

## I. Deepa Mehta's *Fire*: An Overview

*Fire* is a film made by Deepa Mehta, India born Canadian women film director. Most of the narratives of the film are related with the female experiences. This study analyzes the subversion of middle class sexuality from the perspective of Marxist feminism and thus proves how the female protagonists, Radha and Sita resort to lesbianism so as to challenge the heterosexuality, the ideal form of middle class sexuality, and thereby the middle class patriarchy. Marxist feminism is dominated by overall economic issues and it tries to avoid some weaknesses of classical feminism. It opens the new horizon of the study which tries to criticize the traditional ideology based stand point of thought of western feminism.

Sita and Radha, two female protagonists, follow lesbianism and challenge the heterosexuality, an ideal form of middleclass sexuality, imposed on them by their male counterparts. The film *Fire* acknowledges lesbian issues, which denies the traditional concept about gender role and heterosexuality. Mehta's characters resist the middle class bourgeoisie concept of family, sexuality and gender role. The story is based on the experiences of two women: Sita and Radha.

Mehta is best known for her Elements Trilogy, all of which are set in India. The first film *Fire*, in the series, is set in the contemporary Indian society. It is a highly controversial film among certain conservative quarters in India due to its depiction of gender, marriage and homosexuality and particularly because of use of the names of Hindu goddesses as lesbian characters. *Fire* (1996) tells a story of two middle-class Indian women trapped in arranged marriages. Critics attributed *Fire's* widespread success, in part, to Mehta's ability to build empathy across cultural borders. Mehta herself comments in an article in *Zeitgeist Films*:

Even though *Fire* is very particular in its time, space, and setting, I wanted its emotional content to be universal. The struggle between tradition and individual expression is one that takes place in every culture. FIRE deals with this specifically in the context of Indian society. What appealed to me was that the story had a resonance that transcended geographic and cultural boundaries. (1)

If we enter the plot of the film, we find the film *Fire* has India as its background, and is made in English, deals with the development of a loving sexual relationship between two Indian women.

The family portrayed in the film consists of an aged bed-ridden mother, her two sons Ashok (Kulbhushan Karbandha) and Jatin (Javed Jaffri) and their wives. A manservant called Mundu, who helps with the household chores, also lives in the house. The family depends on the income from a fast-food outlet and a video rental business adjoining the house for its livelihood. The elder son Ashok manages the business while the younger son helps him.

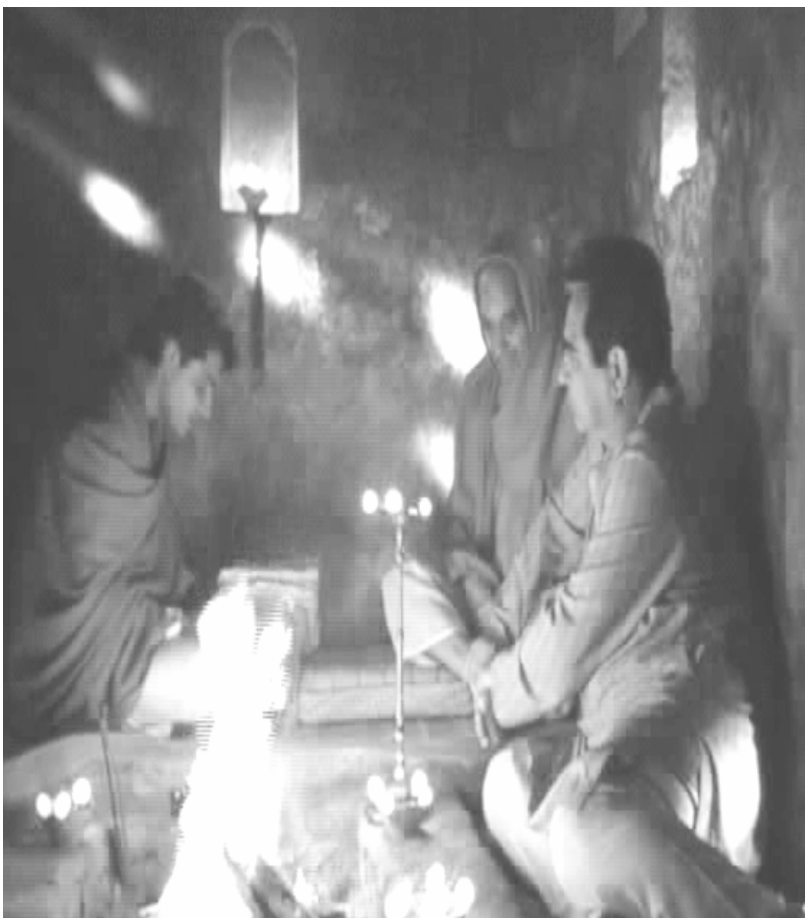


Their respective wives, Radha (Shabana Azmi) and Sita (Nandita Das), prepare the food for the fast-food outlet. Jatin, behind the back of his elder brother, has turned the video rental into a den of illegal transactions where blue films are rented out to young children. Jatin, who is unmarried at the beginning of the film, spends part of the money he acquires this way to maintain a relationship with a woman hairdresser called Julie, who has immigrated with her parents to India from Hong Kong as shown in the picture.

The elder brother Ashok spends a considerable amount of his income to look after a religious guru whom he closely associates with and is in the habit of visiting regularly. Ashok tries to give his family an impression that his eccentric relationship with the Guru would help him to detach himself from sensual pleasures and ultimately attain 'universal truth.'

When doctors reveal that Radha is unable to bear children, Ashok becomes a 'brahmacharin', one who relies on refraining completely from sex to gain religious and spiritual advancement.

Apparently, he has turned his wife's incapacity to conceive



into a ladder to climb up to Moksha or spiritual freedom. As part of this exercise, he

forces his wife to lie beside him on the bed to prove to himself according to Gandhian tradition his “powers of resisting sensual desires”. Radha, to all appearance a traditional woman, consents to her husband's demand, but the viewer can clearly sense the injustice consuming her.

Jatin's girl friend Julie, who has absorbed bourgeois tastes and habits, will not consent to marry into a traditional “joint-family”. When Ashok entreats Jatin to marry to provide the family with a son to carry on the family name, he weds Sita and brings her home while continuing his relationship with Julie. Sita a cheerful, light hearted, lovable young woman, is rather out of place in the somber and gloomy atmosphere of the traditional household until she manages to build up a friendly relationship with her sister-in-law.

Jatin cruelly snubs Sita's attempts to build up a close relationship with him. Jatin seems to gloat over the fact that he is only fulfilling his family's wish in having sex with Sita. Needless to say, his sexual behavior revolts the spectator. Sita is capable of uncovering the reasons behind the peculiarities in Jatin's behavior only after some time.

The spectator senses sometimes open and often veiled derision of the two husbands towards their respective wives. The main theme of the film *Fire* is the development of a mutually supportive and affectionate relationship between the two women, a relationship that is gradually transformed into sexual love.



The film establishes the point that one is not born a lesbian but becomes one. The growing picture of lesbianism is seen in the activities of the Radha and Sita. As Ruth Vanita and Salim Kidwai claim: "The film uses tropes of female intimacy such as oiling each other's hair, tropes of marriage such as exchanging bangles, feeding one another cardamom, and pressing each other's feet and explores in a mastery fashion of the eroticism of exchanged glances" (214).

Mundu becomes aware of the nature of the relationship between the two women and informs the master of the house, who then spies on the women. Radha has to bear the brunt of Ashok's jealous and bitter anger. The seemingly harmonious life of the family is shattered and the two women decide to go away to a distant place and begin life anew on their own. On the day they plan to leave, Radha suggests that Sita leave the house first so that Radha could try and explain things to Ashok.

Radha's attempt to explain things to Ashok only leads to a terrible quarrel. It is clear that Ashok, who is deeply disturbed after witnessing the sexual behavior of the two women, is in no mood to listen to Radha's explanations. The quarrel between Radha and Ashok takes place in the kitchen and Radha's saree unexpectedly catches fire. Ashok who has been asserting all his male authority to substantiate his condemnation of Radha is unable even to raise a hand to put out the flames enveloping her. The narrative moves away from constructing frameworks for Radha and Sita. Jasbir Jain argues that "an act of transgression breaks the control of others body and compels society to reformulate its boundaries in whatever limited measures" (136).

The relationship between Radha and Sita wins not only the whole-hearted sympathy of the spectator but also unreserved respect. The great artistic power of *Fire*

lies in its ability to make the spectator sympathize and respect a relationship that in ordinary day-to-day life is generally not approved of.

The realistic depiction by the film of institutionalised traditional relationships in class society generates within the spectator revulsion and hatred towards such relationships. The brutal and revolting nature of the sexual relationship bound up with institutionalised traditional marriage in class society is powerfully revealed through Jatin's sexual attitude towards his wife. The mental agony undergone by Radha in having to lie beside Ashok in bed so as to provide him with an opportunity to prove to himself his powers of resisting sensual pleasures is powerfully conveyed through Shabana Asmi's sensitive and controlled acting.

The family depicted in *Fire* is fundamentally an economic unit, bound together by an enfeebled system of mutual social duties and it easily succumbs to the pressures borne out of its contradictions. The film's appeal is certainly not for unconventional relationships against conventional ones. The sexual relationship between Jutin and Julie though unconventional is also depicted as one devoid of love, gentleness and beauty merely seeking the gratification of brutal sexual instincts. The maker of the film has consciously sought to contrast the loving sexual relationship developing between Radha and Sita with the sexual relationship existing between Jutin and Julie. That the film's appeal is for enlightened, loving and spiritually satisfying relationships between human beings is crystal clear.

In an interview published in *Sunday Reader* on March 8, 1998, Deepa Mehta said it had become an unpleasant task for her to counter interpretations of *Fire* as a film that idealized and promoted lesbianism:

I love the film *Fire*. I am proud of my film. The questions you raise prompted by your middle class upbringing forces me to defend *Fire*.

I do not like this situation at all. I am not obliged to defend anything in the film *Fire*. The question here is not whether one chooses to engage in homosexual and heterosexual relationships or whether one chooses to engage in only heterosexual relationships. The question is the necessity to choose a life of dignity and self-fulfillment. (4)

The talents of actors and actresses have contributed much towards the artistic power of the film. Shabana Asmi and Nandita Das not only bring to life the characters they portray but also accomplish the difficult task of winning the viewer's sympathy and respect for a lesbian relationship between two women.

The film *Fire* challenges the heterosexual normalcy of the Hindu society through the brave ladies Radha and Sita. It deals with unsatisfied sexual desire of females. Reviewing on Deepa Mehta's film *Fire*, Gayatri Gopinath argues:

Radha's dreamscape and her mother's exhortation to see things differently, "to 'see' without literary seeing", a fact that points to the "need for a particular strategy of reading sexuality outside dominant configuration of visibility, desire and identity it suggest and alternative mode of reading and 'seeing' non-normative erotic and gendered configuration as they erupt within sites of extreme hetero normativity. (741)

Focusing on queer female subjectivity, Gopinath develops a theory of diasporas apart from the logic of blood, authenticity and patrilineal descent that Deepa Mehta argues invariably forms, the core of conventional formulations. Radha's vision and dreamscape makes her to see the world from her own perspective. The dominant parts of desire erupted from inside of her to seek personal identity. Gayatri adds, "The

controversial *Fire* has worked Bollywood's strategies of lesbianism representation and to what is lost or gained in the process of translation" (745).

Another critic Sudhir Kakar analyses the film as the presentation of female bonding; not only because of male domination but through their own desires and ideas. Sexuality is related to the performance what the people shows but not hierarchical loaded to someone. Respecting the lesbian relationship of Sita and Radha, he points sexuality as "the creation of a two person universe, where the affirmations of the female body and the recognition of her feminine soul take place simultaneously" (144).

The boundary of heterosexual normalcy is plucked off by Sita and Radha's unity, where their body and soul take place in the same path. What the society wants is juxtaposed with what an individual wants. The moral issues take a hold over their lives and the individual's desires are pushed back and suppressed. For, Sita this becomes a very trying experience, leaving her emotionally estranged from her husband and accepting the track of lesbianism which is beyond the traditional norms of society.

In this way, different critics have interpreted this film from different perspectives. The present study, however, seeks to prove how the female protagonists, Radha and Sita resort to lesbianism so as to challenge the heterosexuality, the ideal form of middle class sexuality, and thereby the middle class patriarchy. Theoretical insights from Marxist feminism will be derived to analyze the text.

Chapter I provides an outline to the whole study. Chapter II discusses the relevant ideas so as to formulate the theoretical tools for the analysis of the text. In



Chapter III, the text in question has been scrupulously analyzed. Chapter IV concludes the study.

## II. Marxist Feminism

Feminists believe that the primary source of women's oppression is from capital. Women are not allowed fully participate in the workforce so their access to capital is limited. Marxist Feminists posit that if women were fully allowed to join the workforce then they would no longer be oppressed.

Socialist Feminists, among others criticized this viewpoint. Other forms of Feminism more accurately hold men and more specifically patriarchy as the primary causes of women's oppression. Marxist Feminists conclusion that capitalism is almost exclusively the cause of women's oppression is overly simplistic, but not surprising given the fact that they are approaching the problem from only an economic standpoint. Friedrich Engel, one of the fathers of Marxism, and to some extent Marxist Feminism wrote at length about gender inequality under capitalism. He came up with an indefensible theory as to the origins of patriarchy titled *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

Marxist feminism is a sub-type of feminist theory, which focuses on the dismantling of capitalism as a way to liberate women. Marxist feminism states that private property, which gives rise to economic inequality, dependence, political confusion, and ultimately unhealthy social relations between men and women, is the root of women's oppression in the current social context. According to Marxist theory, the individual is heavily influenced by the structure of society, which in all modern societies means a class structure; that is, people's opportunities, wants, and interests are seen to be shaped by the mode of production that characterizes the society they inhabit. Marxist feminists see contemporary gender inequality as determined ultimately by the capitalist mode of production. Gender oppression is class oppression and the relationship between man and woman in society is similar to the relations

between proletariat and bourgeoisie. Women's subordination is seen as a form of class oppression, which is maintained because it serves the interests of capital and the ruling. Marxist feminists have extended traditional Marxist analysis by looking at domestic labour as well as wage work.

Feminism generally a theoretical discourse advancing women's rights based on belief in the equality of the sexes. It is a doctrine redefining women's activities and goal form a women centre point of view and refusing to accept the cult of masculine chauvinism and superiority that reduces women to a sex object a second sex , a submissive other. It seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression: inequalities and injustice women suffer because of their sex and defend equal right for women in a political social, psychological personal and aesthetic sense.

Feminism is a school of thought, which tries to dismantle the patriarchal social norms, and values, that is against the natural law of equality, to liberate women. It as a movement declares that women are also human beings equal to men. It is a voice against the inadequacy, the distortion as well as ideologies of the males. It is a massive complaint against patriarchal monopoly. It is a commitment to eradicate the ideology of domination to establish a healthy and equal society for both male and female. Feminism as "the movement for women's liberation is a part of the creation of a new society in which there are any forms of discrimination. This society cannot be separated from the process of its making" (Rowbotham qtd. in Bryson 257). Feminism focuses on physical, economic, political, and psychological, religions etc equality and opposes gender roles, stereotypes and discrimination against women based on the assumption that women are passive, weak and physically helpless.

The French dramatist Alexander Dumas first used the term 'feminism' in 1872 in a pamphlet "L" to designate the emerging movement for women's rights. It

gradually emerged to be a world-wide cultural movement to secure a complete equality of women with men in the enjoyment of all human rights-moral, social, religious, political, educational, legal, economic and many others. It studies the dominations of women in many fields, from different perspectives. Therefore, Rosemarie Tong states, feminism:

Is not one, but many, theories or perspectives and that each feminist theory or perspective attempts to describe women's oppression, to explain its causes and consequences, and to describe strategies for women's liberation. The more skillful a feminist theory can combine description explanation, and perspective the better that theory is." (1)

Feminism is not only a study of problems but also it seeks its solution and its impact as well. It is a theory based on reason. That is why; some critics call it 'feminist science'.

Feminism is an expression or resentment at the unjust treatment imposed upon women. It voices the women's objection to be treated as a doormat or a piece of furniture meant for the convenience of men. Women refuse to be shifted under oppression and restriction and intend to rebel against the hostile environment in which they live. It is a struggle against the hardship and neglect imposed upon women, "Patriarchy continually exerts forces that undermine women's self-confidence and assertiveness, then points to the absence of these qualities as proof that women are naturally and therefore correctly, self-effacing and submissive" (Tyson 85).

Feminism struggles against this kind of false creation for the establishment of patriarchal regime. Thus, it is not against the males of society but against their monopoly and dictatorship. It raises question against the long standard dominant, phallogentric ideologies, patriarchal attitudes and male interpretation on literature,

social science, economics, politics, religion etc. There is a strong affiliation between Marxism and feminism. Both of them attack the social injustice and discrimination.

Moreover, all feminist activities including feminist theory and literary criticism have its ultimate goal to change the world by promoting gender equality. Thus, all feminist activity can be seen as a form of activism. This activism campaigns on issue such as reproductive right, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, sexual harassment, discrimination and sexual violence. The themes explored in feminism include discrimination, stereotyping, objectification, especially sexual objectification, oppression etc.

The basis of feminist ideology is that rights privilege; status and obligations should not be determined by gender. Feminism however is a grass root movement, which crosses the class and race boundaries. As culturally specific, it addresses the issues relevant to women of the corresponding society. It focuses on physical equality and opposes the gender roles stereotypes and discrimination against women based on assumption that women are passive, weak and physically helpless. It rejects the idea that certain characteristics or interests are inherently masculine, which are positive and superior and that certain characteristics or interests are inherently feminine, which are negative and inferior.

Feminism as a movement started only after Second World War especially in the decade of 1960s when the voices of minorities like African-American, Jewish etc emerged as movements. In this period, suppressed voices got chances to revolt. So, 1960s was the beginning decade of its institutional development. Earlier also feminist felt that females are in fact made inferior not by nature but by social mechanism. In ancient period, women were taken as puppet to amuse males. They said that females lack certain qualities, which males possess.

Aristotle said, "The female is female by virtue of certain lack of qualities" (qtd. in Indreni 90). Similarly, in middle age St. Thomas Aquinas thought that a woman is "an imperfect man" (90).

In 441 B.C. Sophocles wrote a drama *Antigone* where protagonist is a female character who revolts against the patriarchal rules in favor of humanism. She defiles the rule of government where males themselves could not speak against the king's order. Critics find it as first step to women's voice for liberation. Medieval life was routined according to Bible and its interpretation of the priests. Women's position was positioned as the male members wanted and myths positioned them. This period became Dark Age for the human beings. But at the end of this period female also came into public place. Earlier public debate was conducted entirely by men but from the fifteen-century; women's voices were beginning to be heard. The first woman to write about the rights and duties of her sex was the Frenchwoman Christine de Pisan.

In seventeenth century for the first time significant numbers of women protested against the received ideas about their sex in pamphlets and books mostly published anonymously. Among them, Aphra Benn (1640-1689) was dramatist. Mary Asteel was another theoretician; recently she has been described as the first English feminist. She equalized the relationship between king and subject with husband and wife. But she says, women's work need not be limited by the need to attract a husband. She insisted that a "Woman's duty to obey her husband did not involve any recognition of his superiority" (Bryson 15). That means she also rejected the superiority of men over women. She said that men are not fit to educate children. An educated woman should choose to reject the domestic slavery involved in marriage, therefore, advised women to avoid matrimony.

Socialist Feminists criticized this viewpoint. Other forms of Feminism more accurately hold men and more specifically patriarchy as the primary causes of women's oppression. Marxist Feminists conclusion that capitalism was almost exclusively the cause of women's oppression was overly simplistic, but not surprising given the fact that they were approaching the problem from only an economic standpoint. Friedrich Engel, one of the fathers of Marxism, and to some extent Marxist Feminism wrote at length about gender inequality under capitalism. He came up with an indefensible theory as to the origins of patriarchy titled *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. Concept is interesting, but in the end, it is flawed. Again, Engel fell into the trap of trying to use a fundamentally economic philosophy to explain a social and in this case religious institution. Marxist Feminists, and later other Feminists used this to try to explain women's acquiescence to patriarchy. While the concept of false consciousness gained wider acceptance, and was picked up by mainstream liberal feminists the concept fails to mold neatly from Marxism, again a economic theory, to patriarchy, a social problem. Here Marxist Feminists had to over simplify the situation for their theory to fit. Marxist Feminists finally proved their total lack of connection to reality when they tried to propose "Wages for Housework." Attacked from all sides immediately after being proposed, this complete failure of a concept eventually collapsed from the weight of its own sheer ridiculousness. In this regard, Tong, Putnam states:

Marxist Feminism has many flaws; most of these stem from its strictly mono-causal view of women's oppression as a purely economic problem where Marxism lays out its case by first establishing two classes, the bourgeois and the proletariat, Feminists tried to expand this to make the two classes of men and women. They did this ignoring the

obvious problems with the fact that from an economic standpoint not all women exist in the same class. (13)

Women exist in all economic classes and therefore trying to use economic theory to explain their oppression fails. The social and political effects of Marxism are an extension of its economic philosophy. In contrast, the economic effects of patriarchy are an extension of its political and social situation. This does not make them unrelated, but it shows that if the world is to end the oppression of women then it must deal with the social problems and let the economics change because of the social changes and not the other way around. In the same way Tong, R. P argues, “A major Marxist-feminist organization, bases its theory on Marx' and Engels' analysis that the enslavement of women was the first building block of an economic system based on private property. They contend that elimination of the capitalist profit-driven economy will remove the motivation for sexism, racism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression”(45).

Marxist feminism decomposed as political movement because the incoherence of its postulates prevented its adherents from developing either a program, or an organization, capable of engaging in serious social struggle. In the real world, there is simply no political space between the programs an organization, capable of engaging in serious social

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, both Clara Zetkin and Eleanor Marx were against the demonization of men and supported a proletarian revolution that would overcome as many male female inequalities as possible. As their movement already had the most radical demands in women's equality, most Marxist leaders, including Clara Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai counter posed Marxism against feminism, rather than trying to combine them.



Women's first text with feminine spirit was Mary Willstoncraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Since then women, writers have been exploring their experiences through books but they are frequently marginalized by the male literary canon. In this book she demanded equal education to women because mind does not know sex. It means women are capable of reasoning and should be educated accordingly. In her work *Letters on Education* published in 1790 Catherine Macaway, English historian, claimed that differences between sexes are product of education and environment. She demanded equal education to the boys and girls for equal development of knowledge. She attacked the way in which women's minds and bodies had been distorted to please man.

William Thompson wrote a book *Appeal on Behalf of Women* to attack J.S. Mills' concepts, "Women have no interest separate from those of their husband or father, they have no need of independent political representation" (Bryson 32). Bryson claimed that, "Their intellectual capacity is, he argues, at least as great as men; and biological difference can never be an argument against political rights" (32). Though Mills talked, about human rights and humanism, he tried to exclude women from politics but Thompson attacked his view and saw equal power of mind Physical difference should not be cause for the exclusion in politics. American feminist Margaret Fuller's *Women in the Nineteenth century* (1845) was another important book for the women's social and political rights. It is believed that the emancipation of women and searching for their identity has started from the nineteenth century onwards. Then from the beginning of the twentieth century many feminist came and tried to dig out women's' oppression from different perspectives. Before twentieth century, most of the feminists were liberal influenced by eighteenth century liberal humanism. But in twentieth century, radical feminist also came into the field. Many

other feminists also came with different perspectives who are the feminist literary critics.

Feminism tries to find out the root cause of women's oppression in society and its way out from that oppression. Marxist feminism is a sub-type of feminism, which sees the oppression of women and seeks its resolution from Marxist point of view.

Capitalist social system is main cause of women's oppression in society and its way out is to dismantle this capitalistic social system. Capitalism gives rise to economic inequality, dependency, political confusion and ultimately unhealthy social relations between men and women, which is the root cause of women's oppressions. Marxism can be used to help us understand, "How economic forces have been manipulated by patriarchal law and customs to keep women economically, politically and socially oppressed as an underclass" (Tyson 93). Marxism which is used to understand the feminist issues, economical political and social, is called Marxist feminism. Thus, one of the primary tasks of Marxist feminism "is to create the kind of world in which women will experience themselves as whole persons, as integrated, rather than fragmented or splintered, beings" (Tong 45). Gender inequality is production of capitalism and determined by capitalistic mode of production.

We live in a, as Philips says, "Class society that is also structured by gender, which means that men and women experience class in different ways" (qtd. in Bryson 258). For Marxist feminist gender oppression is class oppression and women's subordination is seen as a form of class oppression. It believes that women's situation in society cannot be understood in isolation from its socio-economic context. As the Marxists see the alienation of labour from work, self, human beings and nature women are also alienated from sex, self, children and from whole surroundings. In capitalism labour is treated as a commodity, which can be sold and bought.

Capitalism intensifies alienation and generalizes it throughout all level of society.

The end of alienation requires communism. So, in the society the end of patriarchal domination requires communism. As the classless society emerges the class, discrimination and gender discrimination will be diminished. Because when the classless society is established all people become equal and property will be in every bodies hand equally. Then only in such society, women get their proper place and equality. In this context, K.K. Ruthven writes:

Marxism identifies capitalism (and the modes of production which support it) as a material base of a class system which is the source of all oppression, and holds that the specific subject of women will end necessarily in that general dismiss of oppression which is to follow the destruction of capitalism. (28)

In capitalistic system, relationship between employer and employee is similar to the commodity and its owner. Capitalists have everything but proletariats have nothing except their labour. This is a wedge for their emancipation. When proletariats come to know that they are exploited, they are not getting proper wage they try to find out where and how they are exploited. Then they revolt against the exploitation imposed upon them. The class-consciousness inspires them to revolt against every kind of injustice. They revolt freely because they have nothing to lose but bourgeoisie have everything to lose. Then they establish classless society, which is a society of every people. In such society, women also get equal chances. Then, hierarchyless society emerges. That is the result of class-consciousness.

But capitalists, also represent patriarchy, exercise to create false consciousness to establish their empire. They try to hide all kinds of discriminations and injustice. Workers work very hard for the production of the factory and produce a large quantity

but "none of them bore which name or any other mark of their individual contribution" (Tyson 58). So, the workers are alienated from the production itself. They are alienated from themselves also. When they are alienated from the product they find the work unpleasant but they are bound to do their work: "When the potential source of a workers humanization becomes the actual source of his or her dehumanization, the worker is bound to undergo a major psychological crisis" (Tong 44). Therefore, workers are alienated from themselves. Workers are alienated from other human being as well, because they see around them their co-workers as competitor for job and promotion as the capitalistic economic system encourages. This sense of competition for job and promotion alienate workers from their co-workers. In this system finally workers are alienated from the nature itself "because the kind of work they do and condition under which they do, it make them see nature as an obstacle to their survival" (Tong 44). So they are alienated from nature itself also because of capitalistic economic system. Therefore, the most important aspect for elimination of alienation is the eradication of capitalism, which will help women also to emancipate from patriarchal domination.

For the elimination of the oppression of women capitalistic economy should be dismantled which also dismantle the patriarchal social system because it is based on capitalistic system. As workers are alienated from the product, self other human being and nature women are also alienated from sex, self, children and their surroundings. Women do not get their proper place because they are women:

Women are not paid less simply because they are unskilled, but because working class men have succeeded in protecting their own interest at women's expense they have been able to do this because

dominant attitude label any work done by women as inherently inferior to that done by men. (Bryson 241)

They are paid less because of the interest and self-protection of male superiority.

They evaluate women as if they were commodity because their sex differs from male sex. Women take domestic responsibilities and outward work is generally supposed to do by males which is categorized as hard work. By this cause, also females are treated as weak: "Women's domestic responsibilities do mean that they are less able than men to defend their own economic interests" (Bryson 241). Therefore, women's interest, capacity, vigor etc. are neglected because for male women are commodity as the workers for capitalists.

Women are mostly confined in household activities and they are not allowed to go out and work because their strength, skill, ability are taken inferior than the males infect which is not real but general assumption. Women are doing household activities without any paying. Their work plays vital role in outside work but they don't get any credit. In fact, women enter the productive and important work before than the males of society, because they pave the way for outward activities and make base for industry. This is why Rosemarie Tong says:

No woman has to enter the productive work force, for all women are already in it, even if no one recognizes the fact. Women's work is the necessary conditions for all other labour from which, in turn surplus value is extracted. By providing current (and future) workers not only with food and clothes but also with emotional and domestic comfort, women keep the cogs of the capitalist machine running. (54)

Therefore, some Marxist feminists ask for the wage for their household activities.

They say that from the production of capitalistic factory or from surplus value some

amount of money should be given to women. State should pay for housework of women. Tong brings this Marxist feminist concept from Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, who, "Proposed that the state (the government and employers) not individual men (husbands fathers and boyfriends), pay wage to housewives because capital ultimately profits from women's exploitation" (55).

Actually, women do not get such kind of wage nor their housework is taken as actual work. Therefore, women neither get any respect of their housework nor any wage. That is the cause of alienation of women's self. In capitalistic society, workers are like commodity and in patriarchal society; women's place is also like marketable thing. Males use women as they want and get benefited according to their will. Actually, capitalists get benefit from the exploitation of women. But there are some Marxist feminists who reject the demand of wage for housework. Housework is related to feeling and emotion for them. In her book *The Economic Emergence of Women* Barbara Bergman advocates dislike for wage of the housework. If woman demand wages for housework "the sexual division of labour would actually ossify" (Tong 56). On the other hand if it is not demanded males dominate female more.

Except housework, women have to perform their natural works. One of them is childbearing which women's unquestionable task is. But in patriarchal society childcare is also women's essential work. They give birth and bring up the baby but male members do not take it a vital work and if any woman does only child caring in the house she is called workless. But the father or may be so-called father takes away the child when he wants. This injustice is in patriarchal society. As Engles says, "Women give birth, the mother of any child is always known. However, the identity of the father is never certain because women could have been impregnated by a man

other than her husband" (qtd. in Tong 49). Later this child, if male, tries to control mother.

Engles says, "To secure their wives marital fidelity, men supposedly seek to impose an institution of compulsory monogamy on women" (qtd. in Tong 49). If any woman goes to other man, she is called prostitute and socially outcasted. She should be careful while meeting other males. But in man's case, it is different. Patriarchal society does not seek such strict marital fidelity from males simply because in family males' condition is similar to the condition of capitalists in society. As workers are commodity in capitalistic economic system, women are commodity in family because of influence of capitalistic social system. Engels says, "If wives are to be emancipated from their husband, women must first become economically independent of men" (qtd. in Tong 49). For that dismantle of capitalistic economic system is needed where exploitation of labour is working very strongly. By this reason, women are suffering from the adjective like weak, passive, and emotional in patriarchal society.

Women are treated as commodity in capitalistic society. They see freedom but cannot experience it. In family their voices do not get any place where her husbands, boyfriends, fathers, male members are dictators. Their relatives, supposed nearest persons try to impose their desire upon women. Therefore, they feel alienated from nature and surroundings. Working-class women are more suppressed than the higher or bourgeoisie class women because working class women are treated badly by the higher class women and working class men try to manipulate working class women according to their will, but bourgeois women suffer only from the male members of their own class. Similar is the condition of black women. First, they have to suffer from racial discrimination and then patriarchal discrimination.

Marxist feminists find similarities between male/female in the family and bourgeoisie/proletariat in society. Husband, father or male member in a family is like bourgeoisie in society and wife in a family is like a proletariat in society. It does not mean that women are suffering only within family but family itself is initiating point for women domination. Women are being exploited in the society on the basis of patriarchal norms and values, which are construction of economic power position. Women are the victims of men's comfort "Man's control of women is rooted in the fact that he, not she, controls the property the oppression of women will cease only with the dissolution of the institution of private property" (Tong 49). Women are unable to practice their freedom and desire. Their needs and feelings are condemned to be suppressed because property is in the hand of patriarchy, which believes that there is no desire of women different from men's. Therefore, women are being exploited sexually, psychologically, physically etc. The root cause is the oppression of economic system of the society.

The present study, by deriving insights from the present discussion, will analyze the chosen text and prove how the female protagonists resort to lesbianism so as to challenge heterosexuality, the ideal form of middle class sexuality and thereby the middle class gender roles and notions of sexuality.



### III. Subversion of Middle Class Sexuality in *Fire*

Marxist feminism is a sub-type of feminist theory, which focuses on the dismantling of capitalism as a way to liberate women. Marxist feminism states that private property, which gives rise to economic inequality, dependence, political confusion, and ultimately unhealthy social relations between men and women, is the root of women's oppression in the current social context. Marxist feminists see contemporary gender inequality as determined ultimately by the capitalist mode of production. Gender oppression is class oppression and the relationship between man and woman in society is similar to the relations between proletariat and bourgeoisie. Women's subordination is seen as a form of class oppression, which is maintained because it serves the interests of capital and the ruling.

Against this critical background, *Fire* challenges bourgeois concept of traditional Hindu culture. The hidden pain of emotion, sexuality, has led towards the pace of self-decision and liberty from the tyranny society. The practice of lesbianism in the film comes with the drops of rain in the desert for the people who are waiting eagerly to expose themselves in the society and were maintained a silent; almost secret existence. The film aims to be provocative and challenging to the Indian hypocrisy society through local Indian the characters.

*Fire* portrays an allegory where the country seems to be struggling between tradition and modernity and questions women's roles. It's the suppression of desire and the flame of sensuality that propels the story. The film reflects family relationship of middle class traditional hind society the mutual relationship of the two sisters in-law Sita and Radha, where their husbands pass the every evenings outside. The problem of force marriages learn to bond each other giving the broad meaning of sexuality to the narrow mind concept. *Fire* is Mehta's take on the real middle class of

real India and the reality of the cumbersome burden of tradition. The structure of Hindu tradition projected primary through repeated references to the Ramayana the mythological and historical nomenclature, rituals of home coming and fast keeping the structure of the middle class family with its patriarchal, economic and power equations.

A striking aspect of the film is the treatment of space that out of 90 scenes in the film 71 scenes take place within the house. The outside world and its influences are severely minimized and especially three scenes of the same building is focused first floor of video shop and restaurant 2<sup>nd</sup> floor for the family's rest house and the top floor which is free and only visited by the female members for a breath of fresh and the spot for their bond relationship.

The film *Fire* opens with a dream, which is somewhat like an epigraph to the film as a text. It projects with a young Radha with her parents in a mustard plant, listening to the folk tale from her mother. Her mother nurtures here not only feeding but by attempting to offer her some pearls of wisdom through the folklore. The coziness of the scene with the teasing nostalgic musical strains chiefly the flute in the backdrop keeps recurring as a motif in Raddha's consciousness till she finds solace in her companionship with Sita, her sister-in-law.

The idea is too painstaking visible the film conveys the trusted world in which the family lives. The outside excursions are primarily for the males for Radha's husband, Ashok-the Swami's ashram, for Sita's husband, Jatin-Julie's beauty salon and for the servant, Mundu-the morning street to fetch milk. The women have limited space to go outside and only a day of special freedom that they take on *Karva Chauth*. The real picture of Hindu society where the females are part of suppression is clearly

shown in the *Fire* family. It raises some questions to the male dominated patriarchal society as Madhu Kishwor claims in in her review of the *Fire*:

An unrealistic element in her depiction is that the fire family seems to live in complete isolation. The *Fire* family strangely enough never gets a visitor even at the ritually important moment when the young couple returns from their honeymoon. The past marriage period is usually filled with guests and neighbors in Indian families. . . . The total isolation of this family is not only unrealistic but also claustrophobic.

(7)

The treatment of space in the male dominated society is viewed more inside the film. The old women, Biji in the family is the symbol of hypocrite society and dead manners. She is speechless and tyrannical and holds the suppressive role of the mother-in-law in the Hindu society. The both male members of the family Ashok and Jatin hold the patriarchal position although both are different in nature. The modern manner of Jatin and traditional manner of Ashok both don't have space for their wives. Jatin's love affair with a Chinese girl Julie has taken space in his like. He married Sita just for the family need. Similarly, the elder brother, Ashok regards himself the disciple of Swami ji who takes physical interaction as a sin and hindrance of solace. The activity of Jatin's kissing with Julie and neglecting Sita is the main turn of the plot. Both the pressure of the male characters makes the two sisters strong to raise some action.

The context of Mehta's fire these two sisters in law search their identity by expressing thee emotion and physical urge, which was limited by bourgeoisie society. Radha identifies her own sexual urge for Sita with that of Mundu. However, both the Swami and Ashok are beyond redemption implying a similar fate for the sex

abstaining spiritual leaders right from Vivekananda to modern days Swami. Thus, the *Fire* presents the real picture of the middle classes of India torn between Ramayana and sex between Swami ji and Hong Kong bound Julies passive males and passionate women doomed into dead marriages by tradition without even the option of a divorce or possibilities of socializing or entertainment beyond opera Ramayana. The women are so pushed by tradition on one hand and insensitive males on the other that they only choice left from them is to explore the enlightened possibilities of lesbianism. The film is the answer to the strangle hold of patriarchal tradition, a revolt that is bound to destabilize the constraining Indian traditional set up. Hence, the film is seen as an opportunity for lesbians to come out in public and assert their identity as part of the Indian heritage that had previously censored anything that expressed female subjectively. It speaks about choices that women have apart from the oppressive structure of marriage, which is the cornerstone of Indian society and shows the strength of the women in their unification.

Ownership property and gender relationship are curial constituents of the pleasure of cinema even if evaluations and enjoyment may differ from person to person. The *Fire* explores the paradigm of female sexuality and its representations within the larger patriarchal superstructure. It has made an effort to depict the freedom and possibility in the articulation of female sexual need, which is often condemned in the society. The newly married Sita does not find her husband in Jatin who had already committed himself to a Chinese girl but who refused to marry. Historical places of romance on their honey visit to Agra fail to move Jatin emotionally. Sita's spontaneously telling the romantic tale of Taj Mahal make irritated to Jatin the Taj Mahal chorus ironically an elegiac note it does not signify a thriving blossoming romance which a newly need couple is is expected to enjoy on their honeymoon Sita's

pertinent question: “Don’t you like me?” to Jatin is ironical there is no tenderness no affection associated with the act, only a routine practice. His relationship with Sita as one of duty is ironically contrasted with his relationship with Jatin as that of pleasure”. Sita’s destruction of virginity is the fearful picture that misguides her fate. Jatin kisses her just to preserve his patriarchal position where as Sita is forcefully kicked in the pool of blood by the patriarchal pressure as Teresa de Laureti says about the dominant stable form of hetero-sexuality which is guided by patriarchal norms values and process.

Unfaithful imitation of bourgeois culture and its oppressive nature has been reflected in the novel since starting of the novel. As the few scenes, revealing the incompatibility of the newly wedded Jatin and Sita similarly the painful realities of Radha and Ashoks’ marriage explains the chasm between desire and reality. Ashok divides himself from the real world. Praising to the traditionalism he stays far from Radha in the name of true faith Hindu disciple. Biji the mother is the mute matriarchs who sees and understands everything and holds on the traditional codes steal fast as her both sons do. Biji’s dumbness, her paralysis and yet her indignation, her control over the family beautifully signify the baggage of traditional codes which the Indian patriarchy

continues to drag on even the twenty first century.

Well the image of repression through culture myth,



history and societal norms helped Radha and Sita become closer. The space created by the males in the family made easier to exchange their inner burning feeling. The Jatin's porn video shop Ashok's cashier in his hotel and both sisters have space in the kitchen. The kitchen is the male created space where they help each other. Sita finds Radha as her caretaker and guardian.

Superstructure of the family makes hang and both sister have dream to escape from the certain boundary of the traditional believes of family marriage sex etc. in the context of film Gayatri Gopinath refers to Radha's dreamscape and her mother's exhortation to see things differently, to see without literally seeing a fact that points to the need for a particular strategy of reading sexuality outside dominant configurations of visibility desire and identity [. . .] it suggests an alternative mode of reading and seeing non normative erotic and gender configuration as they erupt within sites of extreme hetero normatively (Gopinath, 441). With controls imposed on Sita's cross-dressing her dance and music examination of the violation of her virginity and her sexual innocence are the cultural values that she feels discomfit on the patriarchal domination.

The dominated women in the film find some fresh air after they began to know each other. Both are swimming in the pool of frustration that the family environment has created. The needs and wants are booted by their husbands Sita's efforts of establishing a normal relationship are endless but the only response she gets at a human level is from Radha. Despite these emotional setbacks Sita's respect for her own body and herself image survive her loveless relationship. Their desire for each other is born out of the need for touch and for sharing. The picnic scene given in the picture massaging the feet of each other all shows the acts that falls within the orbit of filial relationship.

Sita's act in the picture is the act of a lover, which is not known to the family. Any interpretative act depends on a number of factors one of which happens to be the



information one has one may stretch the interpretative act to read these scenes as those of courtship. The love of the two sisters has reflected in the above picture. Their lack of husband has been fulfilled with each other. They seem happier in their lesbian relation than their family relations. The soft hands of Radha on Sita's head are the hands of love guardianship and nanny. Chris Straayer has observed this in many ways as she says that "female bonding is the anti thesis of love at first sight as it is built upon specific personal environment" (350-351).

The contrast between two definitions of marriage is expressed in the meta-filmic discourse of the *Fire* at all levels. Taj Mahal Symbolizes the heterosexual love. Sita's compromised from the very beginning. Sita, like many other women, has internalized the patriarchal notions about sexuality. But later, because of the male domination, she has been forced to define her own womanhood. The good arranged marriages are the rules of the society. Their marriages fail to respect womanhood to preserve female identity. The film wants to viewers to realize the impact that Hindi films have on Indian society and how they are used to control women. In the film too

the both sister in the back kitchen of the restaurant and Jatin's video shop at front clarifiers it. The film connects the visual gratification with oral gratification. The customers all are males with only a single female. Radha recalls a saying that she has learned from her mother, "The way to win a man's heart is through his stomach", In such families, women are the ones who cook and nourish, and their aspect of their lives has been turned into an aspect of femininity, All these closed space and boundary created in the family by males, leads the women to accept the liberty of lesbianism.

Besides, the music of the film has also juxtaposed the dreary family life with the ideal image projected by the films. The first scene that uses a song is significant in its subversion of heterosexuality. Right after Jatin and Sita return from their honeymoon, Jatin leaves to meet Julie, while Sita finds herself, alone in his room. The room is alien space from her, as the walls are full of Bruce Lee and Kung Fu film pictures. It is a male space where she feels caged. She dresses in drag, puts the music on and dances in front of the mirror. The song is sung by the female singer, and the translation of the few lyrics that are heard is "I immerse people into love / I intoxicate people with love." The fact she identifies herself with the song. The words are used irony here. Jatin & Sita's marriage can hardly be considered on immersion into, or intoxication with, love. However, in retrospect the song can be applied to the lesbian relationship that Radha and Sita start not too long after this

Objectification makes sexuality a material reality of women's lives not just a psychological attutiotunal or ideological. It obligates the mind matter distinction that such a division is premised upon. Like, that like the values of commodity women sexual desire ability is fetishized, it is made to appear a quality of the object itself, spontaneous and inherent, in dependent of the social relation, which creates it uncontrolled by the force of, requires. It helps if the object cooperates hence, the



virginal orgasm. The Hindu society compulsory heterosexuality is used to keep women under control, so gender is strictly coded sexually: what is male” is masculine,” and what is “female” is feminine.” With the sexual coding comes the behavioural coding ‘a’ set of rules to which everybody especially women- has to conform. Sita breaks these norms by wearing pants and this scene question the existence of sexually – coded gender and the phantasmatic heterosexual ideal projected by the films songs.

The choice that Sita and Radha have is to enter a lesbian relationship that is mutually fulfilling and that does not involve power struggles or notions of duty. Radha has stayed married to a man who does not acknowledge her needs and desires. Because she is barren, Ashok has refused her all physical and emotional contact for 13 years. He has taken vow of chastity and he is testing his desire by having “the object” of his desire (Radha) lies in bed near him until temptation subsides. A part from being blamed for being barren, Radha is also seen as the root of temptation the main cause of desire. Ashok doesn’t consider her desires or needs, as he sets on his path to “become one with the universe”:

Ashok: Perhaps it was my destiny assigned to seek the universal truth.

Each day Swami ji helps me to conquer the truth.

Radha: How does it help me?

Ashok: By helping me, you are doing your duty as my wife.

Radha’s needs are completely ignored. She is forced to submitted to whatever her husband asks her, without being allowed to express her own desires, By the time Sita joins the family Radha seems to resigned to do her duty as good Hindu wife and to repress any desires of her own.

The male domination to the both sisters gives the traumatic memory. The moment gives equal importance to both of them to explore their own choices. Deeply disappointed by their marriage they both realize each other's marriage as unsatisfying and pain. They both initiate a lesbian relationship and the words of Sita Echoes "I'm so sick of all this devotion. We can find choices!"

The film projects lesbianism as an active choice, an instance of empowering women, of showing the importance of sharing a common experience that teaches them to make choices. It is what Adrienne Rich calls the 'women-identified experience' that bounds Sita and Radha in the first place. Their relationship is not completely different from what they experience in their marriages but it also represents their resistance to the oppressive marriage structures. It is "both the breaking of a taboo and the rejection of a compulsory way of life. It is also a direct or indirect attack on male right of access to women" (Rich 192). The significance of making an active choice to refuse the imposition of heterosexuality is expressed by the *Fire* in two parallel scenes in which both Sita and Radha refuse their husband's desires: Radha does not want to lie in bed beside Ashok so he can test his desire, while Sita refuses Jatin's sexual advances. As lesbianism is considered as a corruptive influence of the West and as there is no word in Hindi for it. Hence, the breaking of taboo by Sita and Radha through lesbianism appears more courageous in the specific confines of the Hindu society.

The metafilmic discourse in the fire glorifies the homosexuality and puts so many questions to the heterosexual normalcy of Hindu society. The film aligns the message with pornographic scenes. The lesbian sex scene that is shown in the film seems to defeat all the painstaking care that the director took in the other ones. The camera is very close to the bed in the picture, and Radha is seen caressing Sita's

breast, Sita is not even in the shot so the spectators are free to fetishize her breast. The particular scene is the most important, since the film seems to indicate to focus the lesbian sex scene. The exclusion of the male from a fully satisfying sexual relationship between two women passes an immense threat to men. The scene revolts the heterosexual normalcy and thinking towards the woman sexual relationship. It gives the answer to the male who thinks that a woman still needs a penis to keep her sexual satisfaction.

Ashok is not the only man who objectifies the two women, Mundu does the same to both Radha and Sita, and the film makes it clear that he does it under the influence of the way women are portrayed in films.



After Radha and Sita make love for the time they meet in the kitchen in the morning and Radha gives her lover some bangles as shown in this picture. Sita puts some bangles on Radha's arm and massage her hair putting oil; the act in itself is very

sexual, since it is accompanied by an exchange of loving looks in the self, glowing light in the morning. The love affair & seed of lesbianism is growing in them, seeking their own identity.

The picture shows the flourishing love between the two women even in the male created zone, where homosexuality is highly challenged. While they are looking Radha explain that men eat black paper on their wedding night for better performance Sita asks, “What about brides?” Radha says they eat green cardamom “for fragrance” and pops one of them in Sita’s mouth. Sita moves close to her as shown in the picture and asks if it’s working.



It shows how the females created their own space challenging the societal rule.

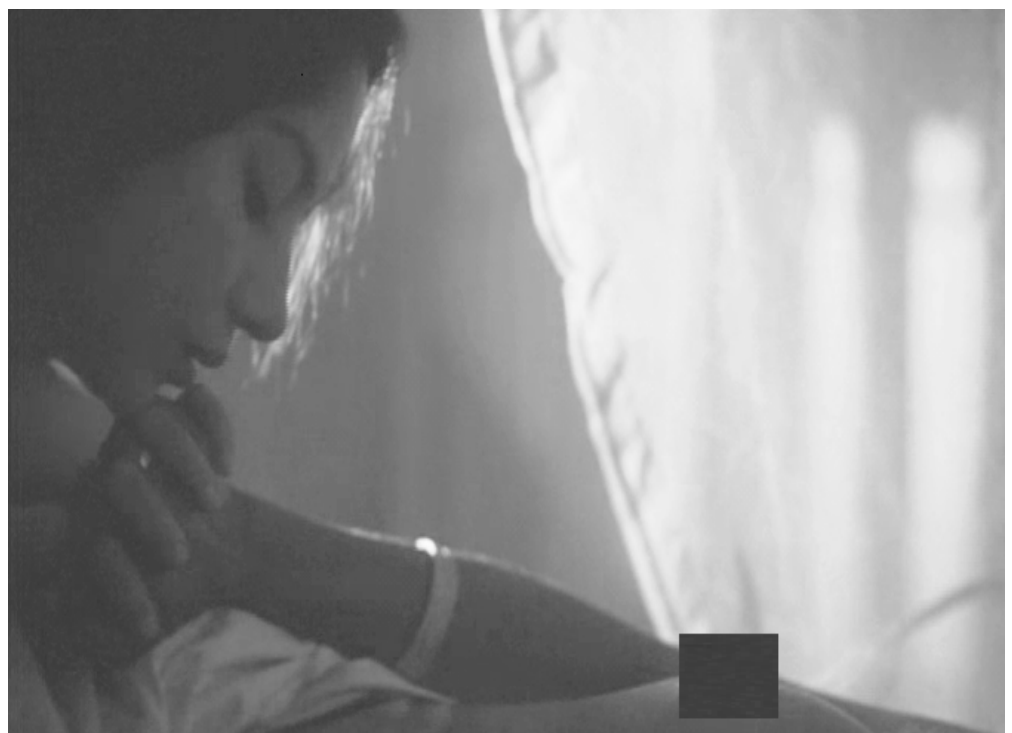
Radha, as a husband, gives Sita green cardamom to her and unites a knot of couple.

Sheila Jeffery accepts the role of the homosexuality where women stand in opposition to an accepted and inevitable heterosexual majority as the picture clarifies the relation of Sita and Radha.

The suppressed desires of Radha and Sita struggle to seek their own identity and happiness in the film. Anthony Giddens claims that “sexuality becomes free – floating, at the same time as ‘lesbian’ is something one can be and discover oneself to be” (14). Hence, sexuality functions as malleable features of self a prime connecting point between body, self-identity and social norms. Sita and Radha too are identifying a new sexual against the patriarchal and heterosexual norms.

The film, *Fire* besides being a lesbian film by an Indian writer is equally popular and loving creates an aura, which makes all the people to hang over. The realization of lesbianism’s category is the strong effect of it that is not a different rather created historically as hetero. The feedings sentiments and lyrics presented in the film make us aware that there are our feelings represented by the characters; lesbianism has found the full justification and celebration by the life of Radha and Sita. The Subject matter of the film is lesbian’s sexuality and is suitable in the contemporary context of our society. It is able to portrait the sentiments of the sexual minorities living in the south Asian and in different areas of the world. Moreover, the *Fire* disproves the false Hindu myths about the lesbians and their sexuality.

The  
main  
protagonist  
of the film  
is Sita,  
whose  
arrival in  
the family  
challenged



the societal family norms. The next woman Radha, who is traumatized since thirteen years in the male dominated family gets rescue in time. The subvert nature of Sita presents her – effort to struggle against the heterosexuality. The camera is very close to the bed in the picture, and Radha is seen caressing Sita's breast, Sita is not even in the shot so the spectators are free to fetishize her breast. The particular scene is the most important, since the film seems to indicate that the only way in which a man can watch a lesbian sex scene – or understand lesbianism. The pressure and ignorance of their husbands make them strong to seek their happiness. The both arranged marriage are failure to respect the feminism and it leads to accept the lesbianism by the two women. The male are finding their fulfillment somewhere else, while lesbianism is proposed as a choice that Sita and Radha make in order to achieve agency and power. To the traditional marriage and its oppression, the *Fire* offers the alternatives of a fulfilling and meaningful relationship between women that completely undermines traditional and constrictive structures.

The lovers try to escape, to somehow make their own way, but Radha is delayed by her integrity and sense of duty, she is after all the bridge between those aspects that are in fact good and might succeed if tradition and individuality could be balanced. Her husband does not care what she has done – his self – absorption, a righteous antithesis to love, willing for the sake of his own satisfaction to ignore what has happened, cages him. Sita, bewildered yet determined, waits for Radha and their new life to begin. Radha appears, battered, burned, and probably dying as in the final scene. During the final scene, Ashok wants to prove his masculinity over Radha but it is too late and Radha says that it has no meaning in her life. Rather she wants to leave the home with Sita, who is waiting her at mosque. Her *Sari* caught fire, which symbolizes the attack of heterosexuality, but she is able to save her from it, to subvert

the traditional norms. The rainwater purifiers her from heterosexual and traditional ideas and present her new pause of time to spend her life in the choice.

#### IV. Conclusion

*Fire* represents the lesbian experience of Indian women in Hindu society.

Radha and Sita, two protagonist of the film challenge patriarchal bourgeoisie notions of gender roles and sexuality through their lesbian relationship. In the beginning of the film, they accept heterosexuality. Once they realize how they have been exploited as well as commodified by their male counterparts, they resort to lesbian relationship in order to challenge the middle class bourgeois concept of gender roles and sexuality. Sita and Radha finally think their life is perfect and their relation deeper compared to their relations with their husbands. They celebrate their lesbianism where there is no boundary of age, sex, religion, and class.

Their marital relations were full of pain and suffering, where they become scapegoats of their husbands and Biji. They stand against the family members and the expectation of the heterosexual middle class patriarchy. They work in same kitchen and take help of each other expressing their love and feelings. They accept the traditional systems and labour hard to achieve the love of their husbands and family. Even on the day of *Karva Chauth* they take fasting in search of true love. They perform all household rituals and duties for the sake of material security. Everything goes in vain. They find themselves commodified and exploited.

Overall, the present study, deriving insights from Marxist feminism, subverts middle class sexuality in Mehta's *Fire*. It has thus proved how the female protagonists, Radha and Sita resort to lesbianism so as to challenge the heterosexuality, the ideal form of middle class sexuality, and thereby the middle class patriarchy. It subverts the traditional concept of middle class concept of sexuality. Hence, subversion of middle class sexuality appears through the projection lesbian



relationship between Sita and Radha, which questions all the notions of sex challenging the traditional normalcy of heterosexuality.

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**Letter of Approval**

This thesis entitled "Subversion of Middle Class Sexuality in Deepa Mehta's *Fire*" submitted to the Central Department of English by Puspa Raj Jaishi has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

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Date: .....

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Puspa Raj Jaishi

## **Abstract**

This research analyzes Mehta's film *Fire*, which is well-known for its lesbianism. The study focuses on the assumptions of middle class sexuality so as to subvert them. By deriving insights from Marxist feminism, it proves how the female protagonists, Radha and Sita resort to lesbianism so as to challenge the heterosexuality, the ideal form of middle class sexuality, and thereby the middle class patriarchy.

**Tribhuvan University**

**Subversion of Middle Class Sexuality in Deepa Mehta's *Fire***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U.  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English**

**By**

**Puspa Raj Jaishi**

**Central Department of English**

**Kirtipur, Kathmandu**

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