

Friendships beyond Class: Female Desire in *The End of Innocence* and *Sister of My Heart*

Hiya Chatterjee

The primary agenda of South Asian feminist scholarship, since its very emergence, has been to carve a niche for itself first to dispel the charges of being a West-derived discourse, much like Partha Chatterjee labels nationalism to be, and second, to establish its difference from Western hegemonic discourse which mostly tends to homogenize the Third World Woman under a single, monolithic category. The 'burden of authenticity', as Ania Loomba calls it, weighed down on Indian feminism for a long time, until works like Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha's *Women's Writings in India* offered evidence that feminist tracts existed in India even before colonial rule.¹ Moreover, feminist activism in India, during and after colonial rule was distinct in each region, separately addressing the immediate and specific needs of each geographical area. Post-independence, one of the major issues which brought these regional women's organisations together was the response to the Shiv Sena's attack on Deepa Mehta's 1998 film *Fire*, a pathbreaking film in its depiction of women's sexuality and lesbianism. C. Shah remarks that "[t]he women's movements were the first to articulate concern over the control over sexuality and the societal constructions of gender and are hence the closest link and support for the nascent 'queer' movements in the country."² Although homosexuality has been condemned as a corrupting influence of the West, and as profane products of globalization, funded by transnational organisations, it has been well-established that same-sex love and relations are in no way borrowed concepts but are integral to the literary and cultural tradition of South Asia. In their seminal anthology *Same-Sex Love in India*, Ruth Vanita and Saleem Kidwai show the different traditions of homosexuality



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