beset by business tycoons, creditors etc. Despite her heroic abilities, incessant struggles, her attempts of saving the business world fail each time. Secondly she tries to win over Alisha who regards Mikki as her supreme enemy. Hence she relishes sadistic pleasures to visualize Mikki to be in a tormented state. The frown and the disgust in her countenance mirror her inner mind that is worn out and tattered completely. This psychological pressure pursues Alisha to be harsh and abusive towards Mikki. Every step towards reconciliation from Mikki's side is met with rough and contemptuous behaviour from Alisha's side.

Mikki sincerely expresses her need by pleading Alisha to help her: "you are the closest person left for me in the world, we share the same blood. We had the same

father. I need you help me, help me” (S160), to which Alisha pays no heed. Mikki feels a sort of vacuum in her life; the main reason is that she fails to bring to practice her cherished dreams. But she is of strong conviction that turbulence and cruelty would never overpower her. The notion of postfeminism is as a “contemporary injunction to render one’s life knowable and meaningful through a narrative of free choice and autonomy” (Gill, *Gender* 260). Mikki strives hard to lead an evocative life which is also enterprising in nature.

Mikki decides to ascend from her home into a world of materialism, control and dominance. Ramanbhai, an old associate of her father makes her aware of the business collapse and discloses that Alisha owns more money than her. Mikki trusts him completely and gladly says “The corporate world is full of sharks, Ramankaka. I’m so glad that I have you on my side” (S 50). The comment portrays indirectly the failing efforts to make sense out of business files and her attempt of mending Alisha, almost all her efforts always go waste. In spite of that she renews her spirits after every failure and with equal vengeance plunges into a fresh mission to achieve her aims.

Mikki attempts to beautify herself with her mother’s jewellery and father’s ring and this act of her’s is an attempt to boost courage and confidence in her personality as she often feels alienated and orphaned. Her sense of insecurity is aggravated by Ramankaka who comments: “Had you been a son, your father might have taken you into his confidence from a young age and guided you properly..... But as a daughter, all he wanted for you was a good husband – that is all” (S 48), she replies:

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 anything else and I intent to. Fate has left me in my father's shoes. Had I been the son he never had but constantly longed for, perhaps I might have had more success with the likes of you. 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 own terms. If these old solicitors aren't prepared to talk turkey with me, I'll sack them. That goes for the accountants and anybody else who wishes to treat me like a simple minded person, spoilt little girl out to play at being a businesswoman. My genes are the same as my father's even if my gender isn't. I'm determined not to let the companies go by default. I will learn whatever I have to and I will hire whoever I think fit. (S 49)

The comment exemplifies that Ramankaka tries to frighten her of the vicious world by highlighting her unfamiliarity in the art of business but at the same time her untarnished spirit is not to be subsidized by this comment.

Engulfed in the corporate world which is full of corrupt and cunning people, Mikki suffers without direction. Thus, she faces stiff oppositions from her employees who are mostly men. They find it insulting to obey to a young woman's orders. She struggles hard to gain identity in this male dominated world. She attempts to revive her father's business by repaying loans which runs almost to eighty crores, and struggles to exist in this business empire. Her choice of her attire and accessories are also after much introspection because she would be judged and questioned by the people around her.

Mikki turns a deaf ear to the warnings of friend Shaney who advises her to stay away from Ramankaka. Mikki equips herself with the western ideas of professional independence by not listening to anyone around her. She is sensible enough to realize that with her lone efforts she cannot revive her father's empire thus she like an intelligent businesswoman announces her decision to take forward the business all alone.

Mikki's decision to marry shows her insecurity and a need for a companion to shoulder the responsibility. She decides to find a match after her step-sister Alisha fails to accept her. Mikki invites proposals and agrees to go ahead with marrying a perfect match after courtship. Being an educated, rich, good looking young girl Mikki is acquainted with many suitors like Navin, Shanay her cousin whom she likes but feels he will fail as a husband.

Finally she selects Navin and decides to get married but her decision is not out of love but to save her business. She finally accepts Navin's invitation to spend an evening with him at a night club. Navin is speechless as he watches Mikki in a beautiful dress. For Mikki, being engaged to Navin involves an endless round of parties, hosted by his countless relatives. Mikki and Navin's marriage is fixed for December. The thought of spending the rest of her life with him makes Mikki seriously dread about her decision. Amy says that is Mikki's duty to mould Navin as he is still young and to teach him how to behave in society. Alisha also enters the club at the same moment. She watches her step-sister walk in and then resolutely turns her face away.

The moral lives of the modern woman can be yet again visualized from Shobha De's *Sisters*. In this novel, the two half sisters, Mikki and Alisha Hiralal are neck deep in competition trying to outdo each other

in business rivalry. They become highly assertive and independents.

(Ningthoujam 58)

When Mikki wants to talk to her, Alisha curses her as 'bitch'. Mikki follows and begs her to be at least friendly with her. Alisha is so careless and so indifferent with Mikki. The jealousy and envy of Alisha is clearly observed in the emotions expressed by her.

With the help of Mrs.D'Souza, a trusted colleague in her father's industry Mikki manages to know that nearly half the files are missing. Mrs.D'Souza says that probably the files have been taken by Shanay with the help of old Mehtaji who used to look after Seth's private affairs. Mehtaji has the key of her father's office. When questioned about the whereabouts of the files Shanay gossips about Ramanbhai and tells her that he is cheating the industry. Mikki gets to the point immediately and replies that she has trust in Ramanbhai. She scolds Shanay as she suspects him for the missing files. She decides to share this incident with Navin as he is assumed to be the future owner of Hiralal industries. Shanay objects having done the misdeed, but she ignores him. When Mikki walks into Navin's plush office suite, he smiles at her and waves his hand by way of a friendly greeting.

Everybody in the office watches her closely, listening attentively to every word. At the end of the twenty-minute monologue without any demur, Navin does not intervene on her behalf by way of a token of contribution to the proceedings. Mikki fails miserably in her mission. Navin neither tries to meet her eyes nor to walk her to the car. Directly from Navin's house, she goes to her office. Mikki is devastated with Navin's approach and she decides to call off her engagement with Navin. Navin is a weak willed person who is indecisive and dependent on his mother for all his decisions. Mikki's decision is a reflection of her self-confident behavior. She is bold enough to redefine the definition the arrangements involved in marriage. Her decision

is significant, because it illuminates a new insight where the woman is free to choose her future.

It is obvious that all human relations as presented in the novel are largely money oriented. The absurdity of the situation is quite clear and comprehensive. In the web of human relations, as depicted in *Sisters*, hearts are ruled by materialistic feelings. (Vats 86)

The institution of marriage is the most sacrosanct prototype accepted socially and religiously hence it is observed as an idyllic form of a civilized social organisation. Thus, the patriarchal society determines the code of behaviour which obliterates women's individuality and her power. Anjanaben schemes a plan so that her son, Shanay can take charge of Hiralal Industries. As Mallika is alone she takes advantage of this situation and convinces Mikki that Shanay would be the right choice for her as they know each other from their childhood. Mikki receives a phone call from Shanay that he wants to meet her in a hotel for coffee. She says that they can meet in her office as usual. Shanay is certain to marry her but Mikki does not show any interest in him. He tries hard to make friendship with her.

Mikki meets Ramanbhai for their daily morning conference. She tells him that she wants to deal all the company matters on her own without anyone's help. This decision angers Ramabhai and he replies that he has got thirty years experience in her father's industries. After listening to him, she says that the present "corporate world is full of sharks" (S 36). These words of Mikki hurts him and he decides secretly to form an ally with Alisha who will soon be the owner of the trust.

Alisha asks her mother if she has got any money from her father. But her mother who is an addict to sleeping pills and alcohol has nothing much to say to her daughter which makes Alisha hate her. Her mother says that she received a phone call

from her father's servant named Ramanbhai. Immediately, she dials to him asking why he phoned her mother the previous week. In response, he wants to unfold some urgent matter to her. His voice is guarded but pleasant. She understands that he is serious and decides to meet him.

Ramanbhai meets Alisha and her mother in their home. He tells about the business of her father, how it is running in debts. Her father had taken a heavy loan before his death. Ramanbhai informs Alisha that she will inherit the entire property of the trust when she turns twenty. Mikki till now has only got her mother's jewellery as a share of her parent's property. Alisha is overwhelmed with joy after hearing this information. She does express her happiness in the presence of Ramanbhai. Once he leaves, she shuts the door behind him and dances around her mother singing that they are also rich.

Anjanaben is so happy that her son, Shanay creates trust in the mind of Mikki and he respects her as a boss. Mikki tells her not to dream more than that. One day, Mikki asks him about rumours in the office. He informs about the conversation between Alisha and Ramanbhai. She tells Shanay to report everything he has heard. Shanay tells about Amrishbhai and Bachchookaka's efforts for past two years to ruin the industry. Mikki is cautious about every move to consolidate her legacy.

In a very gloomy state of mind Mikki decides to go out to a pub to meet her friends just to relax herself. She meets Mr. Binny Malhotra there, when she is in fully drunken state he hands over a card to her and leaves the place. The card contains the following message: "To the most beautiful lady in India, I wish I could write a poem or sing a ghazal" (S 50). Mikki is taken aback with astonishment.

Two nights later, Mikki receives a phone call from Mr. Binny. He informs her that he will be present at the party which Mikki is about to attend later that evening.

The party was organized by Deepak Puri and his wife, Mrs. Munni Puri. Hundreds of invitees flock to the Puri party that evening, where everybody has their own dress code except Mikki. Binny meets her in the party and invites her to his house for an important talk. Saying this Binny leaves the party.

After contemplating for a long time she accepts to visit him. Binny sends his driver to bring Mikki to his home. After twenty minutes travel, she reaches his house. He speaks about his business and then he tells her: “The first - you marry me, The second -you relinquish complete rights in all your father’s affairs to me” (S 56). She thinks for a while feeling very happy, wishes him good night and leaves home in his car.

Mrs. Amrita Kumar (Amy) is a close friend of Mikki’s mother, who is a knowledgeable woman. Mikki enjoys their regular lunch meetings. She confides her personal day today issues to her and sees Amy as a mother figure. Mikki meets Amy after she has met Binny and narrates to her the details. Amy comments about Binny who represents the new breed of Indian businessman. Mikki tells Amy not to worry or bewildered about anything. Mikki feels that he would be the best partner and decides to go ahead with his proposal. Mikki leaves Amy’s place dreaming about Binny. Her mind and heart is filled with the thoughts of Binny. “Shobha De in the novel *Sisters* focuses on the lives of “the “Richie-rich” intriguing corporate world of business tycoons” (Arora 216-17).

In haste, to save her business from financial crisis, without much inquiry Mikki chooses Binny Malhotra, an elderly business tycoon as her future husband. Mikki dismisses Shanay’s last attempt to propose to her. When Shanay looks devastated, she says: “I will be proud to marry Binny and become Mrs. Malhotra. Please do not think I am doing this only to the company” (S 88).

Binny was a self made man. Binny's father dies when he is at school in Delhi. He is reared by a friendly 'uncle' next to their house, an uncle, who finally marries his widowed mother. But somehow, Binny feels betrayed and leaves home soon to start life of his own, by working as a paper merchant. He does everything from trading in second-hand car parts to start a small business related to fixing electronic equipment. After twenty years of hardwork Binny becomes a business tycoon. He has money, power and access to anybody in the government.

Binny is a manipulator who successfully entraps Mikki by promising necessary financial help to save her father's sinking business.

Shobha De has crafted the individuality of the new women with ambitions ideas and a strong motivation to define the world in their own terms. Rich, intelligent and smart, these women prove themselves as being not inferior to men but superior to and even better than men.

(Ningthoujam 91)

Soon after their marriage Binny shows his true colour by tactfully suppressing her and changing her according to his tastes thereby dismantling her capacity to choose an independent life style. Mikki falls prey to Binny's plans and turns into a powerless person. Mikki who is befuddled by love hands over all the business details to her husband, who in turn uses the information given by her for his benefits.

Although she claims, she would look after her father's business, she hands over all her business deals to Binny whom she loves and marries.

In fact, he pretends that he is interested in her but his main aim is to seize all her property and make her dependent on him. He is successful in his mission. Mikki is madly in love with him and does whatever he

asks her to do. (Manohar 146-147)

Binny blocks Mikki's well being and disapproves of her independent decisions.

Robert Burns in *The Art of Staying Happily Married* summarizes marriage as:

Marriage is a social institution where in two individuals has to live together. There can't be any inequality in this area. The partners depend upon each other in the same manner as the 'bow and the arrow'. If one of the partners dominates the other, it will not serve any purpose. If two persons with their distinct personalities wish to live a united life based on love, each of them must understand the other. (34)

Thus, Binny who before marriage used to appreciate Mikki's modern attire now insist her to wear traditional Punjabi dress after marriage. Binny wants Mikki to fulfill his needs but is reluctant to give her the independence, thus reducing her to a beautiful puppet.

In her new status as Binny's wife, Mikki hardly gets an hour or two of his time. As she expresses the same to him, he slams her wrist sharply. Binny snubs her and walks away leaving Mikki in a state of shock. Mikki shakes with fear after this incident.

Notwithstanding her sexual flirtations, she always craves for a muscular canopy over her head against which even the terms like pride and self respect lose meaning. Mikki's craving for love and belongingness gets explained in the light of humanistic theory of personality which says that for the achievement of highest level of development and for making the fullest use of one's capabilities, appear in an order, from lowest to highest. (Vats 91)

His behaviour towards her never generates protest in Mikki as she loves him and surrenders completely to him. Her marriage becomes a source of entrapment. Binny dislikes her presence in the office. When she expresses her views: “I can look after you and look after at least a part of the business. We could work together, jointly. That way we won’t be separated.”(S 176-177), he retorts:

No. That’s not how it works in my family. Our women stay at home and make sure the place is perfectly run. They fulfill their husband’s every need and look good when their men get home in the evening. No office going. No business meetings. (S 177)

The culminative effect of these remarks introduces a palpable tension in the couple’s relationship. Mikki is noticeably hurt as his remarks demeans and belittles her individuality.

De simply raises woman’s soft politics from the margins into a position of centrality. She expresses it through Mikki’s disapproval when she says “it’s not the sort of marriage I’m looking for, I thought we’d be doing things together. Enjoying life” (S 186). Binny insists:

Listen very carefully, princess. This is no longer your father’s home and you are no longer the pampered child. You are Binny Malhotra’s wife. And you’d better start behaving like her. 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. You have nothing to complain about- got that? Your life is perfect. You have everything ...everything. Where I go, what I do, when and with whom, is my business. I will spend as much time with you as I choose to. There are social duties and obligations which

you will fulfil. If I feel it's necessary for you to travel with me for some purpose, it shall happen that way. If I have to attend parties on my own, it shall happen that way. Your job is to look beautiful. I told you that when I married you. Buy cloths. Buy jewellery. Go to the beauty parlour. Play bridge. Learn golf. Attend cooking classes. That's all. But, no questions- you don't have the right. (S 187)

Binny, who poses to be an ideal husband by providing every luxury to his wife is in no way different from prejudiced patriarchal society which restricts women's free will.

Mikki's attempt to voice out is a form of resistance against the patriarchal set up which had always tried to bereft women of her speech and her identity. Thus, her defence of her own individuality is accomplished at a great cost. In addition to verbal abuse she receives a physical blow from him.

Mikki confesses; "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" (S 193). Mikki becomes emotionally attached to her husband because he is the only person that she can call as her own. Mikki is bold enough to face the challenges, but bears it and endures it. With each distressing incidents in her life she grows more mature and ultimately evolves as a survivor.

Mikki realises her helplessness to assert her position against Binny's aggression in the beginning because of love. Mikki says to her friend Amy, "I wanted someone with whom I could share my life. Is that such an impossible expectation?" (S 189). Thus she projects her alienation and ultimate dejection. The comment exemplify that women expect a harmonious idealized form of marriage and long for limitless

love and security. Further it graphically projects the portrayal of a struggling woman for a considerable space, her oppression and her longing for companionship.

When Amy says: “He has a free body for his use in the bedroom whenever he wants one. No wonder he isn’t complaining. You are nothing more than a legitimate prostitute, don’t you realise that” (S124). Mikki disdainfully replies:

I don’t expect you to understand. Sometimes these things are too complicated for an outsider. All I know is I satisfy him; he satisfies me. I don’t care how that makes me look. Besides, all wives are prostitutes to some extent. Weren’t you? Didn’t you use your body to reward or punish? What’s the big difference? (S 124)

This shows her deep love towards him and her desperate attempt to save her marriage at any cost. Her little day-to-day activities are delicately linked with her marriage which helplessly recedes from graspable reality to unfulfilled dream.

Motherhood which is a blissful experience for a woman is denied for Mikki as Binny insists abortion when he finds her pregnant. Binny blows out Mikki’s burning urge to become a mother and advises her to accept Urmi, his first wife and his children and Mikki meekly accepts. Mikki attends cooking classes when her husband expresses disapproval in the quality and taste of her cooking.

She loves him deeply but is forced to leave him after he accuses her on false charge of adultery by saying:

I know all about your so –called cooking classes with some French fellow. God knows what else he taught you there. Don’t deny anything. I’ve got proof. Photographs. Bills. That’s what you were up to while I was away. I knew I could not trust you. (S 229)

Her rapacious desire to improve cooking is nothing but her desire disguised to gain appraisal from him. But her utmost desire to assert herself is only fulfilled after she removes all the shackles of married status.

Thus, her miserable plight in marriage doesn't end all hope for her, instead surfaces to rediscover her lost calibre with new acceptance of herself and life.

Life according to these women is to be lived as they desire. They have money and power and anything else hardly matters. They hate men towering over them. They demand equality with them. When Mikki's relationship with her husband suffers because of his indifference to her wishes, she decides to walk out of the marriage. She sets up life afresh with her half-sister Alisha's love and support. They decide to face the world by themselves. (Ningthoujam 36)

Her heroic way of bringing closure to the spousal abuse endured at the hands of Binny leads her to accept catering services as her profession.

Hence her job tends to be the milestone in Mikki's metamorphosis from passive victim to a confident woman. Her heroic temperament is evident in her survival through relationships which prevent her growth but she emerges more determined.

The emotional sclerosis of Alisha approximates a state of psychic buoyancy. She is caught in the grip of an existential anguish. Mikki realizes her sister's loneliness and arrives at Alisha's mother funeral. Mikki's presence in the *Uthamana* (funeral) infuriates Alisha but Mikki consoles by saying that "it was important for me to come here today and express my condolences. We...we only have each other now." (S 249)

Every step taken by Mikki to reconcile with her sister is met with a hostile response from Alisha. According to Alisha money is more important since it gives identity and recognition in society. She considers, “money can buy the best husband in the world”(S 165) and for Mikki relationships are more valuable than material wealth.

After her mother’s death, Alisha gets into a languorous mental state and has an affair with Navin as an act of revenge towards Mikki, and later with Dr.Kurian, knowing that he has a family which he is unwilling to desert. Love in its sublimity overrides the conventional constraints of social proprieties and therefore Alisha does not confide by moral values. It is not the purely romantic love but sensuality that entralls her ethos. Thus, she views herself not as a sex object but rather as a sex subject.

Alisha gets into physical relationships with the Dr. Kurian. When the doctor realizes his folly and expresses his willingness to go back to his family she retorts: “But I’m a selfish woman. I can’t share you with your wife and family. I don’t want to pull in to the same trap as my foolish mother and end up like her”(S 265-66). Unable to handle the demands of Alisha, Dr. Kurian withdraws. The detachment of the Doctor creates in her a sense of alienation. Orphaned and abandoned, her identity is lacerated and she attempts suicide. Mikki donates blood to Alisha to help her survive the suicidal attempt. Her act of donating blood, nursing and her decision to rehabilitate Alisha in her own house shows the love and magnanimity of Mikki.

Mikki gives Alisha a positive stroke and resolves her dubiousness. She nurtures and helps the latter to gain the lost sense of belongingness step by step. Unlike her father who disowns Alisha in public, Mikki is deeply humane and is ready to give her the share of wealth, love and concern of a sister.

Mikki and Alisha compromise and come to terms: “The two sisters held each other close and cried the lost years away....(S 260), and Mikki consoles Alisha by saying, “You and I are innocents in this complicated mess we are in. And the man responsible for it...my father and yours, is dead. Forget what happened, I am prepared to blank out everything and start everything from scratch” (S 261).

Thus Mikki attempts to pay for her father’s sins and is successful enough to win over Alisha with her sincere love and service when the latter was hospitalized. This creates a strong female bonding between the two sisters. Thereby not only it helps them to gain control over situations but also empowers them to attain selfhood by generating sisterly love between them.

In many ways, Mikki takes the role of the metaphorical parent whom Alisha never had, protecting and guiding her. By breaking through the silence, the survivors Mikki and Alisha construct narratives that defy the patriarchal taboos in the process of re- creating themselves.

Both Mikki and Alisha are active in the life of business and commerce which are ascribed to male domain. Mikki earns by running catering services in partnership with Lucio and Alisha starts a real estate business.

The novel ends in a quiet cathartic manner. Mikki finds herself owner of both Hiralal and Malhotra industries after Binny’s demise in a road accident. She taps into her the power needed to attend, inspect and oversee his funeral. Like a true dedicated wife she decides to attend the funeral and says: “Absent myself? What nonsense! He was my husband. As his widow, I would like to oversee all arrangements for the funeral”(S 275). This shows her magnanimity as she pardons him.

Ramanbhai laughs dryly that Mikki is so young and so gullible. He tells her, “You were still in love with that husband of yours. You may have been divorced, but

your heart was not free. And it would never have been free so long as Mr. Malhotra is alive. That's why Shanay had to kill him" (S 170). Mikki's head is reeling as she hears that Shanay has murdered Binny. She thinks it is impossible as the car drives them to the Airport.

Later, she learns that her father and Binny died of conspiracy and sabotage. The real villain of the novel, Ramankaka attempts to kill her also, but is saved in time by Shanay. She quickly adopts a resisting stance in relation to Ramankaka's presumptuous efforts to interpolate her.

Mikki stands eligible to inherit everything all of Binny's assets which includes her father's old companies. Mikki, the empowered woman is confident and affirmative in discharging her duties. The two half-sisters start working like bees by rubbing shoulders with each other. Mikki's parents' third death anniversary is two months away; Mikki requests Alisha to participate in organizing an appropriate function to mark the occasion. That year, she thinks that the two can lay the foundation stone for a hospital - Hiralal Hospital, hoping to build a home for Bombay's street children and aged destitutes. Mikki hires an outside agency to help her arrive at a few decisions; raising money through non-convertible bonds has been one of their recommendations. The optimistic business climate attracts several foreign collaborators.

One day Mikki receives a mysterious anonymous phone call. She asks what he wants and the voice on the other end of the telephone line responds:

What I want? Nothing, I want to see you dead. That is all I do not want to waste my time in meaningless chats. You have inherited all that was you're in the first place. Your husband's death has made you a wealthy woman. People will be after your money. Men in particular. I

know who they are but now this is not the occasion to tell you. One more sister too. You will need one in the coming days. (S 181)

Mikki dials the Police Commissioner, a friend of her father, Mr. Gokhale and shares her fear with him. He says he will trace the call in twenty four hours. Frequently, someone starts trapping Mikki on phone, the voice is familiar, but unable to recognize. The voice says he wants to wipe out their family.

Mikki informs to Ramanbhai asking him to come to that place. When she goes to that place, she comes to know that the mysterious man is none but Ramanbhai. He also plans to kill her. She closes her eyes and prays to God. She opens her eyes to find to her surprise, Ramnabhai lies down on the filthy floor. She does not move first and hides herself. To her surprise, Shanay strides up to Ramnabhai and enquires about Mikki. Then she comes to know that he is not dead. The police come and arrest him. Ramnabhai plans all the crooked things to kill her parents, husband and even Mikki and Alisha.

Mikki and Alisha are hospitalized, Mikki being diagnosed with T.B and Alisha being addicted to drugs. Both play maternal roles when the other is in need of care.

How the life of a woman in this tragic world of cut throat competition, where good intentions fatally miscarry, for which Mikki suffers and it is through her suffering she learns the art of living. Her final triumph comes when she wins the love and affection of her half-sister, Alisha who pined for legitimacy in life, but failed, because her father had no guts to own her in public. Shobha De brings these two women together,

who blundered their way for a while and turned their mutual distrust to

love and affection passing the bounds of social restrictions. (Das 96)

Das is very much right in revealing the fact how the illegitimate children yearn to achieve dignity and identity to their self when the father disowns them in public.

When Alisha is devoid of recognition, she is distracted from the main stream develops and so much aversion for her half- sister, Mikki. Later Alisha realizes the need of her sister's company and so they have become close to each other. Both sisters go to London for a holiday and return happily with the decision to get married.

At the airport, Alisha is attracted by two men who are good looking, resemble to be Indians. Alisha exchanges a quick conspiratorial glance with Mikki. Mikki is in a hurry they may miss the flight. Mikki smiles when asked if she likes Shanay. Alisha looks at her with surprise whether Mikki is interested in him. Alisha shakes her head in vexation and turns around to stare pointedly at the two men, Mikki says softly:

One of your guys had better watch out. Your bachelor days are numbered. It is all over for you now. Alluring Alisha is on the prowl.

Next to her, Mikki smiled and looked out of the window at the twilight sky outside. She spotted the lone evening star. Mikki quickly made a wish. A wish she knew was going to come true. Finally. (S 222)

De's women are no longer prepared to accept the definitions given to them by men and suffered because of the gender biased society. They refuse to be a prey to male predatory manoeutters and herald the dawn of revolution. Rejecting the darkness of isolation and marginalization, they call for an expedition of women centered paradigm. Her women sought new definitions and hence tried to redefine themselves according to how they viewed themselves.

Shobha De finds financial security, the basis for women's emancipation and she says in her work *Shooting from the Hip*: "There can be no talk of independence for women, without economic self-efficiency" (76).

De springs up with the refreshing message that the emotional bonding between the women removes loneliness and frustration. De emphasizes that gender atrocities can be minimized through female bonding which never silences but communicates and leads towards a healthy and wholesome relationship. De in her writings emphasis the truth that women are endowed with duty consciousness in every of their life and her self-sacrificing compassion as far as family is concerned is her hallmark.