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Fragmented Selves and Commodified Bodies: A Posthumanist Exploration of Gender, Identity and Power in Shobhaa De's *Sisters*

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Abstract

*Indian Writing in English has ascertained a separate position for on its own in the field of global literature. Many varied issues are discussed in Indian Writing in English. The present Indian writings have been deliberating on the experience of the contemporary state of affairs along with the picturisation of life in India and Indians residing abroad reflecting on the Indian culture, custom, social norms, and even Indian history. The women writers, particularly, have been contributing enormously and significantly. They write mostly about the sufferings of the women with psychological perspective. They have elaborately depicted the posthuman feministic elements of the novels and have taken in the perspectives of women. The Indian woman writer, Shobhaa De delves deeply into the psychic elements and is very popular for her distinctive writing style, methodology, and subject matter. The spotlight of her book *Sisters* is women's identity struggles in a patriarchal society. It is observed that not only is a woman treated like an object, but animalism is also practiced against her. In her novel, *Sisters*, Shobhaa De articulates her anger at the patriarchal structure of society—where masculinity seems to always mistreat and abuse the feminine. This paper is an attempt to illuminate on Identity issues, Gender discrimination and the Role of power.*

Keywords: Posthumanism, Postmodern, Self-Assertion, Liberation, Rebellious, Patriarchal, Transformation

Purpose

Posthumanism, as a philosophical and literary lens, confronts the traditional humanist idea of a stable, rational, and autonomous subject. It re-imagines the human in relation to technology, animals, environment, and structures of power. In the context of Shobhaa De's *Sisters*, this aspect can give way to a huge understanding of fragmented identity, the commodification of the body, and the evolving relationships between self, society, and systems of control in a postmodern urban landscape. The purpose of this article is to

examine *Sisters* as a novel of posthuman feminist discourse, wherein the protagonist's expedition reflects a struggle not just against patriarchal norms, but against larger systems of surveillance, control, and commodification. By applying posthumanist theory, the paper intends to discuss how De reimagines female identity beyond essentialist boundaries and towards a more fragmented, performative, and adaptive posthuman subjectivity.

Literary Review

In literary studies, posthumanism has been employed to scrutinize how characters and narratives reflect changing perceptions of the self, the body, and society in technologically mediated and capitalist worlds. It assesses the commodification of the body, the dominance of digital systems, and the erosion of ethical and emotional integrity in hypermodern contexts. The novel's urban, post-liberalization setting reflects a world in which traditional humanist values-integrity, emotional depth, and stable identity-are destabilized. Mikki, as a character, embodies a posthuman subject-fragmented, performative, and shaped by both external systems and internal negotiations of gender and power.

Discussion

Indian writers of English literature have ushered in a new age and have won numerous accolades across the globe. Indian women writers in particular have begun to challenge the long-standing patriarchal dominance. Women can no longer be used as the puppets of men. The women writers have exposed their significance in the domain of literature, both prolific and profound, shaping literary history and pushing societal boundaries. Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Markandaya, Arundhati Roy, Suniti Namjoshi, Bama, Githa Hariharan, Meena Kandasamy, Nayantara Sahgal, Shobhaa De, Anita Desai and Manju Kapur and many other writers have left a permanent impression on the persons who read Indian Writings in English.

The works of feminist writers in India mirror a sensible depiction of the contemporary, well-informed, urban Indian women. On one side, their novels appear to be a product of feminism. On the other side, they deride contemporary metropolitan culture in the frame of feminism. To project urban culture, they have changed the traditional enduring, submissive and self – sacrificing women into audacious and unconventional urban women.

Postmodernism and posthumanism in the writings of Indian women are vibrant and evolving literary movements that portray the complexities of identity, gender, caste, class, and colonial history. Postmodernism, characterized by its skepticism toward grand narratives, fragmentation, intertextuality, and playfulness with language, has significantly influenced contemporary Indian women writers. These authors challenge traditional structures, question patriarchal norms, and investigate themes of identity, sexuality, marginalization, and hybridity.

Postmodern Indian women's writing is a space of resistance, subversion, and innovation. These authors challenge dominant discourses, reconstruct identities, and offer alternative narratives that break away from rigid cultural and literary traditions. Their works continue to shape contemporary Indian literature, making space for diverse voices and perspectives.

Shobhaa De, one of the most prominent women writers in Indian Writing in English, pragmatically portrays the image of the high-class women in present India. Shobhaa De is recognized for her audacious, openhearted and guileless approach in writing. Her narration is very forthright and candid.

Women's lives are shown by Shobhaa De in terms of their psyche, careers, sexual urges, psychological traumas, and repression. Although the overabundance of sexual content may be uncomfortable, her open storytelling and the story's central idea give her writing a distinct voice.

Shobhaa addresses a variety of topics, including fragmentation, feminism, lesbianism, searching for one's identity, cultural shifts, insecurity, liberalisation, disorientation, realism, tradition, and modernism.

Shobhaa De's *Sisters* is a story of crooked metropolitan mores where the values have gone astray, relationship among people and marriages have become a laughing stock. Shobhaa De's novel *Sisters* talks about the shady world of huge trade and industry. The book is indeed an engrossing story of two affluent women who are pitted against each other in a rivalry fuelled by ambition, lust, and greed.

Both the parents of Mikki meet an unfortunate air crash and die suddenly. She finds the family business in a state of disarray and on the brink of collapse. She starts to demonstrate her administrative dexterity in business. Eventually she is surrounded by the lenders, unscrupulous businessmen and untrustworthy employees. But she is ready to shoulder responsibilities and not prepared to give up her individual freedom. When she learns that she has a sister, her father's illegitimate child, she feels obliged to make her a partner in the business. The existence of Alisha makes her feel comfortable and she feels strengthened internally. With the aid of her belief in human values, she tries to connect with Alisha. It also portrays how people are selfish and follow any means in order to get their wishes and interests fulfilled. The plot is centred on Bombay's unscrupulous metropolitan business community. It is filled with sex, treachery, abhorrence, deception and dishonesty. Shobhaa De efficiently depicts the ills of a corrupt metropolitan mores and the rescue of the important characters. Ultimately, it is not a deliverance or an escape, but an understanding of actuality.

In *Sisters*, Binny Malhotra—a real embodiment of the patriarchal system—subjugates, enslaves, and takes advantage of Mikki Hiralal. The novel's portrayal of Mikki's predicament highlights the cruel truths of patriarchal society. This throws light at the mounting alertness that is seen among women who commence to grow from the endless sleep. Mikki remonstrates continuously against Binny wanting to have her own will and freedom. Paradoxically, she does not think on a life beyond marital limitations. Mikki believes that materialistic delights devoid of "self" freedom are meaningless. In fact, Shobhaa De's female characters enjoy financial independence, allowing them to make bold and autonomous life choices. They look for individual liberty, and when they do not get that, they become defiant. They channel their frustration through actions often seen as morally incorrect, such as flouting marital vows or engaging in extramarital affairs. Shobhaa De observes that it is not sufficient for a woman to have her own mind, and she strives for economic freedom and with this comes assertiveness, self-assurance and poise.

Mikki's internal struggle as a woman is tied to her identity and societal expectations. She expects to reap the benefits of marriage, but Binny kicks her out of his house because he doubts her loyalty to him. She pleads innocence and tells him:

"Binny..... I love you. Only you.... I can't live without you...." (*Sisters*, 230)

When Binny asks for a divorce, she feels completely disillusioned and disappointed. She takes many efforts to lead a life with him but they all go astray. She finds herself in a difficult situation when Binny dies. Her perspective undergoes a change. This experience gives her a profound and painful understanding of the lack of power many women face within traditional marriages. Mikki transforms into a kind mother-figure from a sheer social girl. This is obvious when she focuses her consideration to her alienated sister.

Mikki considers human relations to be more precious than wealth. She feels sorry towards her step sister and tries to reconcile with her. Alisha does not trust her, hates her kind-natured attitude and labels her 'bitch'. The dissimilarity between Mikki and Alisha is the on the whole the imperative portion for the development of the story of the book.

Mikki, despite her attraction to Binny Malhotra and her sexual affair with him, is a realist in terms of marriage. She likes to be a wife though she longs for a life of complete independence; she is not hesitant to become a wife. She hates the heartless subordination of the woman and cannot confine herself within the four walls of the house. Being educated in America and a woman with progressive thinking, Mikki adjusts and accepts Binny because she loves him so much. The author describes Mikki's profound surrender and passion. She chooses to offer herself entirely to her husband, believing that his happiness is supreme. This act of giving is ingrained in her love for him and the certainty that he is now truly hers. She transforms from a woman with reservations to one who is fully committed and passionate, willing to give her "body, mind and soul" to the man she loves.

But Binny behaves totally against his wife's expectations. She is interested to support him in business but is denied and her husband says to her that her job is to look beautiful and to buy clothes and jewellery but should not question him at any cost.

Binny marries Mikki to keep up his pride and image in the society. He also deprives his wife of motherhood. Mikki's character represents the challenges faced by individuals who are denied fundamental aspects of personal autonomy and emotional security.

Alisha's denial of individuality, independence, and emotional security defines her character. Her response to these challenges—fighting for her place in her father's business, viewing money as a source of identity, and seeing Mikki as a rival—highlights her resilience and determination. Her journey underscores themes of self-discovery, empowerment, and the quest for recognition in a society that often denies women these very aspects. Unlike traditional Indian women, Mikki is not weak, sensitive, or reserved. On the contrary she is assertive and pragmatic.

Sisters is a down-to-earth novel with a number of grave issues about metropolitan women wanting to achieve greater heights in all walks of life. In the modern world, sex is losing its sanctity. Women are considered as sex-toys. Infidelity in marriage, superficial love and dominant patriarchal values are prevalent.

Shobhaa De, a down-to-earth and pragmatic person. Traditional gender binaries are destabilized in Sisters. Mikki embodies both nurturing femininity and cutthroat corporate masculinity, thus challenging the humanist ideal of preset gender roles. The fluidity of her role also hints at posthuman feminism, which seeks to dissolve essentialist notions of "woman."

Mikki doesn't like to be made fun of. She exudes confidence and intensity. Anjanaben describes her as a challenging young woman. She is tough not because she is unresponsive to people or because she has a strong sense of self, but rather because she questions the conventional wisdom of a community. It sees a young lady as the male's inconsequential shadow. Mikki wants to break the stereotype of women, and she is prepared to handle people brutally if they exhibit the typical lack of empathy and domineering behaviour displayed by their male co-workers in her line of work. Mikki is independent, strong, and self-sufficient despite her achievements. The man typically chooses, organises, and leads the female in an androcentric culture; however, the women of Shobhaa De are a distinct breed. They possess the ability to oppose, restrain, and even take revenge on those who attempt to stifle them.

Mikki is portrayed as a young, postmodern woman with a distinct goal, will, and intellect. She has a strong sense of reality and is an independent thinker. She seems eager to proclaim her womanly qualities while maintaining a strong sense of independence in a world that is consistently ruled by men. We witness the idea of Shobhaa De, the creator, who needs her women to be more than just the submissive counterfoils of their male mates, through the expectations of an impassioned and sensible Mikki. She envisions them as liberated, self-assured women leading transparent, unrestricted lives. However, if Mikki expresses an idea that is clearly a component of her strongly

held posthuman feminist viewpoints, then the concept of Alisha is somewhat extremely obvious and brutal.

In Shobhaa De's novels, the ideas concerned with marriage are crushed by her modern liberated women. In addition to marriage, sex is a significant topic in the novels of Shobhaa De. According to her, women having sex is no longer a taboo subject. The protagonist, Mikki, reflects a fragmented and shifting sense of self. She is caught between her traditional upbringing and the fast-paced, hyper-modern world of business and media. Her identity is shaped by numerous external forces—capitalism, patriarchy, and consumer culture—leading to a posthuman condition where the self is no longer consistent or autonomous.

The message in her novels is that women must search for their identities. Nevertheless, De also highlights the misconceptions that women have about their independence and makes fun of the ways that they pretend to be males in order to express their uniqueness, all the while ignoring the issue of female empowerment as a whole. De has shown off ladies who engage in free sex and lead stylish, affluent lives, but she doesn't appear to endorse the lifestyle these apparently modern women have chosen. Rather, she expresses her disdain and distaste for their immoral and socially inappropriate actions. Female bodies in *Sisters* are presented as sites of consumption and control. Posthumanism critiques how technology, media, and corporate culture objectify and regulate the female form. Mikki's transformation—from a grieving sister to a corporate figure—involves the remaking of her image and persona, suggesting a cybernetic or engineered identity constructed by societal expectation and media gaze.

In *Sisters*, De employs a narrative structure that reflects the fragmented and chaotic nature of the protagonists' lives.

De also discusses patriarchal and class structures by characterising women who defy traditional gender roles. Mallika's rise as a businesswoman and Alisha's journey of self-discovery highlight the novel's posthuman feminist tinges. The novel reexamines the superficiality of high society, showing how power, money, and relationships are often transactional rather than real.

Conclusion

Women writers recurrently investigate the disparity of power between genders, critiquing patriarchal structures that insist on traditional roles and limit women's autonomy. They often talk about the tension between societal expectations and individual desires, demonstrating how cultural norms can throttle women's desires and personal growth. Women have a say to the serious discussion regarding equality and the rights of women by boldly challenging restrictive social and cultural principles, they fuel a crucial dialogue about gender equality and women's rights. Through their powerful narratives, they ignite a call to action, inspiring readers to question, challenge and dismantle the status quo. It is time to demand a world where women's voices are heard, valued and empowered. Shobhaa De's novel *Sisters* exemplifies her posthuman approach to literature through its narrative techniques, thematic explorations, and stylistic elements. The journey of the protagonists in *Sisters* is marked by their search for identity and self-discovery which can be considered the central themes in posthumanism. Let us harness this power to forge a more just, inclusive, and equitable world – where every woman's narrative is a catalyst for change.

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