CHAPTER IV
Cultural and Historical Paradigm in Manto’s and Sobti’s Narratives:
A Comparative Study

The preceding chapters focused on, ‘what desire is’. The focus of this chapter is on, ‘what
desire does?’ What role does it play, on the one hand, in creating as well as challenging the
social boundaries and, on the other, in suppressing as well as asserting individual freedom in
society? This chapter tries to answer these questions by understanding Manto’s and Sobti’s
selected narratives in comparison to one another against the backdrop of cultural and historical
paradigm as “no theme exists in literature or any other cultural text in an atemporal state. Rather
every thematic pattern as it appears in any cultural discourse is a simultaneous continuation and
subversion of similar patterns already existing as a part of the paradigmatic axis of culture and
history” (Singh, Parminder 125).

Sartrean analysis of the selected narratives in the second and the third chapters has shown
that the desire of the women characters in the narratives is not desire for sexual pleasure itself
but a desire for the totality of the existence. If it is a desire for totality, then why does, most of
the times, this fundamental desire find manifestation through sexual desire only? Its answer lies
hidden in the folds of history of the institution of marriage. This institution led to the
categorization of sexual desire as legitimate and illegitimate. But this categorization refers to
female desire only because the existence of the ‘other woman’ from antiquity in the form of
nagarvadhu, tawaif, devdasi, or prostitute is an evidence of the uncontrolled male desire which
constructed the concept of pure and impure female desires in order to fulfill their own desire for
progeny as well as pleasure. This creation of discourse on desires affected both women and
social structure. Firstly, it degraded women from the status of free beings to mere bodies;
secondly it led to the creation of social boundaries between the center and the margins. So it is
natural that in order to regain their freedom women would assert through their bodies. It is their
desire for existential assertion which finds expression through sexual assertion. Though this
dialectics of desire and freedom remains unresolved as these two realities i.e. social and
existential, never reach a synthesis, it leads to the displacement of social boundaries. After
analyzing the role of desire in the creation of social boundaries and curbing individual freedom,
this chapter proceeds towards analyzing the merger of these boundaries in the selected narratives
using the concepts of *devi* and the mother goddess, Radha-Krishna union and the folktales of Punjab as the background to the study. Our religious myths about Radha-Krishna relationship, Kali-Shiv union and the concept of mother goddess are the sublimated expression of the desires which remain unacceptable in human world. The folk-legends of Punjab like like *Heer-Ranjha, Mirza-Sahibaan, Sohini-Mahiwal, Sassi-Punnu* give a peep into the mental complex of our society. In these love-legends women who transgress the social boundaries are eulogized as heroines by the same society. All these religious and cultural myths reveal the complexities of mental structure. Those desires which are unacceptable in society in their naked form are preserved in myth and folk-tales in the sublimated forms. This existence of desire in one or the other form in society shows that the desire which is considered synonymous with sexual desire only is, in fact, much more than it. Had it not been so, then Radha, Kali, Heer, Sahiban, Sohini, and Sassi would not have been a part of our religious and cultural myths.

I. Creation of Social Boundaries

The moral system of any society is a significant medium through which the desires, mainly considered synonymous to sexual desires, of its members are regulated. As Simone de Beauvoir argues quite pertinently, “all discourses of sexuality are inherently discourses about something else; sexuality rather than serving as a continuous thread that unifies the totality of human experience, is the ultimate dependent variable requiring explanation more often than it provides explanation” (qtd. in Shah 50). Here the term sexuality does not refer to sexual act by itself but to the attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviours that seem to have sexual significance in society. In society sexuality is neither something natural nor wholly individualistic but something learned that too in societal context. In this way sexuality as a social construct replaces sexuality as a natural phenomenon. As *Kamasutra* tells us that women, unlike the female of other species, do not have a specific mating season, consequently the union between the sexes need to be constantly regulated and this function is performed by society by creating certain institution to legitimize some sexual activities. The institution of marriage is one such institution which legitimizes sexual union performed with the aim of procreation and not for pleasure. All other sexual activities indulged in outside this institution of marriage are considered profane or immoral. The woman who transcends the social codification in one way or the other is considered adulteress and pushed to the periphery of the social structure. Saugandhi, Sharda, Neelam and Mozel who are considered marginal in society occupy central position in Manto’s
stories, and on the other hand, Ratti and Mitro who are expected to follow the social prescription are given the pivotal position in Sobti’s narratives.

The sacred Hindu literature is full of the fundamental concepts underlying the Hindu marriage as a social institution. According to the Hindu view of life, marriage is necessary in order to achieve the four purusharths – Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha – the four great ideals of life. The traditional Hindu concept of marriage is that it is a religious sacrament which enables one to fulfill religious as well as social obligations, as “marriage was considered primarily a complex of obligations, religious and moral on the one hand, and social and economic on the other” (Mehta qtd. in Promilla Kapur 84). For a Hindu, marriage is a samskara and as such it is a sacrament which could be broken only by death. It is considered a union of two souls not just of two bodies which implies that by controlling and channelizing the sexual energy of the individuals it aims at their biological, emotional, social and spiritual fulfillment. Ideally, it aims not only at the individual’s all-round development and fulfillment but also at the development, fulfillment and welfare of the family and through it of the society and mankind. Thus, marriage is taken as an institution necessary for the maintenance of the society. As Vivekanananda has written, “Marriage is not for sense enjoyment but to perpetuate the race. This is the Indian conception of marriage” (qtd. in Kapur 85). It clearly means that the individual pleasure has to be sacrificed for the good of the others. Many Indian scholars have presented similar views about the concept of marriage. As Kapadia opines, “Marriage was a social duty towards the family and the community, there was a little idea of individual interest” (qtd. in Kapur 85). This has been supported by Coomaraswamy who observes, “According to Hindu sociologist, marriage is a social and ethical relationship, and the begetting of children the payment of a debt” (86). Marriage is an obligation for men because heirs are necessary for them to achieve salvation and to continue their lineage after them whereas for women it is a must because she cannot go to heaven unless her body is consecrated by the sacrament of marriage. Even today marriage is considered mandatory for a woman as it is the only way to protect her from the dangers of her own sexuality. Her highest dharma is the complete devotion and unswerving loyalty to her husband taking him to be her god.

But this understanding or convention of marriage is altogether different from those of the primitive times when this tradition of marriage started. In those times the base of marriage was not sexual relations. According to the theory of evolution, there was a time in the development of
primitive society when men and women lived like animals without the institution of marriage. Marriage was a later social development closely linked with the formation of political organizations that ensured individual rights through some sort of administrative machinery. In about second millennium B.C., among the Indo-Aryans, the notion of marriage rose out of recognition of property rights in a woman and not out of sexual jealousy. “A woman was more or less the property of some man and as long as she lived and worked for him and as long as her children were his property, he had no right to restrict her sexual freedom”(Thomas 44). In this way both men and women were free from any type of sexual restrictions. Sexual relationship was purely an individual affair for both man and woman and only children were the social concern. Calling marriage a business deal rather than a natural institution, the great communist Frederick Engels says:

…the origin of monogamy…was not in any way the fruit of individual sex love, with which it had nothing whatever to do… It was the first form of the family to be based not on natural but on economic conditions -- on the victory of private property over primitive, naturally arisen communal property… (Engels 74)

According to him the monogamous marriages are not the result of reconciliation of man and woman but of the wish to subjugate the other sex. Engles’s concept of marriage can be understood only after throwing away the centuries old religious inhibitions which have mystified and sanctified sex and turned it into a ‘taboo’. “To the primitive man sex was a natural function like eating, drinking or playing” (Thomas 44). In reference to India, Engels cites the reports of Watson and Kaye who wrote in their book, The People of India, about the Teehrs in Oudh (north of the Ganges): "They live together [that is, sexually] almost indiscriminately in large communities, and even when two people are regarded as married, the tie is but nominal” ( qtd. in Engels 46).

Rejecting the idea of romantic love as the base of marriage in primitive society, Radhakrishnan expresses the similar views as Engels:

Primitive marriage was based on the subjugation of woman, and its durability rested on the economic necessity, not evanescent passion. . . . With the development of a more settled life, and the accumulation of possessions, the desire to perpetuate ownership through legitimate heirs gave additional support to the institution of marriage. (148)
Today marriage is considered the base of civilized society. Calling it an ‘implicit condition of human society’ rather than ‘a mere convention’, Radhakrishnan defines marriage as “an adjustment between the biological purposes of nature and the sociological purpose of man” (147).

With the passage of time, the religious view replaced the economic view of marriage. These two concepts shared the common ground as both rejected passion as the base of marriage but the major difference between the two is the view about sexual freedom. The economic view allowed sexual freedom but the religious one prescribed a strict moral code limiting the sexual access of a married woman only to her husband. The definition of marriage as a social duty is attributed to ancient sacred texts but a close analysis of sacred literature of vedic and post-vedic period shows that, no doubt, the purpose of marriage from the very beginning has been procreation but even then in ancient times women enjoyed sexual freedom. Women were not sexually confined to one man and the meaning of chastity in those times was altogether different from its limited definition in present times.

The Rigveda was composed in the latter half of the second century B.C. It gives us insight into the social life of the immigrant Aryans on the one hand, and the divine play of gods on the other. Thus the concept of marriage and sexual life can be understood at these two levels. The view of marriage in mortal world was based on the foundation of family marriage i.e. bride was given not only to an individual but to a family of brothers. In such a marriage a girl was married by the eldest brother and sexually enjoyed by the younger brothers as well. In Vedas, we find reference of the niyoga practice also, according to which a woman can enter into sexual union with a person other than her husband after his death or even during his lifetime. But here cohabitation is only for the purpose of procreation not for the sake of enjoyment as in the earlier case. Use of certain kinship terms such as pita i.e. sociological father and janita pita i.e. biological father clearly suggests the acceptance of the sexual relation of a wife with a person other than her husband. During Rigvedic times girls were allowed to mix with young men and even pre-marital love was tolerated. She could even choose her own husband. Samana festival was in vogue during those times where young men used to woo young ladies and after that go to the girls’ parents to propose marriage. In the age of Rigveda marriage was not imperative for a girl. She could choose to remain unmarried. (Sur 35-37).
Rigvedic gods themselves indulged freely in uninhibited sexual enjoyment. In it we find several references to pre as well as extra-marital sexual relations between near kins among the gods. It describes Kama or sexual urge as the primordial being, the first seed of mind. Thus, for instance, Yama and Yami, the twin brother/sister and the children of Sun god Surya and goddess Saranyu, had sexual relation between them. In the incestuous dialogue Yami tries to win her brother’s love, persuading him that the gods themselves desired that he should unite himself with her (Rigveda X.10). Sexual union with sister or daughter which is considered taboo in our society was a common feature in the life of Rigvedic deities. In Rigveda X.162.5, conception by brother is mentioned. Sexual relation between father-daughter and between brother-sister is indicated in Atharveda (VIII. 6.7) also. Nahusa, Sukra, Suka, Satrajit are some such persons who married their sisters (Bhattacharyya 35).

Not only Rigveda but other Vedas, Brahmanas and Puranas abound in instances of uncontrollable desire. The legend of Prajapati’s uncontrolled passion for his daughter is found in Satapatha Brahmaana (1.7.41-4). Prajapati, the father of the gods, the creator, casts his eyes upon his own daughter, desiring, ‘May I pair with her’. The moment this thought dashed his mind, he entered into sexual union with her. For this sin he was punished by Gods. This story has different versions in Aitareya Brahmana and Pancavimsa Brahmana. In later times Prajapati became Brahma. As stated in Matsya Purana (III. 30-41) his relation with his daughter Satarupa is another example of desire. Seeing her exquisite beauty he was fired with love. When she tried to save herself Brahma developed four heads in all four directions. At last uncontrolled by desire he caught hold of her and entered into union with her. Later she was known as his wife having many names like Saraswati, Brahmini, Savitri, Sandhya, Gayatri etc (Ramanujan 130). In Matsya Purana XLVIII, 32-82 we find one more extreme instance of sexual desire. Here the incest is attempted not by some god but by a sage. The term itself signifies the person who observes sexual restraints. But forgetting all these moral ideals the sage Brihaspati desires his elder brother’s wife, Mamta. She refuses because she is already pregnant and the sage Brihaspati is one whose seed never goes in vain. The embryo which already knew all the Vedas would not allow his seed to grow in her womb. Even then he insists but embryo cries out and prevents him from fulfilling his desire. In rage the sage curses the embryo with blindness and thus the child born is called Dirghatamas.
Even in post-Vedic period the sexual freedom of woman was not looked down upon as a sign of moral depravity. The Pandu-Kunti dialogue in *Mahabharata* shows that their relationship was not based on sexual restrictions. King Pandu desired to have sons and he himself couldn’t consort with his wives because of some curse. So he requested his wife Kunti to have relations with another man for the sake of progeny. He convinced his wife by citing the ancient matrimonial custom of the Aryans:

I shall now tell thee the practice of old, indicated by illustrious sages fully acquainted with every rule of morality… Woman formerly were not immured within houses and dependent on husbands. They used to go about freely…they didn’t then adhere to their husbands faithfully and yet they were not considered sinful; for that was the sanctioned usage of the times. This practice sanctioned by precedent is applauded by great Rishis… The present practice (of a woman being confined to one husband for life) has been established but lately. (Vyasa 254)

*Mahabharata* represents a flexible tradition of marriage and as such there is no attempt at standardization or uniformity. Many of the important characters in the *Mahabharata* were born outside conventional morality. Great *Rishi* Dwaipayana Vyasa, the reputed author of the epic was born outside the conventional marriage. The story of his birth out of the union of mighty Brahmin *Rishi* Parasara and Matsyagandhi (fish-smelling), a fisher-maid is narrated in the *Mahabharata* itself. One day, Parasara was crossing a mountain ferry, when he saw a fisher-maid sporting in the waters of Yamuna. Bewitched by her beauty, he expressed his desire for immediate union with her. The smell of fish coming out of her body did not change his decision but the girl felt embarrassed because of her fish-odour and demanded that her fish-odour might change into sweet smell which the *Rishi* happily granted. “Having obtained her boon, she became highly pleased …and accepted the embrace of that *Rishi* of wonderful deeds…and she brought forth the very day, on the island in the Yamuna, the child begot upon her by Parasara” (Vyasa 127). This child was later known as Dwaipayana Vyasa. Instead of being considered as an illegitimate one, he is known as the most illustrious literary genius and great *Rishi* Hinduism ever produced. This union was totally against the religious convention according to which a holy Brahmin is not allowed to enter into union with an outcaste and that too without marriage but even then it was not looked down upon.
All of the instances cited above give us a peep into the different dimensions the concept of chastity acquired during the different eras. One most important and interesting point which can be derived from this analysis is that chastity was not at all linked to the sexual confinement of the woman to her husband. Contrary to it, in the ancient times a wife would be considered ideal if she enters into the sexual union with other person at the bidding of her husband. A wife was allowed to give herself up to a guest in order to fulfill the canons of hospitality. The above cited instances are just a few of the stories of pre and extra-marital relationship abounding in our vedic and post-vedic literature. But a close analysis of these myths shows that from the time immemorial woman’s sexuality has been defined and used by men according to their own convenience. When they desired they entered into union even with their near kins but when a woman desired she was criticized as Yami was. Binding her chastity with her sexual fidelity to her husband is also the result of the male’s whim and Svetaketu episode is a clear evidence of it. He established the present practice of marriage in anger when he saw his mother going away with another person for sexual union. Consequently women’s sexual freedom was crushed by imposing upon them norms of chastity and purity before marriage and loyalty to their husbands after marriage.

Thus, the eradication of women’s independent entity by reducing them to mere sexual objects for fulfilling men’s desires by suppressing their own desires is the result of misogynistic ideas found in Samhitas and Dharmashastras which were later confirmed by Smrits also. These ideas were designed to serve as the theoretical basis for the establishment of patriarchy. The above cited instances bring to surface the gap between what has been prescribed for all the human beings i.e. fulfillment of sexual desires within the boundaries of marriage and what has been practiced by gods/goddesses and kings/queens who are considered the ideals of common man. Our present social system has its roots in the misogynistic thoughts of Dharmashastra. Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty categorically states that the *Rigveda* is a book by men about male concerns in a world dominated by men; one of these concerns is women, who appear throughout the hymns as objects, though seldom as subjects. The text, however, speaks for itself on the general category of women: “Indra himself hath said, the mind of woman brooks not discipline, Her intellect hath little weight” (*Rigveda* VIII 33.17). Ironically this aphorism is put in the mouth of the heroic warrior known for neither his intellect nor his self-discipline. “With women there can be no lasting friendship: hearts of hyenas are the hearts of women” (*Rigveda* X95.15). In
fact, led by the uncontrollable desire, Indra raped the goddess Usas. Purely erotic expressions are employed in describing the dawn-goddess Usas who in one passage (I.124.7) is said to display her figure like a woman to her lover, and in another (I.92.4) like a dancing girl keeping the bosom bare to attract the eyes of all.

No doubt Vedas recognized desires but at the same time it laid the foundation of patriarchy by giving male desires an upper hand and by reducing females to the status of objects of male desires. Though in the fourfold scheme of life enjoyment of kama within the boundaries of marriage was prescribed for both men and women but practically this prescription is imposed upon women only. It is only women, not men, who are expected to suppress their desires even within the marriage system. That is why expression of desire by Mitro and Ratti created furor in the society. Men enjoy a silent social sanction to openly express their desires and enjoy sexual alliance outside the marriage. Tradition of brothels is an evidence of this bias between male and female. A brief analysis of the different form of prostitution from the ancient till the modern times will help in understanding that how the difference between the meaning of sacred and profane was created and maintained by the patriarchy in the society.

The institution of prostitution in India is very old and it had enjoyed considerable power and prestige from the times of Rig Veda up to the British period. Prostitution developed and thrived in India under the royal patronage of elite classes in different forms like the traditions of Nagarvadhu, Tawaif, and Devadasi which shows that a world of pleasure away from the world of duties has been maintained by the males in one form or the other since antiquity. In earlier times society treated them with a certain amount of consideration as the custodian of fine arts, which had ceased to be cultivated elsewhere in society.

In ancient India, there was a practice of having Nagarvadhus, "bride of the town". Women used to compete to win this title and “it was not considered a taboo” (Dhiman 1). The most beautiful woman was chosen as the Nagarvadhu. She was respected like a goddess, but in fact she was a courtesan proficient in classical Indian dance and singing. Only super-rich people like the king, the princes and the lords could afford to see her performance because price for a single night dance used to be very high. Famous among the Nagarvadhus include Ambapali, state courtesan and Buddhist disciple described in Vaishali Ki Nagarvadhu by Acharya Chaturves and Vasantasena, a character in the classic Sanskrit story of Mrichchhatika, written in 2nd century BC by Sudraka.
Tawaif tradition started in South Asia, particularly during the Mughal era. They were basically high class artists who used to entertain the nobility by performing classical dances like kathak and with ghazals, thumri and shayari. Devadasi tradition began as religious practice in which girls were ‘married’ and dedicated to a deity and they were expected to remain celibate and serve their deity for the whole life. In addition to taking care of the temple and performing rituals, they learned and practiced Bharatanatyam and other classical Indian arts traditions and enjoyed a high social status. It is only in late twentieth century that they fell from their privileged position as the custodian of Indian classical performing arts to the category of mere sex workers who sell their body for the sake of money.

There is a world of difference in the position of a prostitute in the present times and that of a courtesan in the past. Courtesans, as they were called in ancient India, formed an important part of the Indian society. They didn’t merely serve the baser needs of society but were also a symbol of art and culture. We find a full chapter on courtesans even in the most important and perhaps the most ancient work *Artha Shastra* written by Kautilya, the minister of Chandragupta Maurya in about third century B.C. They were employed in large numbers by the kings to sing and dance on ceremonial occasions in the court, to hold royal umbrella and to fan the riding royalty in pageants and processions. A super-courtesan, noted for her looks, accomplishments and charming manners was appointed as the chief of the court-courtesans on a salary of 1,000 panas. Prostitution enjoyed the status of legal profession in that period. Prostitutes operating in the city had to submit a correct account of their income and expenditure to the state officials and had “to pay 15 percent of the profits of the trade to the government as income-tax” (Thomas 72).

In Buddhist literature too we find stories about courtesans which give us idea of the high social position of the courtesans and the attitude of religion towards them. Ambapali, the chief courtesan of Vaishali in her days excited considerable admiration in contemporary society. She was known for her beauty and accomplishments. The Buddha did not deem it inappropriate to accept her invitation for a lunch and the gift of a mango groove for his order. The Buddha didn’t preach any sermon to Ambapali. The Buddha neither favoured nor criticized prostitution. For him prostitution as an occupation was as undesirable as fishing or hunting or even marriage because all these prove obstacles in the way to Nirvana. The Buddha didn’t degrade prostitutes in any way. The high position enjoyed by courtesans in ancient India is further proved by the Jataka Tales which forms a part of the Buddhist Canon. These were often noted for their constancy as
well. One Jataka narrates how a courtesan became very poor because she waited for three years for a youth, who had paid her three thousand rupees. During this long period she did not accept even a beetal leaf from another man.

Ancient Jain literature too, like the Buddhist, throws light on the high position of courtesans in society. “We are told in the Nayadharmakaha that the celebrated courtesan Champa, well-versed in sixty-four arts and sciences, was a linguist who knew many dialects and an accomplished singer and dancer” (Thomas 113). She had the privilege of riding in chariots, of using ceremonial umbrella and fans.

*The Kama Sutra* of Vatsyana is the most important source of information about courtesans and prostitutes in ancient times. As *Kama Sutra* deals with pleasure and not duty so its heroine is not dutiful wedded wife but courtesan having command over the art of giving pleasure to Nagarikas, the rich and affluent class of society. Vatsyana classified the courtesans of his time into nine kinds, beginning with Kumbhadasi, carrier of pots and pans and ending with Ganika, the Jewel of her class, well known for her good manners and deportment. Ganika was a free courtesan who cultivated the sixty-four arts to please her suitors; she ran palatial establishments for the entertainment of men, in which young girls proficient in music and dancing captivated the hearts of great men having artistic tastes as well as wealthy merchants and high-ranking nobles of the realm. Vatsyana says:

The courtesans (vesya), her fame enhanced by the acquisition of these arts imbued with politeness, beauty and virtues, gained for the word “ganika” an honourable mention in the assembly of the people. For ever honoured by the king, praised by the connoisseurs of arts her company much sought after, she became the focus of attention of all. (Chandra, Moti 66)

Bhrata’s *Natyasartra* besides being a compendium for dancers and actors, supplements the information on courtesans supplied by Vatsyana. He says that in addition to carrying out their profession as mistress, courtesans had to be expert in the arts of dancing, singing and acting. Courtesans used to occupy an important place in the boards of assessors who used to pass verdict on the artistic achievement of the actors and actresses.

*The Mricchakatika* is another ancient drama written in first or second century B.C. by a king named Sudraka which gives us inkling into the life of courtesans. The heroine of the play was a virtuous and high souled courtesan who was competent enough to instruct learned
Brahmins in the drama. The detailed description of her palatial establishment is based on the factual way of life of the powerful courtesans of ancient India (Sudraka 90-94).

Courtesan tradition continued in mediaeval and even in the modern India but its glory declined. It lost its earlier passion for higher arts and got more concerned with money. But exceptions are always there and Akhtari Bai is one such popular name among such exceptions. Famous ghazal singer known today as Begum Akhtar began her career in singing as a ‘tawaif’ in 1930-40s. Singing was her life and soul. She worshipped her passion like god. Her palatial establishment was in the Cheena Bazaar of Lukhnow. Only rich and influential people had the privilege to enjoy her singing. Nawab Raza Ali Khaan of Rampur was greatly impressed by her talent. There was no scarcity of name and fame in her life but the only lacking thing was social respect. Thus howsoever attractive and colourful this world of tawaifs may seem but a social stigma has always been attached to this profession, So she gave up the life of a tawaif and married with Mr. Ishtiak Ahmad Abbasi, a gentleman belonging to a noble family. For some time after her marriage she could not continue her singing because singing was not considered respectable for the ladies of noble families but later with the consent and co-operation of her husband she made her career in ghazal singing (Kalidas S. 1-2).

Prostitution flourished in India in one or the other form. In Pauranic period it got religious sanction in the form of devadasi tradition. With the development of the Pauranic religion many magnificent temples of Hindu gods came to be built and a large number of courtesans were employed in these temples to dance and play music on the occasions of different services and worships. The number of ‘devadasis in a temple was in direct proportion to the wealth and prestige of the shrine. However the custom was present even in 3rd century A.D., for Kalidasa refers to dancing girls present in Mahakala temple of Ujjain at the time of the evening worship. But it became quite common after 6th century A.D. “The institution of the devadasi was borrowed by the priest from the king. Just as king employed armies of prostitutes for enhancing their pleasure and pomp, the temples enjoyed them for…adding to the attraction of temple rituals and feasts” (Thomas 238).

The sun temples became particularly famous for eroticism and the sun temples of Multan were known for large number of dancing girls. According to the Bhavishya Purana, the best way for a man to obtain Surya Loka was to dedicate a bevy of dancing girls to a temple of the sun.
But the introduction of dancing girls in temples tended to lower their moral and spiritual atmosphere. People began to visit temple not with any religious feeling but with a desire to carry on love intrigues with voluptuous dancing girls. The champions of social purity like Brahamanas and ascetics opposed it vehemently but all this proved to be of no avail. This system is still prevalent in many parts of India but in a degenerated form. “While many medieval temple women had honourable positions within temple hierarchy, the overwhelming majority of modern devadasis are straight-forward sex workers” (Akhavi 235). The only difference which separates them from commercial sex workers is that they usually work from home rather than brothels or on the streets. Devadasis in Karnataka still enjoy many privileges. They are often invited to attend and bless upper caste wedding. Brahmans call them to their houses on every full moon days, feed them and touch their feet because they are taken as the incarnation of the Godess Yellamma. Because of their privileged status they enjoyed great pleasure in looking down upon their commercial sisters.

But one thing which brings ancient or modern devadasis and courtesan at par with today’s commercial sex workers like Saugandhi is the social disgrace which is inextricably attached to this institution from the very ancient times. Courtesans enjoyed high positions in courts and devadasis in temples. They were a source of grace and splendour for courts and temples but ironically the same source of pride becomes an object of hate and disgrace in society outside the court and temples. They could live in temples and palaces but they had no place in the houses, they could not enter the threshold of ladies apartment if they ever happened to visit their lovers’ houses. To gain their favour, rich people used to shower money on them but marriage with them couldn’t be even imagined. Their world was altogether different from the world of homely wife. The courtesans had freedom and splendour whereas the housewives enjoyed respectability which was considered more precious than the total wealth. Same is the situation with sex-workers today. There has always been, and will always be, an unbridgeable gulf between a prostitute and a wedded wife. Ancient works like *Kama Sutra* and *Mricchakatika* confirm this two-fold division. Vasantasena, the heroine in *Mricchakatika* was in love with Charudatta, a married man. The scenes depicting the dealings between Vasantasena and
Charudatta’s wife show that though Vasantasena was the pride of the city, she could not get that respectable position in Charudatta’s house which his wife enjoyed. Once when she went to Charudatta’s mansion, she was not allowed to enter the room where his wife was sitting and she conversed with Charudatta’s wife only through a servant (Sudraka 114). Besides this the name of Charudatta’s wife is not mentioned in the whole text because in ancient India, it was against the convention to mention the name of a respectable lady. In spite of all the splendour attached to the life of a courtesan, there was a certain public contempt for this profession. This contempt gets expression in the speech of villain Samsthanaka’s courtier when Vasantasena rejects the love of worthless, drunken Sansthanaka:

But what she said was, “I am sick of you.” The fool! Aloud. That’s the strange way for a courtesan to talk, Vasantasena. You know how it is: the doors of a courtesan’s house are open to all young man. She is a flower by the roadside. Money will buy her love. She gives the same greeting to the man she likes and the man she loathes. (Sudraka 25)

The same type of discrimination we find in a story *The Prostitute* written by the renowned Hindi novelist Munshi Premchand in the early 20th century. In it, a young man named DayaKrishna in an attempt to save his friend, Singar Singh from the clutches of a prostitute, Madhuri, himself falls madly in love with her. But when she asks DayaKrishna for marriage, he shows his inability to accept the proposal. Frustrated Madhuri leaves that city. She leaves a letter for Singar Singh in which she compares her position to the respectable ladies of noble families. “For months you rained gold and silk on me, but I ask you, would you let your sister or wife take part in this market of pleasure for even a thousand times that gold or a ten thousand times that silk? Of course not. Those ladies possess something which you hold more precious than all the wealth in the world. . . .” (Premchand 342).

So it makes clear that whatever be their power or glory, the prostitutes have always been treated as objects whose utility is measured according to their ability to satisfy desires; desire may be of decorating courts of the kings or temples, or the desire for physical pleasure. Saugandhi, Sharda and Neelam too are no exception to this centuries old tradition. Saugandhi’s worth is measured by the *Seth* purely in physical terms. He does not find her up to the mark, so he utters ‘ooh’ in disgust and goes away. Similarly Sharda and Neelam too are reduced to the level of bodies only. They appear shocking when they emerge as whole beings and challenge the
restrictive and degrading definitions imposed upon them by the so-called morally upright patriarchal world. It is really paradoxical that the women who have open access to the fields of politics and religion, which are considered the heart of any society, are themselves labeled as marginal in that very society.

This labeling of desires resulted in the categorization of women as devi and patit (fallen). Those women who are truly integrated with the patriarchal ideals are respected as goddesses in society. In our society the title devi is accorded to the woman who is gentle, self-sacrificing, repository of the honour of the family, monogamous, looking upon the face of only one man in her life i.e. her husband, and above all sexually passive even after marriage. In some parts of North India, little girls are worshipped as devis on ashtami in Navratras. They are idolized for their purity and are expected to become ideal wives after marriage and serve their husbands. Those women who do not follow these social prescriptions stand outside this societal framework of respect and are considered patit or fallen. Thus in every society women assume two distinct polarities: firstly, those women who transcend the social boundaries and so considered by men as objects of sympathy, hate or pleasure like single woman, woman having pre-marital or extra-marital relationships, performing artists and prostitutes; secondly, those women who continue patrilineage by becoming ideals wives and the ideal mothers to their sons are idolized as women of virtue.

2. Displacement of Social Boundaries

The Protagonists of Manto’s stories belong to the category of fallen women. Saugandhi and Sharda are prostitutes, Neelam is a film actress, and Mozel has willingly rejected oppressive social norms. So, all of them are outsiders in the society in one way or the other. On the other hand, Ratti and Mitro, because of being attached to the family structures, become a part of the mainstream society but both of them turn out to be the ‘outsiders’ because they do not follow the prescribed code of conduct. Both of these characters would not have become controversial had they lived like an ideal daughter and an ideal wife suppressing their desires. Instead of submitting to the absolutism of the social system, they make their own rules which bring them parallel to Sharda, Saugandhi, Neelam and Mozel, who are considered the women of easy virtues. It is here that the demarcation between the center and the margins obliterates and both Manto’s and Sobti’s characters reach at a level where the two sections, supposed to be totally opposite to each other, interact and merge into each other. This demarcation between the ideal
and the fallen woman is based on the view that a woman has no existence other than a daughter or a wife or a mother or a sister. A woman who asserts her identity outside this framework of relationships is considered fallen. This division is challenged whenever any woman tries to understand the others in relation to herself instead of the other way around. The root of this conflict lies in the absolute nature of the social categorization. Her position in the society is elevated to the status of a devi by reducing her existence to a mere shadow of her husband. So a woman is either worshipped as a devi or abused as a prostitute but never treated as a human. The whole existence of a woman is pinned down to her sexuality. Her attitude towards sexuality becomes the only criterion to define her place in the society. Thus in the sanctification of marriage and the binary of the ideal and the fallen, the existence of woman as an individual becomes secondary to her sexuality. According to social norms there is a one-way relationship between the binary of ideal and the fallen woman. Any woman who tries to transcend or question the social norms of sexuality is called adulteress and considered fallen from the high pedestal of a devi. But when a prostitute transcends the boundaries of her profession and behaves like a self-sacrificial wife, she is never eulogized as a devi. Sobti’s protagonists stand parallel to those of Manto’s as all of them desire to live at an existentialist plane where their emergence as human beings pose a threat to social polarization.

The protagonists in the narratives of both the authors are linked to one another in one way or the other. Manto’s Saugandhi and Sharda are analogous to Sobti’s Mitro and Ratti respectively. Saugandhi is a prostitute who lives in the make-believe world in which she sees herself as the wife of her client Madho, a havaldar. She does everything to save her illusionary world because it gives her that happiness which is socially denied to her. She finds pleasure in Madho’s loving rebukes as it works as a bridge which takes her to the other section of the society which is otherwise prohibited for her. In the mainstream society women sexually belong to one man, the man whom they are married, whereas women like Saugandhi sell their sexual favours for money. This is the reason that they are ‘outside’ the heart of society. The only transaction they have with the mainstream society is when men visit them for a short span of time for sexual pleasure.

Saugandhi feels linked to the section of honourable women when Madho treats her like his wife instead of a prostitute. But both Saugandhi and Madho know that their behavior does not match their social positions. There is a world of difference between what they are socially
expected to do and what they actually do. This inversion of roles ironically exposes the hollowness of social hierarchies based on morality and righteousness. On the one hand, Madho who is a *havaldar*, is supposed to perform the noble duty of maintaining law and order in society and making society free of all social ills, but contrary to the social expectations, he goes to a prostitute and exploits her in all the possible ways i.e. physically, emotionally and financially, and on the other, Saugandhi, who sells her body for money, is supposed to be materialistic and devoid of all human emotions but opposite to this conception, she is attached to Madho emotionally not financially. Instead of taking money from him she gives him both money and love. She feels pride in calling Madho her husband in front of her friends. The feeling of belonging to one man like an ideal woman is a matter of pride for her. She says to her neighbor, a Madrasi woman, who needs some money to go to her village, “Don’t worry sister, my husband is about to come from Pune, I will arrange for your journey by taking money from him” (Manto, *Dastawez* 1: 172). Saugandhi feels that it is only Madho who made her feel that her filthy room is a house and she, herself, a housewife. Her physical relationship with him instead of having professional reasons has strong emotional roots. So “Hatak” is a story of a prostitute full of wifely virtues. She neither wants sex nor money what she wants is - a family, a home where she can lead a respectable life with her husband.

*Mitro Marjani*, on the other hand, is a narrative of a woman who is married, lives with her husband and his family where she enjoys the status of middle daughter-in-law. She enjoys the bliss of belonging to one man which Saugandhi pines for. Initially both Saugandhi and Mitro belong to the same category of fallen women as Mitro too is the daughter of a courtesan. But luckily Mitro gets a chance to become a wife from a courtesan and with it she gets promoted to the society of honourable women which is a dream for Saugandhi. When Saugandhi’s illusionary world takes the shape of a concrete reality in Mitro’s case, things are not as rosy for Mitro as had been imagined by Saugandhi. Saugandhi’s make-believe world with Madho provides nourishment to her love-starved soul whereas Mitro in her actual world with Sardari, in spite of being his wedded wife, yearns for love and sexual satisfaction. Saugandhi is a prostitute whose job is to sell sex for money but instead of taking money she gives money to Madho. Ramlal, the pimp is right when he says to her that something is definitely there in Madho which has worked magic on her. Through his emotional talk Madho makes her feel *havaldarni*. She feels as if she is
being treated not as a body but as an individual for the first time. When Madho met her for the first time he had said to her:

Don’t you feel ashamed bargaining for yourself . . . ! Do you have any idea of the thing for which you are bargaining with me . . . ? And why have I come to you . . . ? chi chi chi . . . ten rupees and as you say two and a half rupees for the pimp and what remains seven and a half yours, is n’t it? In these seven and a half rupees you promise to give me that thing which you can never give and I have come to take that thing which I can never take . . . why not talk about some such thing so that you feel my need and I that of yours . . . I am havaldar in Pune . . . I will come once in a month for three-four days . . . quit this profession . . . I’ll give you the expenditure . . . what is the rent of this kholi . . . ? (169)

She does not want to test the truthfulness of his words. She just wants to live the truth of the moment. These words have power to transform a prostitute into a wife for some moments and this is the thing which is important for her. She feels happy when exercising a husband like right over her, he instructs her to clean her room and take care of herself, “ . . . and this water pot . . . see how grubby it is and theses rags . . . oh . . . how much stinking . . . throw away all this . . . and what the hell have you made of your hair . . . and . . . and . . .” (170). He makes her feel important and it brings freshness to her stale, mechanical and meaningless life. It appears to her as if he has found out the beautiful Saugandhi hidden beneath the filth of her clothes and her surroundings.

On the other hand, Mitro who is both beautiful and beautifully dressed up fails to attract the attention of her husband. Instead of being praised and loved she is beaten up by him so badly that she starts looking like a mad woman with disheveled hair. “Looking like a mad woman in disheveled hair the middle daughter-in-law was trying to free herself from Sardari Lal’s grip and Sardari Lal, wearing a loincloth, was thrashing her wildly” (12). Mitro’s experience is altogether different from that of Saugandhi’s. Her entering into family life crossing the boundaries of prostitution is not at all like transportation from hell to heaven. For enjoying the privileged status of a wife, a daughter-in-law and a sister-in-law, she has to sacrifice her freedom as an individual. Her actions, her behaviour and even her small gesture are judged in term of the family values. Her gesture of not covering her head in front of her brother-in-law and father-in-law is taken as an insult to them. She welcomes her sister-in-law with open arms. When she tickles her with her
teasing talk, she is blamed by Suha of spoiling the innocent girl. “You are the master of sixteen arts, sister but I plead you don’t guide this naive daughter-in-law of another house in your bad ways” (55). Even her wearing good clothes and make-up is eyed with suspicion by Suha. One day when she wears bright pink suit with purple flowers on it, Suha is dazed for a moment on seeing her. Mitro feels as if looking beautiful is a crime. She feels like putting off her beautiful suit because there is nobody to appreciate her. Analyzing her situation, Mitro says to herself, “This half-wit husband of mine does not know how a deep-like-a-river woman such as me could be mastered. When I wear make-up and get ready for him, he goes out to buy grocery . . . (32).

Marriage is a reality for Mitro but it is a dream for Saugandhi. Saugandhi feels that it is only after marriage a woman gets recognition. The base of her illusion lies in her imaginary relationship with Madho which brings her a temporary emotional relief from her miserable routine as a sex-worker. But Mitro does not find any such relief in marriage. Like Saugandhi she too desires the recognition of her individuality. She not only has good looks but a loving heart too. She feeds her husband with her own hands, she gives him money to pay the debt but even then he does not reciprocate her feelings in any way. He never casts a glance of appreciation on her. Its reason lies in the reversal of the archetypal equation of husband and wife in which wife is passive and husband is an active partner. Mitro turns upside down this traditional image of a passive wife by openly expressing her sexual desires. She usurps the position of the active partner in their union which is unacceptable for Sardari. The impotency, which Mitro blames him for, is the concrete manifestation of his loss of interest in her because he does not find her submissive like a traditional wife. But the same Sardari who is always silent and passive appears in altogether different colours when he goes with Mitro to her mother’s house. His eyes pop out of his head on seeing her decked up in lavish attire of a courtesan. As a male he likes Mitro’s being sexually active but as a husband it becomes difficult for him to accept her in the form of a courtesan. Here the ego of a husband comes into conflict with the desire of a male. This conflict is resolved only when stepping out of the boundary of husband-wife relationship, he addresses her as Sangroor wali Lai Bai, a courtesan, and he himself assumes the role of her client. Thus, the focus of both the narratives is the displacement of the social boundaries. In Mitro Marjani a lawfully wedded wife plays the role of a prostitute for her own husband and on the other hand in “Hatak” Saugandhi, a prostitute, plays the role of a wedded wife for her client. This overlapping of completely opposite social roles blows the social boundaries to pieces.
These boundaries are blurred in Manto’s another narrative “Sharda”. In it the eponymous protagonist who is a prostitute stands somewhere in-between her two counterparts Saugandhi and Mitro. Her relation with Nazeer lies parallel to Saugandhi-Madho relationship. She too melts down on listening Nazeer’s words. But she is one step ahead of Saugandhi as she successfully covers the distance between that filthy room and Nazeer’s house which Saugandhi could not. Here she comes close to Mitro who enters into the stream of respectable women after marrying Sardari. Though Sharda too lives in Nazeer’s house as his wife but she is not his lawfully-wedded wife. She stands in the middle of both Saugandhi and Mitro where the boundaries of the ideal and the fallen merge into each other. Sobti’s Ratti too, like Sharda, poses a challenge to the absolute social boundaries which restrict their freedom. Ratti, a rape survivor, after rejecting the advances of many males in her life at last enters into a sexual union with Diwakar who is already married to Preeti. She appears similar to Sharda who too comes to live with Nazeer, a married man. In both the narratives there is a triangular relationship where a married man enters into relationship with the other woman but in both the cases the onus lies with the females only. Like Saugandhi she too gets emotionally attached to her client but she is different from her as from the very beginning she is aware of the concrete reality. In Saugandhi’s case the seth’s ‘ooh’ works as an epiphany which jolts her out of her illusionary world. On the other hand, Sharda’s decision either to come to live with Nazeer or to leave him is not the outcome of any such epiphany. Though her initiation into prostitution is the result of persuasion and manipulation by Nazeer but after that her coming to live with Nazeer is her own decision. According to Promilla Kapur’s division of prostitutes on the basis of their choice of their profession, she falls into the category of voluntary prostitute. While explaining the two categories: involuntary and voluntary prostitution she says that involuntary ones are those women who are compelled, deceived or coerced to enter into the life of prostitution by inheritance, community customs, tradition, religious practices and beliefs, deceptive marriages, by being kidnapped or sold by parents or relatives etc. She further adds:

The category of voluntary prostitutes, on the other hand, comprises such women who took to prostitution after somewhat accepting and choosing to do so, on their own. That is the prostitutes of this group trade in sex voluntarily in the sense that even while they might have been gradually persuaded, convinced and induced by their overall life-situations also by the persuasion and manipulation of the
interested parties, these girls or women start and continue prostitution voluntarily, after knowing that their sexual favours have a cash-value, and somewhat accepting to make a living out of that. (*The Life and World...* 30-31)

This definition of voluntary prostitution is half-true in Sharda’s case as she is induced into prostitution by Nazeer and then she voluntarily enters it and continues it but not for material gain as she gives instead of taking money from him. She neither expects any physical or emotional satisfaction from him nor does she demand any material reward in return of her love and care. Instead of reciprocating her love, he scolds her but she never utters a single word of complaint. She performs all the duties of a wife but not with the intention to usurp the position of the lady of the house. Here lies her similarity with Ratti as both of them are misfits in their respective social group. A prostitute is supposed to sell her sex for money and opposite to it a respectable woman is supposed to enter into sexual union only with her husband that too for the sake of procreation not pleasure. But here the situation seems to be reversed. It is ironical that Ratti is pushed to the category of the fallen women by labeling her behaviour as sexually scandalous but Sharda is never raised to the level of an ideal woman because of her wifely love and care for Nazeer.

The thing which makes their behaviour more complex is that Ratti enters into sexual union with Diwakar but not with the sole purpose of sexual pleasure and Sharda on the other hand serves Nazeer like a wife but without demanding the status and rights of a wife. Sharda and Ratti do not want to possess Nazeer and Diwakar respectively in spite of the fact that they fill the vacuum of their lives. Nazeer enters in Sharda’s life as her daughter’s father. First, Sharda refuses to accept five rupees note which Nazeer tries to give to her daughter but when he says, “I’m her father; why are you doing this?” (85), she accepts the money without saying anything and becomes calm and quite. On the other hand, Diwakar too brings hope in Ratti’s dark and deserted life by making her feel like a complete woman capable of becoming a mother too. Her rekindled hope to become mother has been presented through the imagery of mother earth and a small plant. In her dream she smilingly asks Diwakar:

Can’t we grow a small plant here together?” When he asks her where will the sapling take root as there were only barren rocks, she says, “hey... you don’t even know this! I am here- the earth!” she lovingly touches the furrow spread below her chest and says, “here that sapling will take root Diwakar... (139-140)
The image of the male-female sexual relationship is reiterated by the recurrent symbolism of the seed and the earth. “By the sacred tradition the woman is declared to be the soil, the man is declared to be the seed; the production of all corporeal beings (takes place) through the union of the soil with the seed” (qtd. in Wadley 115). This symbolism implies male-female sexual union with the purpose of procreation and not pleasure, and thus, presents the fertile and benevolent aspect of female which is termed as prakriti (nature) in Hindu philosophy. Prakriti is the active female counterpart of purusa, the inactive or male aspect. Moreover, Nature is undifferentiated matter; the cosmic person is spirit or the differentiated code. The union of prakriti and purusa leads to the creation of the world. Wadley (116) explains this relationship diagrammatically:

3. The Image of Mother Goddess: A Sublimated Expression of Female Desire to be Free

In the binary relation woman is considered nature which means uncultured, and male is associated with a code, that is, culture which controls nature. As Babb and Beck opine, “Good females – goddess or human – are controlled by males; that is, Culture controls Nature” (qtd. in Wadley 117). The benevolent goddesses in the Hindu pantheon are those who are properly married and who have transferred the control of their sexuality to their husbands like goddess Parvati, Lakshmi and Sarasvati. Thus the concept of woman as prakriti is associated with the
image of an ideal wife. But this is only one aspect of the dual concept of female in Hindu philosophy. The other concept is concerned with the aggressive, malevolent and destructive side of female. This dual character manifests in a woman when she controls her own sexuality. By not transferring it to a man, she retains both the benevolent and malevolent aspects of her character. In such a case she represents both death and fertility. It is the sakti form of a female. Goddesses like Kali and Durga are the manifestation of sakti. It is her independence from purusa which makes her different from her completely benevolent counterpart, prakriti who always exists only in relation to purusa. Analyzing the anthropological meaning of the sakti form, Veena Das says, “In sakti form the goddess usually stands alone and is not encompassed with a higher male principle” (qtd. in Desai 301).

Here the terms ‘benevolent’ and ‘malevolent’ need some clarification. Some scholars like Malcom Mclean and Neela Bhattacharya Saxena do not accept this enclosure of Indian deity in neat compartments of benevolent and malevolent. Saxena is of the view that these are Western categories of binary opposition and misrepresent Indian thought and claims, “The prevalent image of Kali as the bloodthirsty goddess of destruction, although quite powerful in Indian imagination, was perpetuated and utilized by colonial powers which saw these cultural “others” as barbaric and primitive worshippers of a naked woman” (93). Thus it implies that it is wrong to term the aggressive form of Kali as necessarily malevolent. So it is more necessary to understand these two forms of Kali in Indian context. Thus, giving Indian interpretation of this concept Kathleen Erndl argues:

It would be more accurate to use the indigenous Indian categories saumya (gentle) and raudra (fierce) to describe the two aspects of the Goddess . . . the fierce Kali is not necessarily malevolent, even when she is most terrifying and out of control . . . It is only the demons who could see her actions in any sense as malevolent.

(qtd. in Saxena 93)

Thus, the terms ‘benevolent’ and ‘malevolent’ have been used in this analysis not as binary oppositions but according to their Indian interpretation as ‘saumya’ and ‘raudra’. An understanding of the dual character of the Hindu female’s essential nature i.e. as prakriti and sakti, provides a background for comprehending the rules and role models for women in Indian society. A central theme of the norms and guidelines for the proper female behaviour is that her energy and power should be under the control of male. In Indian society the dual character of
Hindu female is most clearly visible in the roles of wife who is benevolent, dutiful and controlled, and in the role of a mother who is fertile but simultaneously uncontrolled and dangerous also. The dominant code of conduct prescribed for the Hindu woman is concerned with her duties as a wife. The role models for mothers, sisters and daughters are not as prominent as the role models for a wife in Hindu scriptures and smritis. Her conduct is always prescribed in relation to a male and never that of a female and that too as a wife. The Ramayana is one of the most sacred religious texts of Hindus. In it by following her husband into the forest exile for fourteen years, keeping her wifely virtue unpolluted after being kidnapped by Ravana and then proving the same by placing herself on a lighted pyre and remaining unscathed by the flames, she emerges as a proper Hindu wife who represents the ideal towards which all the Indian females strive. Thus the message of The Ramayana is clear: all the wives should strive to be like Sita. This is just one of the many examples which reiterate this image of an ideal wife.

Now the second main role which a female plays in the life of a male is that of a mother but surprisingly the norms for a mother are not as explicit as those for a wife. Whereas mythology and smritis provide endless examples of a good wife, there are no prime examples of a good mother. Because of being encompassed with a higher male principle, the energy of a wife is channelized in a positive direction. So a wife is always bestower of prosperity but a mother is both a bestower and a destroyer. She represents both fertility and death, she can give and take away. Though her role is not acclaimed as ideal behaviour but even then her danger is accepted because she is necessary. In Hindu tradition, goddesses are worshipped always as mothers not as wives as a wife can be dispensed with but not a mother. A common name for many goddesses is ‘mother’ like Maa Kali, Maa Durga, Maa Santoshi, Maa Sitala; a goddess is never called a ‘wife’. Differentiating between these two forms of female, Wadley says:

The wifely role is one of subordination, of devotion in any circumstances, of dutifulness. It is the mother who gives, who must be obeyed, who loves and who sometimes rejects. . . . Although there are no popular and well-known role models of the mother treating her children well, the mother as a giving, loving individual, although sometimes cruel and rejecting, is present at a sub-conscious but critical level in Hindu thought. (124)

At biological level, a mother represents both polluting as well as purifying aspects of a female. In her very biology a mother is a contradiction. As the opposition between Parvati, the
wife, and Kali, the mother, shows that the mother goddesses are in control of their sexuality and wives are not. While Kali is worshipped in Hindu tradition as a mother, she has been an ambivalent figure within orthodox Hinduism and always considered as an aberrant threat to the patriarchal set-up. It is therefore not surprising that attempts have been made to domesticate or appropriate her within a more acceptable mode of divinity in the form of Maa Durga. In some parts of India this milder form of Kali is worshipped in the form of Durga festival. In this form she is associated with Shiva, a male principle which makes her more benevolent in contrast to Kali. But even in this form she, like Kali, has a vast potential for aggression and destruction. In spite of being with her husband, she does not remain under his control and controls her own sexuality. Nrishinghprasad Bhaduri explains her relationship with Shiva as, “There is no relationship between Mother Kali and Shiva; even with Durga his relationship is meager” (qtd. in Saxena 67).

The behaviour of Ratti and Sharda and their relationship to the particular males can be better understood in this framework of female as mother and mother goddess. Sharda lives in Nazeer’s house and along with providing him sexual pleasure, she performs all the duties of an ideal wife. “Sharda assumed all the duties of a wife. She bought the wool from the market and knitted a sweater for him, and when he returned from the work he would find soda ready, the ice in the thermos. Early in the morning she put out hot water for his shave and prepared everything for him, cleaning his house, frequently sweeping the floors herself” (92). Along with being more caring and loving, she has become sexually more vibrant now but instead of feeling happy with this change, Nazeer feels sad. The more she loves him, the more he feels burdened with the feeling of guilt of being unfaithful to his own wife. He does not want Sharda to behave like his second wife but like the old Sharda of the hotel days. He feels that she is incomplete without her daughter. He remembers his experience with Sharda, the mother:

Once when he held Sharda tightly, drops of milk from her engorged breasts had dripped over his hairy chest, and he had experienced a divine pleasure. How wonderful experience is to be mother, he thought . . . mothers take nourishment and in return nourish their baby . . . how satisfying it is to nourish another life. Munni was no longer with Sharda. Sharda was incomplete, her breasts were imperfect, the milk, that white elixir of life had dried up. Now when he clutched Sharda to him, she did not protest. Now Sharda was not that same Sharda – No,
Sharda was the same Sharda, she was something more than that Sharda . . . she had become sexually more vibrant. She loved him with her body as well as her soul. But Nazeer would feel now she did not have the same attraction. (91-92)

What Nazeer is missing is the mother element in her body and behaviour but she is elevated from the position of a biological mother to the status of mother goddess who is sexually independent and, thus, uncontrollable. In order to understand the difference between the biological mother and the mother goddesses, it is necessary to comprehend the complications surrounding the concept of ‘motherhood’ of the goddesses. Drawing attention towards this complex but interesting fact Wadley says, “The goddesses who are said to have children are seldom called mother; rather, it is the goddesses who do not have children per se (Durga, Kali, Santoshi, Sitala) who are known as Mother” (137). It implies that a biological mother is but another form of prakriti not that of sakti because for becoming mother she transfers the control of her sexuality to a man and, thus, overpowered by the male. So by missing the old Sharda of the hotel days, Nazeer is, in fact, missing the Sharda who was under his control. Her milk engorged breasts symbolize the purifying and benevolent aspect of a female and with the drying up of her milk her benevolent aspect disappears, and a malevolent female takes its place that is in self-control. It appears unacceptable to Nazeer as slipping out of his control, she appears in her grand form.

Though Sharda is not as benevolent as Parvati, she is not as malevolent as Kali. She assumes an in-between form i.e. form of Durga, a milder form of Kali who is generally considered beneficent and who does not depend upon the male principle for her existence. Sharda is beneficent like Durga and bestows her love and care upon Nazeer but remains out of his control. As a mother goddess loves her devotees, she loves Nazeer but remains detached at the same time. She lives with him and leaves him willingly. She works as a higher female principle over which Nazeer has no control.

As Sharda’s character can be understood only by rising above the superficial categories of fallen and elite women, same is the case with Ratti. Her relationship with Kumu signifies that she is a complete manifestation of motherhood. On seeing him, she feels like a barren woman. Her love for Kumu shows that she too longs to be a mother. But when Jainath sees her as the form of mother of his sons and says, “I saw our son, mine and yours, in your face” (96), she feels offended and rejects his marriage proposal. Diwakar brings in her life the hope of becoming
mother but it could have been possible only after his divorce with his wife Preeti. Ratti does not want to intrude in his family life, so she refuses his proposal and withdraws herself into her zone. Thus, in spite of being an archetype of motherhood, she does not choose to be a mother biologically. Her warm affection for Kumu and her cold but hitting response to Jainath symbolizes the benevolent and malevolent aspects of her character. Thus, she appears as the personification of *sakti*, the higher female principle or the mother goddess in control of her sexuality.

Besides the uncontrolled sexual aspect of Kali, the other aspect of her personality is her horrific bloodthirsty image. This bloodthirsty image is termed as her Chandi roop. Ratti becomes a manifestation of this Chandi roop when the mocking eyes, giggling faces, and harsh comments of her classmates in the school turn out to be unbearable for her. In order to teach them a lesson she makes Pashi a victim of her wrath. She smashes his head to the extent of killing him. A wave of shock and fear runs in the minds of all her teasers. “Ratti looked at the crowd with cruel eyes and said icily, “If this ever happens, I’ll tear you all to pieces...” Then she called him, “Pashi”, her voice was hard but free of malice, “you had to be thrashed today” (56). It shows that she was violent but not indiscriminately destructive. Durga’s Chandi roop is always associated with her outrageous form. Madhu Kishwar, a known feminist, sharing her experience as a child in her essay “Traditional Moral Female Exemplars in India” writes:

> I remember as a child, whenever I got into one of my righteous rages, my mother would warn others, saying ‘Don’t provoke her into manifesting her Durga-Chandi roop’. Thus, very early on, family friends and relatives understood that it was best to be careful about stepping on my toes. Even without being a Durga devotee, I unconsciously began to successfully ‘play Durga’ in dealing with a whole range of situations, from sexual harassment to intervening between two groups of riotous men, to bringing under control neighbourhood drunkards and wife beaters.

(qtd. in Saxena 32)

This is what Ratti does as a child and as a young woman but she does it consciously. She beats Pashi consciously and deliberately, not out of any ill will but just to protect herself. After beating him, addressing the group of her demon-like schoolmates she says, “I don’t say anything to anyone. But remember, if you ever taunt me again, I won’t spare you. Understand?” (56). After the incident she goes to Asad Bhai and tells him the whole incident very innocently and
demands chocolate from him. Her twinkling eyes and her smiling face is a manifestation of the *saumya roop* of her personality which implies that she is a manifestation of *sakti* who is bold and aggressive but not indiscriminately harmful. This is what Asad means when he says to her, “Apa is right. Ratti is not only a girl . . . but some metal Ratti” (61-62). Here the term ‘metal’ symbolizes her unyielding attitude towards the difficulties of life. Later as a young woman, before meeting Diwakar she comes in the contact of many males but her refusal to enter into sexual union with them, too, reflects her unyielding attitude.

Like Sharda-Nazeer relationship, Ratti’s relationship with Diwakar is also very complex. Ratti consummates her relation with him but out of her choice not any kind of compulsion i.e. emotional or physical. She does not accept Diwakar’s proposal to marry her after divorcing Preeti. She says, “It is a big thing to love, but not big enough for me to destroy what is between you and Preeti. . . No Diwakar. I will not usurp anything” (141). She refuses to marry him because she does not want to make their relationship an obligation. Just like Sharda, instead of becoming Parvati, she chooses to be Durga, sexually self-controlled but *saumya roop* of Kali. Thus by making their own choices, both of them transcend the arbitrary and artificial social division of fallen and honourable, and enter into the realm of mother goddess.

Neelam and Mozel, the protagonists in Manto’s other two stories, also pose a challenge to this artificial social structure. It is difficult to socially categorize them either as fallen or as ideal. They neither belong to the category of prostitutes like Saugandhi and Sharda, and nor they fall into the category of wife or daughter like Mitro and Ratti. Neither Neelam nor Mozel is placed in the family set-up. About Neelam there is brief information that she is the daughter of a tawaif from Banaras. Earlier tawaifs were considered high class artists who used to entertain nobility with the classical dances. Though Neelam too is an artist but it does not imply that she is a woman of easy virtues. On the other hand there is no information about Mozel’s family and background. In Indian society a woman is called ideal who protects the honour of the family as a dutiful daughter or who continue the patrilineage of the family along with preserving her wifely virtues as married women. Thus, both Neelam and Mozel are shown neither as somebody’s daughters nor as wives. They have not transferred their sexuality to any man but it does not mean that they are sexually promiscuous. So their sexual independence brings them in confrontation with the social structure. Both of them belong to the category of independent women. In this way they stand somewhere in-between Ratti and Mitro, and Saugandhi and Sharda. At individual
level, they are the concrete manifestations of the annihilation of the very foundation of the social structure but at social level, they are nothing more than an insignificant part of the invisible section of fallen women as society does not allow any middle path. Any woman who does not follow the prevalent ideals of chastity is sure to be thrown into the category of fallen women.

Hemant Apte and Rohini Sahni discuss the role of language in the social construction of the concept of fallen women. They opine that in traditional patriarchal society, the moral code of conduct was strict, particularly in case of women and the slightest deviation or mere suspicion was considered sufficient to label a woman as a fallen woman which is considered synonymous to a prostitute. According to them it leads to the emergence of plethora of words, which in addition to their intrinsic meanings have also acquired the additional meaning of a prostitute. While explaining the reason behind the presence of so many words for a fallen woman or a prostitute they say, “Beyond the singular monolith of marriage existed a finer differentiation of heterosexual relationships, all of which were different from each other and words needed to be created to express this differentiation” (302). The ‘performing artists’ is one out of the ten categories of words, made by them, indicating the multi-dimensional man-woman relationship. They define this as follows:

Performing arts, including singing, dancing and acting, were not considered occupations desirable for women of honour. Women who performed and entertained such as kalavantee (artist), nartakee (dancer), natee (an actress) rarely married. They may be sometimes available for sexual pleasures and hence the word acquired an additional meaning to their occupation, that of prostitution. (305)

While analyzing further the relation between performing artists, and prostitution and marriage, they say:

A gayikaa (a singer) was not considered as low as a prostitute, but also did not command the same respect as married women from respectable households. A natee (a film actress) probably was understood to have a status lower than the one who sang classical music. And all these women were thought to be moral deviants. (312)

The attitude of the whole unit towards Neelam as their eagerness to see a new girl in the studio, Niyaz Muhammad Villain seeing her as to measure her body proportions with eyes and
rejecting because of her thick lips, and then being given a very tight and body exposing dress by the director are some clear evidence of the degraded position of the female artists. Shamlal’s description of the shooting of the kissing scene between Raj Kishore and Neelam confirms the same attitude of the general public. His narration of Raj Kishore’s refusal to kiss Neelam “after kissing this dirty woman, how can I touch the sacred lips of my wife?” (146) mirror the binary opposition between an actress and a married woman. It reflects the moral framework of society in which sacredness is associated only with marriage, and a film actress is considered nothing more than a fallen woman as is signified by the words “the bloody prostitute” used for Neelam by Shamlal.

Along with the sexual independence, one more basis of this division between fallen and pure is separation of the social space into home and the world i.e. private and public sphere. Gender-based social roles correspond with this separation of social role where home is considered a sacred site for woman. Lata Singh analyses this separation as:

> An enclosure is conceived as necessary to preserve a woman’s chastity and by extension, her men folk’s honour. Since the social construction of gender places ‘good women’ in seclusion, women who appear in public spaces such as on stage, are defined as ‘bad’, that is prostitute. Unlike the chaste loyalty of the good wife who reveals herself to only one man, the actress’ profession requires that she willingly expose herself to the gaze of many unfamiliar men. (317)

The feeling that his female co-actresses belong to a lower status develops in Raj Kishore a sense of superiority. He thinks that he is conferring honour upon them by addressing them as ‘sister’ and it is a matter of pride for them to be addressed as a respectable woman. He has never expected that any actress can ever object to it. In fact, he has no concern with their reactions, and by calling them as ‘sisters’ he is satisfying his own male ego and assuring himself of sexual control. He is using this as a means to resist his own sexual desire. So it implies that he, in fact, considers them as the manifestation of sexuality whom he uses just to create his own image of a sexually vibrant yet controlled young man. It is the only motive behind his visit to Neelam’s house along with his wife. He orders his wife to apply make-up on Neelam’s face. He does not expect any objection either from his wife, Shanti, or from Neelam because he thinks that Shanti is an ideal wife and it is her duty to obey her husband, and Neelam does not have any power to resist because of her lower status. Describing the background of the actresses, Lata Singh quotes
Upendranath Vidya Bhushan, “The class and place and society where the actress come from, they do not have their own say” (326).

Lata Singh says that this demarcation between ‘ideal’ and ‘other’ women is a middle-class construction associated with the issue of the entry of woman on stage. The view that enactment of female roles by male adversely affects their masculinity led to the consensus that female roles would be played by women but it became an issue of debate in Maharashtra in the early 20th century whether kulin women should enter the theatre or not. Most men agreed to the concept of development of art but they were not in favour of allowing kulin women to come to the stage as they perceived an inherent contradiction between art and morality. R. Shripad Krishna wrote in 1916 in *Rangabhoomi*, a theatre journal which became the center of this debate:

> It is advisable that female roles should be performed by women . . . However it is by no means easy for noble women to bring it into actual practice. We value the morals of women, especially of married women very highly. . . . A husband would never approve of his wife performing the role of somebody else’s wife and the audience will also not feel respect to her. . . As prostitutes work in Parsee and Bengali theatre there is no objection for Maharashtra also to do the same. The probability of a woman joining the profession and yet maintaining her purity would be an exceptional one. As the purity of a woman is more important to the society than her skill in fine arts, noble women would not turn towards this profession. . . . the predominance of emotions over thoughts amongst prostitutes would be helpful to them in acting as dramas provide ample scope for emotional expressions. (qtd. in Singh, Lata 325)

It clearly presents the societal view about prostitutes in the context of theatres. In this debate one can see the middle-class construction of ‘ideal’ and ‘other’ women, the prostitutes as the other of kulin women. Those who thought that women are necessary for the development of theatre but did not want married women to lose their morality, gave reluctant consent to prostitutes with the condition that they would fit into the moral standard of society or else they would spoil the morality of men in the theatre companies. One of the important aspects that emerge from the debate is the claim of the middle-class that by offering them theatre they would be reforming such “morally loose” women. Hence by allowing them to work in theatre, an
opportunity is being provided to them to reform themselves. Lata Singh quotes a piece from *Rangabhoomi*:

This new opening for the prostitutes for earning money by teaching acting and making a name for themselves would provide an alternative employment for them which may persuade them to leave their old profession and thus become more moral and ethical. . . . A prostitute working on stage would begin to feel that she should be more sensitive to public opinion. And she would not be able to behave in any way she wants. (325)

Raj Kishore’s insistence that Neelam should tie him a rakhi reflects this reformist attitude. He feels that by addressing her as sister, he is uplifting a prostitute’s daughter for which she should be thankful to him but rejection of this honour is an insult of both Raj Kishore’s masculinity and his kind gesture. So leaving persuasive approach, he turns to the coercive measure to reform her. In order to prove his own sincerity he gets violent to her. His order to Shanti to apply make-up on her face symbolizes his desire to strip Neelam off her individuality and to redefine her the way he wants. Explaining the term ‘violence’ in his article “The Semiotics of Conceptual Discourse”, Harjeet Singh Gill says:

The human condition, the subject of every literary discourse, is the condition of violence, violence in the French sense of the term. The word for rape in French is “viol”, which implies acting against one’s own will, to do violence to the other’s desire. Man has been, and is being raped, or violated, if I am allowed to use this expression, in every socio-political, individual situation. (134)

In this way Neelam is no different than Ratti. Both Neelam and Ratti are violated; Ratti at physical level and Neelam at emotional level but this violence affects both of them differently. Ratti turns into a sexually frigid and passive woman after her rape. As she does not get chance to exact revenge on the same man who violated her physically and emotionally, and her feeling of helplessness in this situation resulted in her sexual clamming up. Neelam, on the other hand, gets the opportunity to settle the scores with Raj Kishore and in this war of dignity she emerges out to be intractable and undefeatable. Ratti symbolizes Durga, the milder form of Kali whereas Neelam manifests Kali itself in all her ferocity. In her encounter with Raj Kishore at the end, she appears just like goddess Kali determined to annihilate the evil with her sexual energy. At that moment Neelam, supposed to be an insignificant part of a silent section of society, manifests
herself as an all-absorbing consciousness like Kali who alone among all her forms, “reveals the nature of ultimate reality and symbolizes fully awakened consciousness” (Kinsley qtd. in Saxena 61).

One thing which is common between Ratti and Neelam is that they are conscious beings from the very beginning. Like Saugandhi, they are not jerked out of their existential slumber by some epiphany. They exercise their freedom to analyze the situation and behaviour of the people around them. As Ratti’s union with Diwakar is not the outcome of the heat of the moment but a well-thought decision, Neelam’s encounter with Raj Kishore is also something for which Neelam was mentally prepared. She could have thrown Raj Kishore out of her house as she was aware of his intention but instead of doing so she takes him into her room and bolts the door from inside after smearing lipstick and rouge on her face. It implies that she knows what she is to do. So her violent meeting with Raj Kishore is the result of her conscious choice as she knows that life cannot take a new direction until the old issues are resolved. Her decision to put an end to the old order of things can be better understood in relation to Kali’s eternal creative activity. Describing Kali’s creative activity, Sanjukta Gupta says:

Kali is pure consciousness, totally transcendent, the unique Being. She subsumes both Siva and the divine power Sakti. At a certain primordial moment, Kali suddenly saw inside herself her own mirror image or shadow, which indeed is delusion, Maya. In that Maya, Kali created the imagined form of Siva, who became the primeval God and Kali’s spouse. Kali then created empty space, and the chaos of the destroyed universe disappeared as she engaged in sexual intercourse with Siva, taking the reverse position and the active role. (Qtd. in Saxena 60)

As the sexual union of Kali and Shiva is the result of Kali’s desire, in the same way sexual encounter between Neelam and Raj Kishore is the result of Neelam’s desire. Here the desire is not the desire for sexual union in the literal sense of the term but a desire to put an end to chaos and give a new start to life. The image in which Raj Kishore is lying in Neelam’s feet cold like a corpse at the end of this war of desire is a metaphor for actual male and female relationship where male is passive as matter and female is violently active as energy. In the narrative Neelam tells Saadat, “I blew his pyjama into pieces and imposed my bleeding lips on his lips . . . when I gave him a burning kiss, he turned cold like a woman after that. . . I saw that
nonsense . . . that very nonsense about which I used to think . . . I started feeling disgusted at once . . . I got up . . . from my full height I looked at him lying below” (149). This last scene, where Raj Kishore is lying on the floor and Neelam is standing there and looking at him lying in her feet, is parallel to the above discussed Kali’s one of very popular postures where Kali is standing on Shiva with her tongue out. In this encounter Neelam is the initiator and it is she who plays the role of active partner and ultimately overpowers Raj Kishore. Their reverse position is the concrete presentation of the nature of female and male union in Hindu philosophy symbolized by the image of Kali standing on Shiva. B. Bhattacharya describes it as the supremacy of Shakti:

At her feet Siva lies inert symbolizing the state of matter bereft of energy. In the Lamaic Vajrayana the male is the active element, and the female the passive, as the various union figures illustrate; not so in the Hindu concept, where the male as matter, lies passive, and the female as energy, remains violently active. (qtd. in Saxena 64)

On seeing him naked instead of feeling any sexual excitement, she feels disgust and comes out of the room immediately. Neelam symbolizes Kali’s most ferocious manifestation whose desire is not sexual intercourse but sexual independence. Though the destination of both Ratti and Neelam is same but Neelam is one step ahead of Ratti. As a young woman Ratti is leading an independent life and after her childhood phase there is no reference of her parents in the text. But it does not mean that she is delinked from society. Her relation with Keshi, Reema and Kumu shows her being linked to society. They work as a bridge between Ratti and society. She is brutally raped in that so-called civilized social system which is, in fact, so repressive that it does not leave any scope for resistance. She is not allowed even to give vent to her anger. But in spite of all the repression, the society fails to silence her anger. What little success it achieves through this repression is the domestication of her anger. In this way she symbolizes Durga, the domesticated form of Kali who can be aggressive but not ferocious. But on the other hand, Neelam is not bound to any such social norms, and the reason is her being placed at the margins of the society. She is not answerable to the society of which she is not a part. It sets her free from the social trap of domestication. Like Kali she is not bound in space or time. She creates her own space by trampling on the oppressive and artificial social system which is personified in the form of Raj Kishore.
Similarly Mozel, the protagonist in Manto’s narrative of the same title, is not bound to the social norms. She consciously chooses to be an outsider by detaching herself from the oppressive social order both intellectually and morally. She brims with a unique vigour and passion for life which she doesn’t want to be marred by the social restrictions. She has courage to create an ethical system superior to the existing moral framework. Mitro in Sobti’s Mitro Marjani exhibits a spirit similar to that of Mozel. The only difference is that Mitro is placed in a family structure but any such social institution is conspicuously absent in Mozel. But just like Mozel, Mitro too does not let this restrictive system overpower her existential freedom. Mozel possesses the same strains of wildness and frenzy as Mitro, and both of them manifest an untamed quality and are driven by the desire to explore the unknown. Attributing all these qualities to Goddess Durga, David Kinsley puts forward the view, “Strength, vigour, passion – the very sap and blood of life pulse with divine rhythm, expressing and revealing the immediacy and pervasiveness of the divine” (156). The defining feature of their personalities is their playfulness and spontaneity. Their reactions to different situations don’t appear to be the result of their social grooming but their individual consciousness. Their actions which appear transgressions are, in fact, the outcome of their desire to transcend their facticity or the social bindings which curb their existential freedom. Their spontaneity and playfulness are the expressions of their transcendent freedom which is a characteristic feature of gods. “As players the gods are revealed to be delightful, joyful, graceful beings whose actions are completely spontaneous, unconditioned and expressive of their transcendent completeness and freedom” (Kinsley, The Sword and the Flute 74). It appears as if Mitro is playing with Sardari and his family, and Mozel with that of Trilochan. The same Mitro who does not lose any opportunity of blaming Sardari of his impotency, feels troubled on seeing him sad. She feels happy at the permission of going to her mother’s house and enjoying with her old acquaintances but the same seemingly unfaithful woman shudders at the thought of separation from her husband. Similarly, Mozel agrees to marry Trilochan whom she calls an idiot but does not turn up on the wedding day. And later she lays her life to save the life of Kripal Kaur, the fiancé of the same Trilochan whom she does not consider worth marrying. Their choices seem to be the result of their desire for amusement and not any other pragmatic motive.

Mozel’s quick decision to bring Kripal Kaur safely out of the sensitive area and the way she tackles the situation seems nothing more than a play for her. The thought of going into the
curfew-stricken area does not arouse any fear in her. Even at this moment she is calm and careless as usual. She is aware that Trilochan’s going there wearing turban is not safe and when she tries to make him understand the situation, he bursts in anger and yells at her, “shut up” on listening to this, “Mozel bursts out laughing. Then she raised her arms covered with a fine layer of down, and circled them around Trilochan’s neck. Swinging a little, she said, ‘Ok darling, as you wish - Go and put on your turban, I’ll wait for you downstairs’” (261). She is playful all the time. She starts waiting for him standing on the footpath with her sturdy legs wide apart like a man and when he approaches her, she blows off a whiff of smock on his face teasingly. As they wade into the curfew-stricken area, “Trilochan was terrified. The stirring of a single leaf made his heart beat violently. But Mozel walked on unafraid, exhaling cigarette smoke casually as if she were out on a leisurely stroll” (262). She diverts the attention of the policeman in a blink of an eye and walks off dragging her clogs. The situation was same for both Trilochan and Mozel but what was horrifying for Trilochan, was enjoyable for Mozel:

Trilochan was quiet. But could sense that Mozel was deriving some strange pleasure from her defiance of the curfew – she liked playing with dangers. She became a problem for him when she went with him to Juhu. Fighting the gigantic waves of the ocean, she would go far in water while he watched her anxiously, afraid that she might drown. When she returned, her body would be blue and bruised, but she did not seem to care. (262)

For her entering this valley of death is just like playing with the waves of ocean. And at the end when she realizes that the situation is going out of control, she decides to play a game in the real sense of the term. She suddenly takes off her cloak and makes Kripal Kaur wear it, and she herself stands completely naked. In this game she uses her naked body as a dice which she throws in front of the attackers. Her plan exactly hits the point and she becomes successful in diverting the attention of the attackers. She saves Kripal Kaur from the blood-thirsty men by deluding them as Durga saves the cosmos from demons by creating illusions. The birth of Durga takes place during a cosmic crisis precipitated by a demon whom the male gods were unable to subdue:

Durga is created because the situation calls for a woman, a superior warrior, a peculiar power possessed by the goddess with which the demon may be deluded.
. . Invariably Durga defeats the demon handily, demonstrating both superior martial ability and superior power. (Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses* 97)

The same is the case with Mozel. Trilochan is unable to overpower the ferocious men beating the door outside. The situation could be handled not by force but by tact and nobody but only Mozel could do it. She does it without caring for her own life but she does it not out of the sense of social compulsion but her own feeling of responsibility. As Durga was created by gods to kill demons but even then they could not compel her to do anything. No doubt, she kills the demon but not out of the sense of obedience to gods. Dwelling upon it Kinsley states:

Her face, however, is calm and shows no sign of strain. For her this is mere sport and requires no undue exertion. It is a game for her. She enters into the cosmic struggle between the lesser gods and the demons because it pleases her, not out of any sense of compulsion. (*Hindu Goddesses* 105)

In the same way Mozel enters the communal struggle of Hindu, Sikhs and Muslims out of her own desire to save a woman and not any sense of compulsion. Trilochan who should, in fact, bear the responsibility of saving Kripal Kaur as she is his fiancé, hesitates even to follow Mozel when she takes initiative to rescue her. To risk his own life for saving somebody else even if it is his own fiancé is no less than a catastrophe for Trilochan but to play with danger is an adventure for Mozel. Her actions are the result of her desire for freedom and self-dignity but her pursuit of freedom is not divorced from her responsibility to others.

There is a struggle in *Mitro Marjani* too but the level of struggle changes from situation to situation. In the case of Durga the crisis is of cosmic level, then in Mozel it is limited to communal level and in *Mitro Marjani* the scope further contracts to the level of a family. The degree and gravity of the situation can differ but the crisis in the form of conflict between good and evil is always present.

In *Mitro Marjani* this conflict has been presented in lighter vein. Here what is at stake is not the stability of the cosmos or life of a human being but the peace of a family. The cosmic crisis is reduced to the altercation between Dhanwanti, the mother-in-law and Phulan, the daughter-in-law in the family. This argument begins with Phulan’s allegation on her mother-in-law and sister-in-law of seizing her jewellery and clothes but the truth is totally opposite. As in Durga war, demons want to usurp the positions of gods, here Phulan wants to grab all the wealth of the family. Soon it takes an ugly shape and Dhanwanti and Suhag feel really shocked and hurt
when Phulan calls them ‘robbers’. It is difficult for Dhanwanti and Suhag to subdue Phulan in this war of words. In this environment of allegations and disturbances, Mitro is calm as if nothing has happened. She is enjoying this dramatic war as an audience. “Like a spectator, Mitro laughed looking at mother-in-law and daughter-in-law – Phulan Rani! I was already famous as a wicked one. But I see dear you will also earn even greater reputation!” (28). No one but only Mitro can control her with her weapon of sarcasm. Phulan abuses Suhag to such an extent that she feels forced to return her jewellery. Feeling victorious, Phulan asks Suhag to return her clothes too. When Suhag goes inside to bring her clothes, “the middle one winked at the younger one and said, “Congratulations, Phulanwanti! Today the crown of victory rests on your head. Now you play music to celebrate your victory, and prepare some Halwa and Poori with your own blessed hands for a feast’ ” (30).

Mitro intervenes in the war when Suhag is about to give Phulan the clothes she was demanding. She asks Suhag to leave this settlement of clothes to her now. When Suhag insists to let the dispute be over by giving her what she demands and why to start another war. Mitro shook her head in disagreement and said:

“Not only another war but a thousand more. This greedy woman has her head turned, elder one, as if her ancestors would not rest satisfied without getting these clothes back.” Then she turned to Phulanwanti and threw in a sharp one, “Now better wash your hands off these suits, Younger One! You can claim these in your next birth . . . I am your death warrant. That’s all! You challenged the mother-in-law, I kept quite. But I won’t stand you insulting the one whose sandals even you do not match. Better keep your ornaments safe in your box or you shall lose them too”. (31)

Nobody but only Mitro knows how to rein uncontrollable Phulan. It is here she emerges as a superior warrior like Durga who curbs the evil calmly but resolutely. Among all the members of the family if Phulan is afraid of somebody, it is Mitro because she has some magical power to peep into the other’s heart. Phulan feels shocked when she asks her about her newly beaded necklace. She shoots another arrow from her quiver, “O younger one, even if you hide the necklace in your heart by using black magic, even then Mitro has secret mantra to find it” (42). She is jovial and playful all the time no matter how serious the environment of the house is. When Suhag rebukes her and tells her anxiously, “It doesn’t do any good to cut jokes all the
time, middle one. Your elder brother-in-law has not told me the whole issue but this much is enough for you to know that these brothers are heavily in debt in the grain market”, Mitro says carelessly, “let there be debts and dumpings on the heads of the people. But I’ve a horned jinn sitting over my head right now” (41). She appears as a self-centered individual, unconcerned with others’ problems. Through her playfulness she creates such a world around herself which is beyond the understanding of the others but beneath this chaos lays an eternal stability and serenity which can be experienced under the protective hand of a mother. A loving and benign mother figure hidden behind this veil of spontaneity and carelessness comes to the fore when Mitro resolves Sardari’s problem of debt by giving him her saved money. In spite of her seemingly carefree and self-centered attitude, she is a source of comfort to all whether it is Sardari, Dhanwanti, Suhag, Janko or Gurudas.

Thus, one aspect of Mozel and Mitro’s personalities is their playfulness and the second one is the motherly instinct. So both of them are personification of Durga who is a “personal savior as well as a great battle queen who fights to defeat the enemies of the gods” (Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses* 104). As at the end of *Devi-Mahatmya*, Durga grants desires to the two of her devotees. To one she returns his wealth and kingdom and to the other she grants ultimate liberation. In the same way Mozel gives Kirpal Kaur her life back at the cost of her own life and Mitro, on the other hand, reinvigorate the lives of the family members with her lively chirping all the time and makes Sardari come out of his self-imposed boundaries and live life to its full. Here Mitro is a direct personification of Durga who “exists outside normal structures and provides a version of reality that potentially, at least, may be refreshing and socially invigorating” (Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses* 99).

Durga is one of the most impressive and formidable goddess of the Hindu pantheon. She is described as a ferocious, invincible warrior who descends into the world from time to time to combat evil of various kinds, especially demons who have stolen the positions of gods. In this role she is depicted as a great battle queen with many arms wielding weapons. She rides a fierce lion and is described as irresistible in battle. Praising her *Devi-Mahatmya* describes, “Though she is eternal, the goddess becomes manifest over and over again to protect the world” (12.32). The most ferocious of all her manifestation is Kali. A full account of the origin of Kali is given in the third episode of *Devi-Mahatmya*. Kali appears when Durga confronts the demon brothers Sumbha and Nisumbha. Kali springs from Durga’s forehead when she becomes furious on seeing
Chanda and Munda approaching her with drawn swords and bent bows. Kali is black and wears a garland of human heads and a tiger skin, and wields a skull-topped staff. She is gaunt, with sunken eyes, gaping mouth and a lolling tongue. She roars loudly and leaps into the battle, where she tears demons apart with her hands and crushes them in her jaws. After defeating Chanda and Munda, she makes second appearance for defeating the demon Raktabija, who had the ability to reproduce himself instantly out of his drops of blood falling on the ground. Kali defeats the demon by sucking the blood from his body and throwing his countless duplicates into her gaping mouth. In her ferocious form Kali epitomizes the wild and uncontrollable aspects of the divine.

Kinsley finds a relation in the wildness of Kali and the creation of the world. Her wild appearance conveys the idea of world as the spontaneous, effortless and dizzying creation of their divine play. He says, “Kali appears tumultuous and frenzied, acts in wild ways, and is frequently called mad or intoxicated” (The Sword and the Flute 157). In her mad dancing, disheveled hair and eerie howl she presents an image of the world reeling and careening out of control. Kali reflects the phenomenal world and at the same time she presents a picture of that world that underlies its ephemeral, unpredictable, and spontaneous nature. Through her madness and untamed behaviour, she poses a threat to the fake and imposed boundaries in this world. Describing Kali as Mahamaya Kinsley concludes, “Kali confronts one with a vision of the world as chaotic and out of control and thereby urges one to see beyond it to what is permanent and eternal. In this sense Kali is both the embodiment and mistress of this ephemeral, magically created world and the stimulus to resolve, to transcend it” (The Sword and the Flute 136).

Both Mitro and Mozel betray the same elements of madness as are manifested by Kali. The word ‘mad’ appears in the very first line of description about them in the narrative. Mitro has been introduced as “with tousled and disheveled hair insane like middle daughter-in-law . . .” (12). She is counter-attacking Sardari with her sharp gaze. On the other hand at the first glance “Mozel appeared like dangerously mad” (251) to Trilochan. She too has disheveled hair. Her chapped lipstick which has been compared to thick blood symbolizes Kali’s blood smeared lips. As Kali is naked except for a necklace of severed heads and a girdle of severed arms, Mozol too is naked except a loose white dress with very low neckline exposing the three-fourths of her large bluish breasts. The same instinct to demolish the every imaginable order is noticeable in Mitro too when she pulls off all her clothes and becomes completely naked and talks highly of the beauty of her breasts. This playful nakedness stands for the unmasking of the façade of this
phenomenal world. From the point of view of outlook, they turn out to be the manifestation of Kali as Mahamaya and through their unconventional images they call into question the stability, order and destiny of the artificial social reality.

Both Durga and Kali are associated with the periphery of civilized order. Durga who presents the ideal of beauty for Hindu woman on the one hand, violates the model of an ideal woman on the other. She is neither submissive nor subordinate to a male deity. Instead of fulfilling the household duties, she excels at what is traditionally a male function, fighting in battle. In this way, she reverses the normal role for females and therefore stands outside normal society. In her shocking appearance and unconventional behaviour as Kali, she presents an alternative to normal society. She presents a world of reversals, opposites, and contrasts through which she shakes one’s comforting and naïve assumption about the world, and allows, instead, a clear perception of how things really are. All the six protagonists, viz, Saugandhi, Sharda, Neelam, Mozel, Mitro and Ratti too exhibit the similar reversals and contrasts to the normal social order. All of them exude such a wild energy which is impossible to be circumscribed within the artificial social boundaries. Their wildness and unconventional behaviour symbolizes that “underlying the world of fractured particularity and specificity is a dimension that is completely unbound, primordially free. It is an untamed, fertile dimension from which the world is born and upon which the world rests” (Kinsley, The Sword and the Flute 157-158).

4. Radha-Krishna Relationship: A Fusion of the Center and the Periphery

The paradoxically ‘peripheral’ nature of the six protagonists can be further analyzed by placing them parallel to Krishna, another most famous Hindu deity who too inhabits the fringes of society like Kali. Krishna has many forms. Playing the role of Arjuna’s charioteer he reveals himself as a teacher, friend and a counselor; while dancing with gopis in Vrindavan he appears as a passionate lover, then as killer of Kansa and other demons he turns out to be the savior of the creation. But throughout the entire subcontinent, he is most popularly worshipped as a child or as a youthful cowherd. A youth having lovely blue complexion, wearing a crown of peacock feathers, standing cross-legged in an idyllic forest setting and playing intoxicating flute is his most popular image in Hindu Bhakti tradition.

According to Bhagavata Purana Vishnu incarnated himself as Krishna with the aim to relieve Mother Earth of the tyrannical burden of demon-king Kansa but Krishna’s life in Vrindavan has hardly any reference of this mission except when Krishna kills the demons sent
by Kansa to kill him. No doubt he performs his mission but without breaking the mood of his playful freedom. Mitro and Mozel are the best examples of this transcendent freedom. The most unique feature of their personalities is their playful spontaneity. Their actions are not as such ‘serious’, they are without calculation and premeditation. The only purpose of their ostensibly purposeless life appears to be reveling in bliss. However serious the situation may be like the choice between husband and mother at the end in Mitro’s case, and choice between life and death in Mozel’s case, they don’t let it overpower their playfulness. As the infant god, who is aloof and absorbed in self-amusement showing no concern for world maintenance, is, in fact, a testimony to the divine freedom, similarly Mitro and Mozel, too, who appear to be carelessly busy in self-delight are the concrete manifestation of essential freedom.

The most complex aspect of the personality of this charming youthful god is his inciting sexual passion in gopis and deriving them to frenzy by his appearance or the call of his flute. In response to the irresistible call of his flute, the gopis leave their husbands and children to rush to the forest to be with their darling. In some accounts of the tradition, Krishna is said to multiply himself so that each gopi can have a Krishna. All that happens at the banks of river Jamuna is outside the scope of the civilized order of society. Here the god who is responsible for maintaining the order in the world has himself turned all the norms of society upside down. The most controversial of his relation with gopis is his relation with Radha. Radha-Krishna relationship is adulterous. In spite of being parakiya i.e. married to another person, she is passionately attracted to Krishna and her adulterous relationship breaks all the norms of society.

Today Radha is considered a model of love for the Lord but she did not appear as a fully developed figure until Jayadeva’s Gitgovinda in the twelfth century. The poem is written almost entirely from Radha’s point of view. It presents a detailed description of lovesick Radha who ventures at night to search the woods for her lover. Jayadeva’s heroine is neither a wife nor a worshipping rustic playmate. She is a jealous, solitary and proud female who is Krishna’s exclusive partner in a secret love, a union that is contrasted with his communal sexual play with the entire group of cowherdesses. This poem describes her estrangement from Krishna because of his relationship with other maidens, her sorrow, jealousy and longing, penitence and propiation of Radha by Krishna and the joy of their reunion.

The uniqueness of the poem rests on the two features mainly: firstly, the uninhibited portrayal of the love-play of Radha and Krishna; secondly, the use of the reversal technique in
the poem from the beginning to end. The poem begins with an interesting reversal of the convention that the female is weak and coward and, thus, she needs protection especially in darkness. But the poem opens with a reversal where it is young Krishna who is afraid of night and heavy clouds and that is why he is escorted home by Radha at Nanda’s bidding:

The sky is densely cloud, The forest grounds are dark with *tamala* trees; at night he [Krishna] is afraid. Radha, you alone must take him home. This is Nanda’s command. [But] Radha and Madhava stray to a tree in the grove by the path and on the bank of the Yamuna their secret love games prevail. (240)

Although Radha’s marital status is not specified in the poem, there are hints that she belongs to another man. Whether or not Radha is married to another man, Krishna is certainly not married to her and he indulges in dalliance with other married cowherdesses too which breeds jealousy in Radha’s heart. The love-play between Radha and Krishna takes place at night in the woods and is surrounded by secrecy. The imagery of dark cloudy night in the beginning symbolizes that it is not a relationship that can take place under the approving eye of society. Thus the poem stands for the reversal of both social hierarchy in terms of male and female roles and social norms in terms of love outside marriage.

The erotic imagery used by Jayadeva for portraying Radha-Krishna relationship for which he has been criticized also is, in fact, a main feature of gopi tradition described in detail in *Srimad-Bhagvatam* composed by the great sage Vyasa Deva under the instruction from Narada in order to attain ever-lasting peace. In this great religious text itself the relation of the Lord Krishna with *gopis* has been described in the most human terms. It dwells at length at Krishna’s dance with *gopis* which is known as *rasha*:

Thereupon Govinda began his sportive dance in the company of those best of damsels who attended on him . . . then having stationed himself between every two of these damsels, Krishna, the Lord of all yoga, commenced in that circle of milk-women, the festive dance known as *Rasha Leela* (127).

Krishna enjoys the company of these cow-herd women having multiplied himself into as many Krishnas as there were *gopis*. The atmosphere of a playful physical intimacy is created in dance. During dance *gopis* embrace Krishna by the neck, kiss his arm placed on their shoulder and place their cheek on Krishna’s. “Being tired they drew the auspicious hands of Krishna on their breasts and their fatigue was removed” (128). Having sported for a long while they enter
into the waters of Jamuna with the desire of getting over the fatigue. In the water Krishna sports with *gopis* like an elephant. Touch of Krishna’s body relieves *gopis* of all their pains.

Putting forth his arms embracing the damsels, touching their hands, curling locks, thighs, breasts, scratching them with his finger nails, indulging in laughs, jokes and with repartee, piercing them with his glances, and with other amorous tricks, he delighted the *gopis* bringing them under the spell of Cup (the god of love).

(118)

Thus, this authoritative text itself is full of the sexual undertones. At some places we find the more indirect reference of the sexual relation of Krishna and *gopis*. While describing the effect of the music of Krishna’s flute on *gopis* it says, “All these *gopis*, leaving their respective business unfinished flew to Krishna, their garments and ornaments having fallen off from their persons in consequence of their great hurry” (113).

Jayadeva has taken further this tradition by portraying Radha as Krishna’s most favorite among all the *gopis*. He renders minute details of the emotions and actions of Radha and Krishna during the love play. The unique feature of Krishna as cowherd is his playfulness. It pervades all his actions from stealing butter as a child to making love to Radha as a charming youth. Words for play like *lila*, *krida*, *vilasa* etc, are used generally in Sanskrit poetry to indicate sexual activity:

Love-play is the most perfect example of all play, exhibiting the essential features of play in the clearest form . . . It is not the [sexual] act as such that the spirit of language tends to conceive as play; rather the road thereto, the preparation for and introduction to ‘love’, which is often made enticing by all sorts of playing . . . The dynamic elements of play . . . such as the deliberate creation of obstacles, adornment, surprise, pretence, tension, etc., all belong to the process of flirting and wooing. (Huizinga qtd. in Siegel 171)

The same playful attitude pervades the sexuality of the *Gitagovinda*. Krishna and Radha play the game of love with each other which is full of laughing, joking, mock anger and loving persuasions. Radha uses coyness and mock resistance as a ploy in this game to elicit Krishna’s feelings for her before actually offering herself in love. Radha’s coyness is genuine in the beginning but later she deliberately uses it as a strategy on the advice of her friends:
The playful, amusing nature of Radha and Krishna’s love, then, serves to underline the fact that the relationship takes place in a world apart, far removed from the harsh world of work and worrisome duty. And within the enchanted realm of their love each finds a new freedom, particularly Radha. Within the love relationship her deepest feelings finally can be expressed. Her longings and secret dreams are fulfilled in her intimacy with Krishna. (Kinsley, *The Sword and the Flute* 48)

This playful love of Radha-Krishna which amounts to adultery at social level, is worshipped in Sahajiya Vaishnavism. "Sahaj is the ultimate reality which the cult interprets to be this dalliance in the transcendental world that is brought to earth by the mimesis of men and woman in the sublunar world. . . . the sexual act is the most important cult rite and the preference is for the female partner who is parakiya, wife is someone else (Chaitanya 476). They did not make the distinction between sacred and profane love; the divine was for them the fullest blossoming and the finest distillation of the profane. In this tradition the literary motif of adulterous love became a religious motif. This sect of Krishna-bhaktas holds Radha’s parakiya position and considers their love was higher than dharma. They believe that bhakti must be passionate and that the parakiya relationship creates a greater passion than the svakiya one. It is the bhava or emotions like jealousy, grief and passionate longing which grow out of the the fear of separation that makes a relationship passionate and in “a svakiya relationship there is no fear of separation; that is why there is no birth of bhava in it. Anuraga manifests itself in extramarital love; that was the cause of supreme enjoyment in Vrindavana” (Dimock qtd. in Siegel 117).

This adulterous nature of their love became the central theme in the poetry of many later poets especially Vidyapati and Candidas. Both the poets make it clear that she is married to another man and that she risks social ostracism by pursuing her affair with Krishna. Vidyapati describes Radha as a woman of noble family, but he portrays Krishna as a common villager. In loving Krishna, Radha sacrifices her status and reputation. She says to herself “If I go [to Krishna] I lose my home/ If I stay I lose my love” (Vidyapati 65). In spite of being aware of the dire consequences of her transgressing her limits, she decides in favour of going to Krishna. Abandoning her social duty to love Krishna is the central theme in the poems of Candidas. Radha, married to a man named Ayana, is not secretive about her adulterous love and she does
not hesitate to incur the wrath of her family and village to be with Krishna. A rebellious Radha
curses her fate and society to keep her bind to her husband whom she calls a dolt and away from
Krishna. Impatient and angry Radha threatens to burn her house which represents a social
authority and her destiny which stops her from fulfilling her desire to love:

I throw ashes at all laws
made by men or god.
I am born alone,
With no companion.
What is the worth
of your vile laws
that failed me
In love,
And left me with a fool,
A dumbskull [Ayana]?
. . . I will set fire to this house
And go away.               (qtd. in Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses* 88)

This is only one instance out of the numerous writings in which Radha has been clearly
presented as a *parakiya nayika*. It is really ironical that her love for Krishna which is a symbol of
defiance of social authority represented by her husband and Nanda, Krishna’s foster father who
exemplifies the ideal of *dharma*, has been exalted by the same society to a position of divine
love. It is not only worshipped but justified strongly in *Vaishnav* tradition as has been discussed
already. Not only their adulterous love is worshipped but their love-making has been highly sung
as a divine allegory by many writers following the foot-prints of Jayadeva. His poem became
controversial also because of the use of erotic imagery for the portrayal of divine union. Krishna
Chaitanya criticizing it as “one of the most sensuous in the tradition of profane love in the world
poetry” says that in spite of being replete with sensuousness, it has found its way in the temple
services in Gujarat in thirteenth century. Songs from the poem were part of the regular liturgy in
the Jagannaatha temple in Puri and these are sung till today in Krishna temple at Guruvayur
(428).

Beginning with union of Radha-Krishna, followed by separation and then ending with
reunion, an archetypal structure in Indian ontology i.e One (*Brahman*) in the beginning, then
separation or multiplicity in the form of creation, then at the end re-absorption into the one, has
been followed by Jayadeva. Defending the poem against the charges of eroticism Lee Siegel
says, “The structure of the profane experience is identical to the structure of the sacred and by
virtue of that structure the profane could be interpreted as, or be, the sacred” (161). The
behaviour pattern of the lovers and representation of that pattern in art and Sanskrit poetry was
highly formalized. Siegel defines it love-in-union as ‘love play’, “a game with rules, and it was
an ‘amatory-art’, a science to be learnt and practiced with refinement” (161). It is here that the
boundaries of sacred and profane merge.

Our most popular erotic sastras like “Vatsyana’s Kama Sutra, Koka Pandit’s Ratti
Rahisya, and Kalyanmalla’s Ananga Ranga . . . speak in detail on the subject of sex, without the
slightest trace of inhibition” (Nahal 32) and in these sastras sex as an amatory art is never
practiced by a wedded wife but by some woman who is free from any sort of social bond.
Kamasutra, the earliest treatise written in Sanskrit, deals with pleasure and not duty so, the
heroine in it is a courtesan. As the hero in this work is a nagarika or man-about-town who
vigorously pursues the pleasures of life, so it is clear that his partner in his pleasure cannot be his
wife, but his mistress. Radha-Krishna union has been depicted by different writers like
Vidyapati, Candidas, Kesav Das and Jayadeva etc. by using the language and conventions of the
erotic sastra. Jayadeva’s Radha is accomplished in all the charming arts which have been
considered necessary for a courtesan by Vatsayan and on the other hand, Krishna is presented in
the pursuit of pleasure just like the lover in Kamasutra. Krishna in Gitagovinda is a Nagara-
Narayana or a nagaraka proficient in the arts of love and Radha longs to experience that
proficiency. Its second part is an annotated catalogue of ‘sixty-four’ arts of love-making. The
purpose of arts and science of love-in-union is, of course, to produce pleasure, but the pleasure is
only achieved only through infliction and receiving pain. That is why Vatsayan explains in detail
the importance of embracing, pressing, marking or scratching with nails, different kinds of biting
and striking during the union. Jayadeva describes that in order to persuade angry Radha, Krishna
pleads her to pacify herself by inflict pain on him and her doing so would give him pleasure:

If you are truly angry, O lovely-toothed woman, give me a wound with the arrows
that are your sharp nails, bind me with fetters which are your arms or bite me, by
which all the conditions of pleasure come to be; beloved! Sweet-natured woman!
stop being piqued with me . . . ! [X.3]
Vatsayana stress the pleasure derived from the application of great pressure during embrace. He differentiates between the four kinds of embraces depending upon the pressure – touching, piercing, rubbing and squeezing which implies the violence inherent in the sexual union (*Kama Sutra* 38). Jayadeva uses this terminology unequivocally – Krishna asks Radha to give him the squeezing-embrace and then squeezing Radha he delightfully ‘fears’ that her breasts may break his back:

O artless-woman! Give me squeeze against your ample breasts and bind me with the creepers of your arms and bite me with cruel teeth! O fierce-passionate-woman, rejoice! [X.11]

Slowly-slowly having taken Radha in the space between his arms and squeezing her tightly on account of his delight: May the lofty breasts of the excellent-bodied-woman not break my back and quickly come out it!

[XI. 34]

According to Vatsyana there is no sharper erotic stimulant than the effects of nails and teeth. The ‘scars from stroke of nails and teeth’ which the lovers inflict upon each other were felt to have sentimental and ornamental value. These acted as love-stimulants and indicators of intense passion. “The love of a woman who sees the marks of nails on the private parts of her body, even though they are old and almost worn out, becomes again fresh and new. If there be no marks of nails to remind a person of the passage of love, then love is lessened in the same way as when no union takes place for a long time. . . In short, nothing tends to increase love so much as the effects of marking with nails, and biting” (*Kama Sutra* 47). Radha-Krishna epitomize the perfect lovers portrayed by Vatsayana. He scratches Radha’s breasts at their first union (II. 15) and she pierces his chest at their re-union (XII. 11). The loving assault is reciprocal, and according to *Kamasutra* it follows the rule of ‘blow for blow, kiss for kiss.’ Initially Vatsayana attributes roughness and violence to the man, and weakness and gentleness to the woman but he explains that in the full rage of passion these attributes can be reversed:

At such time with flowers in her hair hanging loose, and her smiles broken by hard breathings, she should press upon her lover’s bosom with her own breasts; and lowering her head frequently, she should do in return the same action which he used to do before, returning his blows and chaffing him. . . Though a woman is
reserved, and keeps her feelings concealed, yet when she gets on top a man, she then shows all her love and desire. (59-61)

Following this tradition of reverse union Radha too declares her victory by mounting Krishna and “in this manner she tries to demonstrate the ‘heroic sentiment’; the woman is active and vigorous in sexual siege” (Siegel 167).

Held-captive by her arms, pressed by the weight of her breasts, pierced by her finger nails, the cup of his lower-lip bitten by her teeth, crushed by the slope of her hips, bent-down by her hand on his hair, crazed by the tricking flow of honey from her lower-lip, the lovely-beloved somehow obtained delight – so, oh! The way of love is paradoxical!

In the undertaking of the battle mixed with the play of love-pleasure, [an undertaking] having the mark of [love death], something full of impetuosity was undertaken by her on-top [of him] for victory over her lover . . . how is the heroic sentiment of women demonstrated? (XII. 11, 12)

In spite of its adulterous nature and uninhibited expression of sexual desire, the two socially unacceptable aspects, being inevitably associated with Radha-Krishna relationship, their love-theme and especially their reversal of roles between the male and female became a conventional motif in Krsnaite literature and this viprita-rata is symbolized by exchanging the clothes of Radha and Krishna. It suggests the identification of lovers with each other and becoming one with the other. This idea is religiously adapted as the identification of devotee and the Lord. Radha’s sexual utterance, “I am the Enemy-of-Madhu” (VI.5) is interpreted by Krishna bhakats as having sacred and devotional significance. Lee Siegel finds it same as the identification of one’s self as the Self with Brahman which has been considered the ultimate realization in Upanishads: “In the beginning this [universe] was Brahman alone, and he truly knew [him]self (atman), saying: ‘I am Brahman’ ” (Brihad-Aranyaka Upanishad I.iv. 10).

Thus Radha-Krishna relationship provides us with a strange paradox that sacred and profane are not two mutually exclusive categories but one and the same thing. When selflessness enters the relationship, the distinction between sacred and profane disappears. Radha unable to bear the arrow of separation from Krishna prays him for reunion, “O madhav, I am fallen [in obeisance] at your foot – when you are turned away [from me] immediately even the nectar-storing-moon spreads fire in my body” (IV.8). Here, on the one hand, the word ‘fallen’
symbolizes the renunciation of all ego and sense of self for becoming one with the Lord, and on the other it suggests fall from the higher moral standards of society. The term suggests both an absolute devotee and a fallen woman i.e. a prostitute. Both of them stand on the same platform as both of them renounce their social duties in favour of their personal choices. So it signifies the fusion of sacred and profane. In terms of social duties Radha represents a complete anti-thesis to Sita. Both are renunciates but in complete opposite sense:

While Sita renounces her personal interests in favour of social and familial duties, it is precisely those duties that Radha renounces in pursuit of her personal choice. Radha throws aside the bonds that Sita accepts and receives no blame for what would be an unthinkable transgression in any other woman, including Sita. . . . Sita’s goal is determined by social expectations and Radha’s by their rejection. (Bose 41)

This is exactly what happens in Mitro’s case. She is very beautiful and sexually uncontrollable just like Radha. She is aware of the wealth of her beauty and burns with the desire to be praised and especially for her beautiful breasts. When she asks Suhag, “Would anybody else have such beautiful breasts?” (19), Suhag feels offended and admonishes her self-love. Here Suhag presents a contrast to Mitro just like Sita is to Radha. Like Sita, Suhag is a personification of ideal wifely virtues. Sita is worshipped as “the perfect example of the uncomplaining wife whose sole purpose in life is to follow her husband’s every wish and to put his interest above her own. . . . Her society and ours regard her love as her duty, and approve the fact that in fulfilling that duty she plays the role of wife exactly as expected by society” (Bose 41). Love or sexual gratification is a matter of obligation for a married woman. She enters in sexual union only to maintain the lineage of the family. She places this duty above her personal sexual desire. Suhag, a personification of all these wifely virtues, negates the importance of woman’s body for its own sake. She refuses to acknowledge the uniqueness which Mitro attaches to her body. For her body is just a means to perform her duties. On the other hand, Mitro in spite of being a married woman just like Suhag, refuses to sacrifice her personal interests. Her behaviour is not in sync with her social role. She is expected to be like Sita but she behaves like Radha. Like Radha, she too “bristles, makes love-cries, laments, trembles, gasps for breath, ponders, jumps-up, closes her eyes” (Gitagovinda IV. 19) in the memory of the Nayamat. She is full of sexual passion and she loves Sardari like a lover but he expects her to behave like a wife. Like Radha she longs for
passionate union with him but he is unable to fulfill her desire because he does not accept her as a beloved. She is afflicted with the disease of love, “your brother-in-law doesn’t recognize my disease. At most he approaches me once a week or a fortnight-and my body is so thirsty it thrashes around like a fish out of water!” (20). Her only cure is passionate union with Sardari as the cure of Radha’s affliction is contact with Krishna only. Radha’s friends ask Krishna, “O Beloved of the Heavenly Physicians! You don’t help Radha [to be] rid of afflictions, [Radha] is sick with love and cured only by the nectar of contact with your body . . .” (Geetgovinda IV. 20).

Mitro’s praise for her own breasts symbolizes her earnest desire for love pleasure. In Gitagovinda we find repeated reference of the beauty of Radha’s breasts. Her friend asks her, “The pitcher of your breasts is more heavy and {passionate} that coconut – why make it fruitless? O piqued-woman!” (IX. 3). Radha mediates on her first union with Krishna by remembering the scratches made on her breasts by his nails and in the tenth canto to persuade angry Radha, Krishna says, “May the garland of jewels glitter upon the pitcher of your breasts” (6), and then pleads her, “give me squeeze against your ample breasts” (11). In spite of being placed in a specific social role Mitro is expressive of her personal desires but in spite of all her efforts she is not able to pull Sardari out of his ego of being a husband. As Radha-Krishna union-in-love takes place in Vrindavan which is outside or beyond the borders or limitations of ordinary human society and habitation, Mitro-Sardari union too takes place at Mitro’s mother’s place which has not been termed as a house but ‘noor mahal ka adda’, a place which is at the margins of civilized society. Sardari enters into realm of emotion leaving behind the wary world of duties. Here for the first time Sardari sees her as his beloved and feels captivated by her beauty. Like lovers in Vrindavan they reach at the height of emotion where “shame is completely forgotten, and they behave with abandon, frenzied and intoxicated” (Kinsley, The Sword and the Flute 49). With her playfulness Mitro’s transports Sardari in a realm of love and love-making. The erotic aspect of this other world proves life-affirming for their dying relationship. In the love of a married couple misery is always inflicted by some other person which cause separation between them as the misery of love-in-separation experienced by Rama and Sita is inflicted upon them by Ravana, but that of Krishna and Radha is self-inflicted. To torment her partner and to repulse is unpardonable for a dutiful wife but such tactics are used by a parakiya woman to increase the desire of her lover and this is called self inflicted misery. But conflict between Sardari and Mitro is a type of self-inflicted misery which successfully rejuvenates their passion
for each other and leads to their happy reunion. Similarly Ratti’s long cherished dream comes true in the wilderness of Corbett Park away from the harsh realities of the day-to-day life. Her refusal to marry Diwakar is the result of her desire to love him willingly and passionately not out of the sense of obligation. Thus Mitro’s and Ratti’s desire is similar to that of Radha’s but it is really ironical that what is worshipped as divine or transcendent in Radha’s case, is criticized as profane or transgression in the case of ordinary women like Mitro and Ratti.

5. Concept of love and marriage in the Folk-legends of Punjab

This paradoxical fusion of sacred and profane is visible not only in religious myths but also in the cultural folk-legends. The same society which criticizes women for the expression of desire in actual life as is depicted in the selected stories extols such women as heroines in religion and myths. As in Punjabi folktales like Heer-Ranjha, Mirza-Sahibaan, Sohini-Mahiwal, Sassi-Punnu, the heroines transgress the social boundaries to fulfill their desires. Heer elopes with Ranjha after her marriage; Sahiban calls Mirza on the eve of her marriage and flees with him; Sohini is married but she comes to meet Mahiwal every night crossing the river with the help of a pot; and Sassi who is a princess leaves her palace to meet Punnu and dies in wilderness. The women in these legends are shown as passionate as men. They bring disgrace to their families by transgressing the limits set on them by the society. The lines quoted during the analysis have been taken from the existential renderings of these four folk-legends by Harjeet Singh Gill in his book *Heer Ranjha and Other Legends of the Punjab*. In *Sassi-Punnu* voluptuous embrace of the lovers leads them to sublime union:

If Punnu was the most handsome prince
Sassi was the most beautiful princess
. . . Sassi and Punnu met for the first time
their encounter transcended
all their expectations
it led to the most sublime union
to the most voluptuous embrace
. . . . they were burning with desire since long
they kissed and hugged
and made love
the eternal love of the union of body and soul
their hearts mingled with the longings of the lovers of yonder day
of the thousand and one tales!  

And when Punnu is snatched away from her by the King Bloch, she decides to follow him against the wishes of her parents:

The foster parents tried in vain
To console the young girl!
. . . but nothing could restore
the peace of the troubled soul
. . . she stood like a rock
Her eyes were blazing with rage and rancor
She decided to be the eternal lover
to go to the ultimate destination
to follow her love on the hottest sand dunes
of the merciless desert
under the unbearable heat of the Indian summer!

Burning with the heat of passion Sassi and Punnu find refuge in the lap of scorching desert, away from the world of emotionally frozen people. Similarly Mirza-Sahiban get eternally united with each other on the back of Mirza’s horse Bakki. Sahiban’s love for Mirza was not acceptable to her family and to save family from disgrace her marriage is fixes to Tahir, some other young man. But emerging as an iconoclast she elopes with her love on the eve of her marriage:

Sahiban was decked as a bride
. . . she wore the most gorgeous dress
with bangles and necklace
with earrings and nose rings
with all kinds of rings of gold and diamond
. . . but Sahiban was sad
Where was Mirza her love
. . . and lo and behold there was Mirza
. . . quietly, silently with the help of her trusted friend
She slipped away and fell into the arms of Mirza
Who immediately put her on her steed
And flew like an eagle in the wilderness. (118-120)

Their flight on the back of the fast horse away from the world of repression becomes a symbol of their ecstatic flight into the realm of free and passionate love. “Mirza and Sahiban are the two spirits on the back of Bakki, delighted in their spiritual consummation in the air, away from the crude earthly realities of human predicament” (Aulakh 66). Horse in this tale is the symbol of manly bravery, strength, animal energy and represents the elemental instinctive side of human nature. Horse is also considered a sensuous animal and a symbol of sexual desire in man and gods. Though after the elopement her minds get obsessed with the thoughts of purity and virginity and at the end she takes the side of her brothers. While analyzing the cultural dimension of Sahiban’s behaviour, Satinder Aulakh states, “Sahiban’s conflict after elopement with her lover, depicts the mental complex of a girl born in a culture where normal relations are looked upon with scorn” (37). Her support of her brothers is interpreted as her betrayal to her lover. But what is surprisingly important here is that in spite of saving her brother at the cost of the love, she is sung not as an ideal sister but as a passionate lover. The same society which is challenged by her sings the tale of her love with Mirza.

In the folk legends the heroes and heroines sacrifice not only worldly pleasures and possessions but their own lives too which symbolizes their rejection of the ordinary ways of the world. Ranjha accepts the job of a cowherd in the parental house of Heer; similarly Mahinwal throws away his fortunes and becomes a cowherd in Sohini’s house, and after the marriage of their beloved Mahinwal becomes a faqir, and Ranjha a yogi in the sect of Gorakh Nath. On the other hand Heer as well as Sohini refuse to enjoy the married life with their husbands because they have already promised their love to somebody else. The shackles of this imposed relationship fail to subdue their passion. On the other side their lovers too are burning in the fire of love. Mahinwal follows Sohini to her in-laws after her marriage and starts living in a cottage across the river. Sohini comes every night to see her lover crossing the river with a pakka pot. One night her sister-in-law comes to know about her love scandal and replaces her baked pot with a kachcha or unbaked pot. Sohini smells the intrigue as soon as she touches the pot but even then she decides to jump into the river of passion:

She resolved to follow her heart
. . . with the unbaked pot
the kacha ghara under her arm
she plunged
into the furious waters of Jhanaa
the Jhanaa
that had seen that had endured
many a tragedy
many a resolve of the determined minds
who challenge the mundane
the superstitious norms
of customs and conventions! (94-96)

Hearing the cries of Sohini, Mahinwal jumps into the river and the lovers separated by
the society gets eternally united in the cold waters of Jhanaa.

According to Hindu philosophy marriage is a union of seven births. Whether a husband is
kind or cruel, a wife is expected to serve him till her last breath because it is written in her
destiny by gods. Meeting of a good or bad husband or being unable to marry the person of one’s
choice is the result of deeds of previous birth. The unfulfilled desires are hoped to be fulfilled in
the next birth. “The promise of future bliss offers a great consolation and strength to bear the
sufferings and to be reconciled with one’s fate” (Aulakh 45). But none of the heroes and heroines
finds relief in this consolation and they do not believe in life after death. Heer too, like her other
counterparts Sohini, Sahiban and Sassi, desires to unite with his love in this very life. She is
unable to accept Saida as her husband because she has already promised her love to Ranjha.
With the blessings of five pirs she is able to maintain her chastity. Ranjha who becomes a yogi in
Heer’s love reaches the village of her in-laws and starts living in the garden outside the village.
Heer’s sister-in-law plays an important role in the story. Sister-in-law is a symbol of social order.
In other words she represents the authority of socially sanctioned relationship. In the legend of
Sohini-Mahinwal, Sohini’s sister-in-law acts as the custodian of social norms by punishing
Sohini for her transgression but Heer’s sister-in-law, Sahiti, acts totally opposite to her social
position. Instead of becoming the spokesperson of her brother, she acts as her rescuer who
releases her from the prison of marriage and takes her into the garden of love. Here the
inconsistency between Sahiti’s social position and her behaviour represents the perennial clash
between the society and the individual. Sahiti does not act as the agent of society but as a free
individual who helps another individual with whom she identifies herself. Whatever is her social relation with Heer but at existential plane she is in the same situation as that of Heer. She, too, is confronted with a choice between duty and love, social honour and individual esteem, momentary and eternal. It is paradoxical that we do not find even a single reference of the name of Sohini’s sister-in-law in spite of her role as the upholder of the honour of the family but Heer’s sister-in-law has her independent identity and is popularly known as Sahiti in spite of flouting the social norms and bringing disgrace to her family.

Sahiti plays the role of mediator between Heer and Ranjha. She helps Heer in her drama of being bitten by a black snake and thus giving her opportunity of staying in garden, popularly known as kala bagh, with Ranjha for cure under her own observation. It is a Garden of Eden where the union of the lovers takes place; Sahiti finds her love Murad and elopes with him; and the voluptuous union of Heer and Ranjha takes place. Beyond the boundaries of village they meet in the garden by doing so “the lovers simply go beyond the limits set by the social structure. . . The union in the black forest is not a sexual reproductive union, it is a voluptuous celebration” (Gill 34). Though later they are again separated by the social forces. Heer is poisoned by her family and Ranjha dies with this shock and get eternally united with his love.

The basic theme underlying all these legends is the challenge to the established order. But the most pertinent question that arises here is – who rejects this order? Heroes or heroines? Or both do it equally? The close analysis of these legends shows that no doubt heroes too reject the social system by sacrificing their privileged social status and the worldly possessions but it is the heroines who pose the actual threat to the society by challenging its foundation like the institution of marriage upon which the whole social structure is erected. History is witness to the fact that men have never been questioned for transgressing the boundaries of marriage because they are the law-makers who make rules only for others to follow. So they can never be the law-breakers. Sahiban is betrothed to Tahir but on the eve of marriage she elopes with Mirza, and Sassi, a princess too refuses to marry because she has already married Punnu in her hearts of hearts and this marriage is above all the social ceremonies and sanctions, Heer and Sohini are married but they refuse to consummate their marriage. It is a paradox that with the act of transgression, socially they fall in the category of unfaithful wives but metaphysically they are raised to the status of saints. They do not believe that they are doing anything wrong to the family. They feel that their love has been sanctioned by god himself and so after that social
approval has no significance for them. Both Heer and Sohini become successful in protecting their virginity through the divine intervention. Heer invokes the great lovers of the religious and secular traditions, who died for the sake of their highest principle of faithfulness and fortitude. “Along with her mental purity she is able to protect her physical purity with the help of the Panj Pirs, the five divine sages, who respond to Heer’s prayers and do not let Saida approach her bed” (Gill 15). Similarly, Sohini is also unable to love her husband. Like Heer, she too “seeks the help of God to protect her virginity and honour in the house of her husband . . . her husband becomes impotent and she lives in the house as the “virgin-wife” waiting for the arrival of her lover” (Aulakh 77).

According to the Hindu view of marriage, to enter into sexual union with her husband is both the dream and duty of a girl. To provide sexual satisfaction to her husband and to raise his children is the matter of honour for a wife. And contrary to it, to have physical union with somebody else other than the husband amounts to crime on her part. At the time of marriage the husband takes vow to protect the honour of his wife but in these love-legends husbands have been portrayed as the threat to the honour of their wives. This view is conceptually opposite to the definition of marriage and, thus, a direct challenge to this institution. Thus all of these legends celebrate the voluptuous union of the lovers. Had their love been purely metaphysical, the heroines would have no problem in physical submission to their husbands but it is not so. The lovers want a complete union, a union of mind, body and soul but this type of relation which includes voluptuous union also does not get support in our social tradition so they seek and, receive too, the divine sanction for it. Thus, sideling the social authority, allegedly profane gets merged with the purely sacred.

6. The Basic Thesis

The whole thrust of this chapter is to understand the mental complex of our society by finding the common theme underlying its religious, historical and mythical dimensions. All these aspects have been studied earlier also but in isolation and in terms of good or bad, justice and injustice. But the things are not as simple as that. Our myths and religion are in fact complicated riddles which hide in their folds the ultimate truths of existence. Whether it is the concept of mother goddess, Radha-Krishna love, the folk-legends of Punjab or the history of marriage and prostitution, the thread binding these together is one i.e. the intermixing of the center and the periphery, and the sacred and the profane which question the mutually exclusive social
categories of the ideal and the fallen. All these religious and cultural myths reveal the complexities of mental structure. Hindu gods and goddesses, and our folk heroes and heroines are celebrated and sung for the same thing for which any girl in real society would be criticized, punished, and may be killed also. The study of these religious and cultural myths shows as how the discourse of chastity has been created to suppress the woman in society. The categories of the deal and the fallen are applicable on women only. A married man who goes to a prostitute is never questioned but a prostitute who comes to live in the house of her married client becomes a threat for the institution of marriage. The existence of the institution of prostitution is an evidence of the uncontrollable sexual desire of men which is never questioned but a woman is not allowed to express her sexual desire even for her husband. The protagonists of Manto and Sobti’s stories represent the existential conflict of such women in our society who are criticized sometimes for crossing the boundaries set for the honourable women and sometimes for intruding into the privileged space. The attempt has been made in this chapter to understand this paradoxical social attitude by placing these narratives in the broader religious and cultural paradigm. The two-tier analysis of the texts; first, at the level of the comparison of the narratives of both the writers; and second, the parallel study of the narratives and the religio-cultural and historical aspects brings forth the view that the center and periphery, and the sacred and profane are mutually inter-dependent entities instead of being the exclusive categories. Otherwise the desire of Radha, Kali, Heer, Sahiban, Sohini, and Sassi would not have been celebrated in our religio-cultural myths.