Introduction

Imagine a blood curdling night in the dead of winter and a thunder raging outside but the
great fire burning in the fire place fills a vast hall with warmth and light. The whole outside
world is enveloped in darkness which gives the feeling that there is nothing on the earth except
that supposedly safe and warm hall but sudden flash of lightening in the sky makes the whole
world appear as a concrete reality before our eyes. It disappears as soon as it appears. The man in
the hall closes the window and draws the curtains to detach himself from the stormy reality of
the outside world and to continue enjoying the warmth of the hall.

It is not the story of only the man in the hall but all of us. We spend our whole life in the
familiar world of our five senses but what lies beyond that, we do not want to recognize. The
flash of the lightening hints that there is one more concrete reality in the form of a whole world
inside as well as outside us which is waiting to be explored. But most of us are happy to stay
where we are. We are a bit afraid to face the thunder leaving our comfort zone. Yet there are
always a few who are not content to spend their lives indoors. The flash of the reality outside
their boundaries makes them restless and fills with a desire to cross the boundaries in order to
explore the realm of unknown.

1. Conceptualization of Desire and Freedom

Saadat Hasan Manto (May 11, 1912 - January 18, 1955) and Krishna Sobti (b. Feb.18,
1925) are known for creating such restless characters who are not ready to accept the given, who
refuse to fit in the social framework, who reject the warmth of a closed world. Drawn by the
sudden flash of lightening, they set out to face the concrete reality outside their closed world
which brings them in direct conflict with the social standards of propriety or the social
perspective of human freedom because society is “a system of controls of human behaviour and
of liberties” (MacIVER 5). Social institutions and customs function in each society as the
regulators of human behaviour. They are used as instruments to control desires e.g. the aim of
the institution of marriage is to control human desire for sex. Thus at the social level, desire and
freedom are opposite to each other but this contradiction is not absolute as both desire and
freedom are fluid and dynamic forces which make it difficult to pin down their relationship to the
social level only. These two forces form a different equation at the level of human existence as
man is born free and it depends upon him whether to accept or reject the pre-existing norms.
Jean-Paul Sartre, the most widely known existentialist philosopher, claims that the root of all human desires is his existential freedom. In this way, these two forces become complementary to each other at existential plane. Thus the relation between desire and freedom is fluid because these are in conflict as well as in interdependence at the same time. On the one hand, the fluidity of this relation makes it difficult to pin down its absolute meaning but, on the other, this very elusive quality raises in us a desire to make sense of this dialectics. It is worth mentioning here that the gender difference of the authors is not a matter of concern for this study as its focus is the existential conflicts and not the sexual differences of either the writers or the characters.

2. The Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to study this dialectics of desire and freedom by taking Saadat Hasan Manto’s four short stories “Hatak” (“Slight”), “Sharda”, “Mera Naam Radha Hai” (“My Name is Radha”) and “Mozel”, and Krishna Sobti’s two long stories Mitro Marjani (To Hell With You Mitro) and Surajmukhi Andhere Ke (Sunflowers of the Dark) as a point of departure. In the already existing critical studies these two works of Sobti have been referred to as novels but the term ‘stories’ has been used in this study as these were published in a magazine in the form of series before their publication in the book-form. Mitro Marjani which was published in series form in the magazine Sarika in 1967, was published by Rajkamal Prakashan a year later and Surajmukhi Andhere Ke , too, came in series form in the same magazine in 1972 and was brought out by Rajkamal the same year. (Taneja 111). Krishna Baldev Vaid has included Mitro Marjani in the category of long tales in his article “Contemporary Short Story: Quest for Quality”, written in 1969 i.e. two years after the publication of Mitro Marjani in the book-form. Referring to this work he says, “In this tale Sobti has gone further than any male writer in breaking the taboos against so-called obscenity” (506) (italics mine).

Saugandhi, Sharda, Neelam and Mozel, the protagonists in Manto’s stories, and Mitro and Rati, the protagonists in Sobti’s stories are some such characters who pose threat to the social structure by assertion of their beings. They have been condemned for being sexually open and assertive and iconoclastic in their attitude but, opposite to this generally accepted criticism, the actual thing which is disturbing for most of the people is that these women have not been portrayed as the victims of the circumstances. Generally readers would be reassured if they end up reading a story saying that ‘life is like that. Things are not in our control. Poor girl! She was left with no other option. It was written in her destiny. No one can do anything about it’. But
what appears shocking to such readers and critics is that these women bear responsibility of their actions instead of shifting it to their destiny or society. It is, in fact, the acceptance of the desires and the recognition of the existential freedom by them which appears unacceptable to the fatalist mind-sets.

Both Saadat Hasan Manto and Krishna Sobti are the most popular and at the same time equally controversial writers of their times because of the unhesitant portrayal of different shades of human desires in their stories. Sobti occupies the same place in Hindi literature as Manto enjoys in the world of Urdu short stories. Both are trend-setters in their respective fields as they wrote extraordinary stories about ordinary characters and situations. Sobti’s *Mitro Marjani* was published in 1967 and *Surajmukhi Andhere ke* in 1972. Exact date of publication of Manto’s stories is not known but his two stories “Hatak” and “Mera Naam Radha Hai” were published before independence i.e. during the period 1934-1947 and the other two stories “Sharda” and “Mozel” came after independence i.e. during the period 1948-1955. This span of about forty years during which these six narratives were written was a period of turmoil in the Indian history as decolonization of India in 1947 was accompanied by its geographical partition into two nations - India and Pakistan. Thus trauma of partition which came with the ecstasy of independence shook the subcontinent. Though India was politically free, She still remained shackled economically, socially and in terms of cultural stigmas and prejudices. The real significance lies not so much in the outer events of history as in the inner dilemma of man in the face of such complex situations. This dilemma became an agonizing experience for conscious and sensitive writers like Manto and Sobti. In their stories they draw picture of still mentally slave society in the politically free subcontinent. They lent a flaming tongue to the thoughts of some such conscious beings who are exceptions in the society because of their courage to assert their freedom. The creative excitement, the critical turmoil and the socio-ethical debates stirred by these stories have the same intensity even today as these had about four-five decades back when these were written.

3. **Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto**

“It is possible that Saadat Hasan may die soon but Manto may still live on” (qtd. in Wadhawan 15). Manto’s these words proved true because even after his physical death, he is still alive in the hearts of thousands of people. His contribution in the field of Urdu literature immortalized him. His birth centenary celebrations which started in 2012 are still going on. He
was a popular and, simultaneously, a very controversial writer of his times. He was born at Papraudi near Samrala, in Ludhiana district of Punjab on May 11, 1912, to a barrister practicing in Amritsar and his second wife. He received his early education at Muslim High School in Amritsar, but remained a misfit throughout his school years. After failing twice in matriculation, he cleared it on the third attempt with poor grades. One of the subjects he flunked twice was Urdu, which is not surprising because niceties of the language were not for him. His interest was in common people and colloquial language. In 1931, he finally passed out of school and joined Hindu Sabha College in Amritsar. But his attempt to study there failed as did his subsequent effort to study at the Aligarh Muslim University. Back in Amritsar, he came in contact with Abdul Bari Alig, who introduced him to European literature and coaxed him to translate Hugo, followed by the likes of Chekhov, Gorky and Oscar Wilde. The massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar inspired him to write his first short story “Tamasha”. In 1936 an assignment to edit a weekly Urdu film magazine Mussavar took him to Bombay, a city he loved immensely. He earned name and fame there but after the partition, the condition in the film industry took a serious turn. People began to look at each other with suspicion. It was a period of great turmoil. Fearing that he would be attacked any day, he yielded to the prodding of his wife and migrated from India to Pakistan almost in desperation, on January 08, 1948. As film industry was almost non-existent in Pakistan after the initial years of the partition, so he had to entirely depend upon creative writing for a living. It proved to be the most creative period of his life and he wrote more than one hundred fifty stories only in seven years there. Some of these stories like “Toba Tek Singh” and “Mozel” are considered the best of his literary creations. But he was sore over the fact that he was not accorded his rightful place in Pakistan as a writer. In a postscript to one of his collections he wrote:

You the reader know me as a story writer and the courts know me as an obscene writer. The government sometimes calls me a communist, and sometimes a great literary figure of the country… but I am still troubled, as I have often been in the past, over the questions like: who am I? What is my Status?... I have still not found my rightful place in Pakistan… (qtd. in Issar 184).

He died on 18 January, 1955, a few months before his 43rd birthday. During his two decade long career, he wrote about 250 short stories, at least a hundred essays and journalistic articles, sketches and letters, some film-scripts, and more than a hundred radio plays. But he is
best known for his collection of short stories which reflect his concern for humanity. To write anything about him or his stories is a challenging task because he has never been judged in a balanced way during his life time or even after his death. Transcending the limits of exaggeration, he has always been described either as a ‘messiah’ or a ‘mad-man’ but never as a normal human being.

He has never been a religious preacher or political propagandist. He was a writer of humanity who wrote what he saw around himself without concealing the true state of affairs which made his writings shockingly real. He earned popularity mainly for his partition stories in which he captured the trauma of Partition, the woes of divided families, the agony and torture of abducted woman, the plight of migrants and the tormenting experiences of countless people who were rooted out of their ancestral place in the name of religion. In the legendary short stories like “Thanda Gosht”, “Khol Do”, “Toba Tek Singh”, “Mozel” and “Babu Gopi Nath” exposing the inadequacy of numerous narratives on Independence and Partition, he directed our attention to a new perspective which eluded the grasp of earlier writers. “Toba Tek Singh” which is considered his magnum opus is a satiric account of deportation of mentally challenged people to their respective countries after the partition which conveys the ironical truth that only insane preserved sanity in the times of partition. Another anthology “Siyah Hashiye” is a light veined depiction of the psychology of people during communal riots through a series of small anecdotes.

He had to pay high price for his love of presenting reality in its original form without any sugar coating. He became the victim of legal wrath because of his unhesitant portrayal of the relationship between man and woman. He was tried for obscenity for near about half-a-dozen times, thrice before and thrice after independence. “Kali Shalwar”, one of the best examples of his craft, was the first story for which he had to face trial on the charges of obscenity. “Bu” was also the one among the stories for which he was hauled up before law. Once in his defense he said:

There is nothing obscene or vulgar between man and woman in a relationship. Nor is it vulgar to talk about this relationship. But when this relationship is depicted in the form of 84 asanas (sex poses) namely, erotic union, then it will not only degenerate into lascivious actions but also into an abominable form of base indulgence, having unhealthy overtones. (qtd. in Wadhawan 96)
In spite of being prosecuted and convicted several times, he did not change his style of writing. He said, “If you are not conversant with the time through which we are passing then do read my stories. If you cannot tolerate these stories it means this world is intolerable. The ills which I have, are the ills of this system” (Dastawez 4: 27) (Trans. Self). His commitment to truth was so passionate that in spite of harsh criticism of his bold writings, he never compromised on his art. Though he is widely read but he is not a name to be mentioned in the home before the females because of his obsession with the tales of pimps, prostitutes and man-woman relationships outside marriage. His so-called sex-oriented expressions hampered a deserving comprehension and appreciation of these works as both his opponents and supporters kept their focus only on proving and disproving the charges of obscenity and in this controversy a fair share of critical attention turned to his partition stories.

But in this controversy one thing was always ignored that just like partition stories, in these stories too, which are often condemned as ‘sex-oriented’ or ‘pornographic’, he captures a human reality which is much above the realities of body only. In his so-called obscene stories he brings to light the suppressed side of human existence which has always deliberately been left untouched by the writers in the past because of the fear of social disgrace. Through his unique perception he offers multiple versions of truth by opening the various layers of mystery woven around human existence and contributes to a richer understanding of human life. Out of the four selected stories, three belong to this category and only one i.e. “Mozel” is categorized as a partition story. But the focus of this study is not the trauma of partition but the mysteries of existence which he tries to unfold in the all of his stories. About his death, Baqar Mehdi writes that he was consumed by the passion to know the secrets of the social and physical relationships of the underworld - the daily lives of poor prostitutes, pimps and the so-called anti-social people (23). He was questioned by the protectors of public morals many times but he came out unscathed in the long run. Though he had to face severe criticism during his life time and he died in utter penury, his publishers and editors minted money by selling his books after his death and it was actually his art which provided initial maturity to Urdu short story.

4. Life and Works of Krishna Sobti

Krishna Sobti, popularly known as “the grand old dame”, is one of the most renowned authors in Hindi fiction in the present times. She was born on 18 February, 1925 in Gujrat, now in West Punjab, Pakistan. She had an early education in Delhi, Simla and Lahore but partition
put an end to her attempts at formal education. She spent her holidays as a child in the havelis of Gujrat where her father enjoyed the confidence of royalty. However her aristocratic family lost its power and position because of partition and after that she had to take the post of governess to Tej Singh, the then Maharaj of Sirohi at Mt. Abu. After working there for two years, she came to Delhi and taught in a number of educational institutions. Finally she became an Editor, Adult Literacy, Delhi Administration. She gave up her job in 1980 to be able to devote herself to full-time writing. She has several exquisitely crafted and compelling literary works to her credit which include Daar se Bichhudi (1958), Mitro Marjani (1967), Yaron Ke Yaar, Teen Pahar (1968) Surajmukhi Andhere Ke (1972), Hum Hushmat (1977), Zindginaama (1979), Badalon Ke Ghere (1980), Sobti Ek Sohbat (1989), Ai Ladki (1991), Dilo Danish (1993) and Samay Sargam (2000). In English translation, Ai Ladki! has been renamed as Listen Girl! (2002); Dilo-Danish as The Heart Has Its Reasons (2005); Daar Se Bichhudi as Memory’s Daughter (2007); Mitro Marjani as To Hell With You Mitro (2007) and Surajmukhi Andhere Ke as Sunflowers of the Dark (2008).

Unlike Manto, Krishna Sobti who baffled both modern feminists and blind traditionalists with her iconoclastic writings is lucky enough to earn wide acclaim during her lifetime. She is best known for Mitro Marajani which explores the complexities of female sexuality. Her contribution to Indian literature transcends cultural boundaries. A writer par excellence, her innovative use of language, technique and refreshing delineation of strong women characters have opened up new vistas in Hindi literature, challenging the normative. One of the most creative and engaging aspects of her writing is her vibrant yet minimalist use of language. With every work, she breaks new ground with language, theme and structure. Her each work evidences a distinctive use of Hindi, steeped in the dialect and flavours of the region that the story is set in. Her works have been translated into many languages like Swedish, English, Urdu, and Russian. Her nuanced, layered writings cover issues spanning Partition, upheaval and turmoil in Indian society, man-woman relationships, feudalism and dissolution of human values. Sobti is the first Hindi woman writer to receive the Sahitya Akademi Award for her magnum opus Zindaginama in 1980. She is also the recipient of the first Katha Chudamani Award for Lifetime Literary Achievement, conferred on her in 1999. Other notable awards to her credit include the Shiromani Award in 1981, the Hindi Academy Award in 1982 and Maithili Sharan Gupt Samman 1996-97 besides a number of Fellowships including the exclusive Punjabi
University Fellowship and the Sahitya Akademi Fellowship. She is essentially a natural and spontaneous writer without any artifice or pretentions. About her selection of the themes, she said in an interview:

During my complex creative process I keep on listening to and picking the slightest signals travelling from inner to outer as well as outer to inner realms of my being. To identify inner conflicts and self-contradictions you have to measure the basic geography and history of the situations. You cannot lend them life by a mere touch of whimsical imagination. To recreate a point of time imagination alone is not enough, nor would ideological tinge suffice . . . many fluctuations come across in highly complex situations and happenings. At the bottom of these lies much that does not meet the eye. You have to delve deeper and deeper like a diver to get at what is called ‘truth’. (“Author’s Integrity is Supreme” 68)

She says that there is no difference between the writer and the reader. There is nothing special in the writer which differentiates him from the reader. She is against the writer’s subjectivity in interpreting a situation. She says, “A writer is neither allured by the heaven nor scared by the hell to write something, his job is to keep on carving the truth with the help of his pen by studying life and the people objectively” (“Mai, Mera Samay aur Mera Sansar-Rachna” 398-399) (Trans. Self). She talks about the freedom which a writer enjoys in his creation and every human being enjoys in his life. She says that human beings are both masters and slaves of themselves. They are free to interpret their experiences and understand this world. When they enjoy freedom as individuals while making their choices, they simultaneously set their boundaries.

Both Manto and Sobti write as free individuals for free individuals about freedom. They have deep faith in the essential humanity of man who is invariably confronted with perennial problems. The only way to come out of these problems is to make choice. He is left with no choice but to make choice. As Manto says, “When he chooses to love a woman, the parable of Heer-Ranjha is made. If he chooses to love bread, the philosophy of Epicurus takes birth. He becomes Sikander, Chengiz or Taimur when he chooses to love power. And if he chooses to love God, he is transformed into a Buddha” (“Kasauti” 61) (Trans. Self).
5. Brief Outline of the Selected Narratives

*Mitro Marjani* is the story of a daughter-in-law in a lower middle-class family who is bluntly open in the expression of her physical needs as a woman and in the mockery of her husband’s inability to satisfy them. When she is sent to her mother’s house, she finds ample opportunity for erotic union. But in the end she chooses to go to her husband instead of indulging in bodily pleasure. This work has been analyzed by different critics from the perspectives of the desires of female body and Mitro’s going back to her husband has been termed as victory of society over individual or of male over female. That is why the end of the story has been criticized by many feminists.

The picture of psychic isolation and sexual clamming up of a young girl Ratti who is victim of rape in her childhood has been drawn by Sobti in *Surajmukhi Andhere Ke*. Ratti comes into the contact of many males in her life. She comes very close to some of them but withdraws at the crucial moment. An undefinable inability to give herself grips her and she breaks the relation. But she gives herself passionately to Diwakar because she feels that his love is not merely sex-hunger but a deep, intense, encompassing yearning for her being.

Manto’s “Hatak” is a story about the insult of a prostitute Saugandhi by her client, a *seth*. This insult triggers an avalanche of thoughts and emotions within her. It shatters the calm of her life so much that she begins to question her very existence. She realizes that Madho, the object of her desire whom she treats like her husband has, in fact, reduced her to a non-existent being. Here Madho epitomizes the *motorwala seth* who insulted her. In order to take revenge she throws him out of her *kholi*.

In “Sharda” also the eponymous heroine is a prostitute. Her husband leaves her a few months after her marriage. Now she has a one year old daughter. She has to come to Bombay from Jaipur to save her sister Shakuntla from the trap of a pimp, Kareem. She saves her but herself falls into the trap. In spite of Kareem’s best efforts, she does not open up with any client. But Nazeer, a client, becomes successful in seducing her by showing love to her daughter. She satisfies Nazeer physically but she is very reticent. She spends full day with him without speaking even a single word most of the times. She never talks to him about money. Instead of demanding from him; she gives him money, when he is in need, whatever she had earned and goes back to Jaipur with her sister. But she remains in contact with him through letters and shows eagerness to meet him. She comes to meet him as soon as she comes to know that his wife
has gone to Lahore. Though Nazeer’s body is very happy to meet hers, he does not like her changed attitude. She keeps on talking about her love for him and takes care of him just like his wife without exercising any right over him. All this irritates him too much. When she feels that he is fed up with her, she leaves his house without telling him and without taking the money from him.

“Mera Naam Radha Hai” is a story about two actors working together in a film. Raj Kishore, the hero of the film, who is an archetype of a complete man whom every girl sees in her dreams, is known for his moral uprightness. He addresses his co-artists and every other girl as ‘sister’. Neelam alias Radha, a daughter of a prostitute from Banaras, is playing the role of a vamp. But she is not mean in her ways as a vamp is supposed to be. Rather her sincerity makes her unsuitable for this role. She has the skill to read other’s mind. She recognizes an egotist, a sadist and a pretender hidden behind the so-called ascetic Raj Kishore and forbids him from calling her ‘sister’. He takes it as an insult. Once she is suffering from malaria, he comes to her house with his wife on the pretext of enquiring about her health. Out of revenge he forces her to bind a rakhi on his wrist but before it he asks his wife to apply some make-up on Neelam’s face. Following his instruction she daubs her face with make-up. He gives her shagun and goes away but leaves his bag there. Neelam sees through his intentions. She knows that he would come again to take the bag when she would be alone. And it happens after three days. But instead of taking the bag, he stays there and keeps on seeing Neelam smearing her face with make-up for one hour. After doing it she bolts the door and attacks him like a wild cat. Perhaps he is also waiting for this moment. He counter-attacks her with full vigour and pulls out the locks of her hair from roots. He exhausts all his power in this wrestling but she overpowers him in spite of her physical weakness. She fiercely wounds his body with her wild bites and sharp nails. She tears away his clothes. At last he is lying prostrate below her and she is standing straight over him. When she sees his body in full nakedness of which he was proud, she feels disgusted, quickly opens the door and goes away.

“Mozel” is one of the very popular stories of Manto. Trilochan Singh, a young sikh, falls in love with Mozel, a Jew girl who is his neighbour in Adwani Chambers. But their thinking and life style are completely opposite to each other. Mozel wears only a loose long cloak without any inner clothes. She feels suffocated in more than one cloth. She has a beautiful and stout body. She is not ashamed of it and does not feel any need to hide it unnecessarily like other girls. She
sometimes stands or sits in a manner considered obscene for girls. Completely opposite to her is Trilochan. He is a traditional sikh whose religious sentiments are attached to his beard and hair. Mozel always makes fun of his long hair and beard which hurts him. He does not like her ways and sometimes feels embarrassed with her behaviour but even then he loves her. In spite of enjoying physical intimacy with him to some extent, she does not allow him to cross his limits. When he expresses his wish to marry her, she lays condition that she will marry him if he shears his hair and beard, he feels offended but accepts it for her sake. On the day of marriage she goes away to live with some other person leaving Trilochan behind waiting for her on the fixed spot.

Trilochan comes out of shock after some days and decides to marry a simple village girl, Kripal Kaur. But in Hindu-Muslim riots, Muslims seize control of the area in which she is living. Trilochan Singh loves her but he does not have courage to take her out from that area. At this crucial moment Mozel appears from nowhere and takes quick decision to help him. She asks him not to wear turban but he is not ready to go bare headed in front of his fiancé who takes him to be a true sikh. Mozel saves his beloved by sacrificing her own life and in order to save her she has to take off the only cloak which she was wearing. In the end she throws away Trilochan’s turban when he tries to cover her with it and dies without even a single cloth on her body.

6. Review of the Relevant Literature

Both Manto and Sobti are known for their passion for presenting reality in its naked form without any sugar coating. Manto has captured the stark reality of partition and the hidden truth of man-woman relationships with the same spirit. But unluckily these two categories were not judged with similar standards as he was eulogized for his partition stories but condemned for his stories about fallen women. His partition stories have always been a subject of discussion. Most of the critical studies available are based on his partition stories but as the focus of this research is not partition so a deliberate attempt has been made to discuss only the most relevant and the most recent critical literature.

The most recent critical study of Saadat Hasan Manto's life and his works is The Pity of Partition: Manto’s Life, Times, and Work Across The India-Pakistan Divide (pub. 2013) by Ayesha Jalal. She is a noted historian from Pakistan and the director of the Center for South Asian and Indian Ocean Studies at Tufts University, Massachusetts. In this book she explores Manto's life and times, especially around Partition and for it she has taken the microcosm of Manto’s life and his works and connected them to the microcosm of Partition. Her area of
interest is partition and this book is her return to Partition in a different theme. In this, she used Manto’s life and his witnessing of Partition, as well as his broader engagement with the history of the time through his writings, to understand Partition. Her study of Manto’s life is based on the information available in family archives and her research into the rich body of literary work that the writer left behind. But it is leavened by her intimate understanding of Manto, possible perhaps because she is his close relative. Manto was the maternal uncle of her father and also married to the elder sister of her mother. This gives her a ringside view of his life as seen by many of his relatives including Safia, his wife. Not surprisingly, some of the finest pictures of Manto, his wife and of his friends embellish this book. This book is partly about Manto, the human being, and Manto, the individual, as related to the society he grew up in and then subsequently engaged with in different cities. It is about his life and times and his work. Jalal claims that his portrayal of the times of which he was a witness, his fictional narratives helps the historian in a way an official archive cannot. He was a key witness to the post-colonial movement and he throws light in ways that journalistic and official accounts would not. Though it is an excellent study but more than a work of literary criticism, it’s a work of history that shows how a new kind of historical narrative can be crafted that utilizes the life and works of a literary figure that throws light on a major historical disjunction.

In Rilke, Kafka, Manto: The Semiotics of Love, Life and Death, which came in 2001, Rosy Singh has presented the view that how these different writers have transcended the empirical realities to arrive at the universal human truths. She says that these writers delve deep into the extremely complex nature of human beings and instead of proposing some preconceived formula to resolve their complexities, they reflect on the intricacies of their existential predicament. In this book she analyses ‘Human dignity in Manto’s writings’ by discussing in detail his two short stories “Hatak” and “Thanda Gosht”. She claims that Manto’s stories do not deal with the economic condition of the marginals but with the existentially blocked situation which are finally resolved by their desire for self-assertion. Manto’s characters have mysterious energy to face and transgress existential upheavals. She describes “Hatak” as “a saga of an innocent mind full of desires. The violence and cruelty of life crush the innocence. There are storms and turbulations but ultimately life goes on. Human dignity triumphs in the end” (179).

Manto Naama: The Life of Saadat Hasan manto, published in 1998, is a great contribution by Jagadish Chander Wadhawan. It is mainly a biographical study which provides a great deal of
information about his life, personality, trials, philosophy and his relation with the real world as an artist but it does not discuss any of his writings in detail. *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, published in 1997, is a collection of papers presented at a seminar held at IIAS, Shimla in 1996. It contains different articles ranging from his life to the theme and the style of his writings. On the one hand, Manto has been defended against the charges of obscenity and, on the other, accused of vagueness of details and overdose of melodrama in some of his stories. Analyzing “Mozel”, Keki N. Daruwala says that in it Manto’s intentions are transparent as in it he “sets out to prove that this scantily clad Jewess, who is free with her love, is bolder and better person than the rest of the character put together” (61). Describing “Hatak” as an “absolute shocker” he says, “The end is nihilistic as Saugandhi ends up in utter moral despair” (67). His reading of these two stories appears partial and limited in scope. Manto’s ideology, aesthetics and architectonics has been discussed by Harish Narang in order to answer the question whether he is obscene or great story writer. He agrees with Krishan Chander who calls Manto ‘the Lord Shiva of Urdu Literature’. Narang says that Manto’s choice of characters from the periphery of society had the definite objective of subverting the majority of discourse (69-89). Some articles contain the detailed analysis of his popular stories like “Babu Gopinath”, “Mummy” and “Mahmuda”, “In This Maelstrom”, “1919 Ke Ek Baat”. His stories have been described as the result of his conviction to reality and confidence in humanity. Devender Issar calls his stories as the interplay between good and evil, sex and violence, and between forces of Eros and Thanatos. He says that sex in his stories is one of the basic and instinctual aspects of human existence. Besides this many other issues related to his life and works have been discussed in this volume. Though “Mozel” and “Hatak” have been touched upon in some articles but these have been discussed mainly from the perspective of social oppression.

The preponderant critical view of Manto among literary critics is that he was a one-theme author dealing almost exclusively with prostitutes and that many such stories are obscene. But Leslie A. Flemming refutes these charges in her book *Another Lonely Voice: The Urdu Short Stories of Saadat Manto* published in 1979. She claims that these conclusions are not only unwarranted but entirely false. The reading of the first two chapters entitled “Kind-Hearted Terrorist” and “The Literary Context”, respectively, presents the view that Manto himself was a victim of the same sort of loneliness in his artistic life as were the characters in his stories. Thus because of being alone in the literary surroundings, Flemming calls him, “another lonely voice.”
The facts of Manto's life are in and of themselves the very stuff from which short stories with tragic and unhappy endings are made. The core of this study is found in Chapters three, four, and five. Chapter three is a detailed analysis of the stories written in pre-Independence India from 1935 to 1947; Chapter four deals in depth with stories written in Pakistan between 1948 and 1955; and Chapter five analyzes many of the formal elements of Manto's stories. Flemming skillfully delineates the earliest European influences on Manto, notably, the works of Hugo, of whom he was particularly fond, Gorky, Chekhov, Gogol Dostoyevsky, Wilde and Maupassant. From these writers Manto adopted two basic aspects in his writing: (1) an overwhelming preference for sympathetically portraying characters oppressed by social institutions and (2) the well-structured plot. In an attempt to synthesize the large number of stories even further, Flemming has devised three broad thematic categories into which nearly all of Manto's stories fall: (1) political stories, which subdivides into a) stories with characters who are political activists or revolutionaries, and b) stories whose background involve political events or issues; (2) sympathetic stories which portray with considerable detail and sympathy the oppression of a character at the bottom of the social scale; and (3) romantic stories. She describes Manto's stories such as "Hatak" (The Insult) and "Mozel" as studies in the loneliness and despair not only of prostitutes, but of oppressed women everywhere. She further suggests that given the recurring theme of the exploited prostitute in these stories Manto felt that the prostitute and her situation were merely symbolic of the subjugated and dependent role which Indian society has forced on women. She states that these stories must be viewed beyond their surface theme and treated as universal statements regarding any woman who is oppressed by any society. But Flemming's this interpretation fails to vindicate its position on the basis of details in these narratives. Nowhere does the narrative of "Mozel" gives any indication that Mozel is a prostitute or a victim of social oppression. Rather from the beginning till the end she is an epitome of individual assertion. The focus in "Hatak" too is not the female oppression but a universal desire for self-dignity. Undoubtedly, the narrative describes Saugandhi’s humiliation at the hands of her clients but its preoccupation is with the way in which she avenges this humiliation.

Besides some of these full-length studies, much of the critical analysis of his works is available in the form of articles published in different journals. Only some of these articles, which do not focus on the partition particularly, have been discussed here. In the article "Manto as a Modernist", Linda Wentink says that in a few stories written towards the end of his life,
however, he moved away from the realistic and straightforward narrative of the progressives and began to experiment with some new techniques like internal monologue, allegory, symbolism, and surrealism, which were to be widely used in the modernist movement a few years after his death. Wentik describes “Farishtah” (The Angel) and “Phundne” (Tassels) as his most innovative stories in this regard. Both stories combine the social concerns of the progressives with the experiments in technique and concern with the inner life of the characters.

In “Other Reflections: The Minor Writings of Saadat Hasan Manto” Leslie A. Flemming tries to answer the question ‘how “minor” are his minor writings?’ Both in Pakistan and India, Manto is recognized as an influential voice in the development of modern Urdu fiction and, through his short stories, as the source of a considerable legacy to the succeeding generation of short-story writers. However, he also wrote several collections of radio plays, topical essays, and personal reminiscences. Although these were quite popular during his lifetime, and many of them address the same issues as his short stories, they have been largely ignored by literary critics and historians. Flemming claims that these non-fiction writings do contribute to our understanding of Manto’s achievements as a writer and lead us to consider anew the question of the relationship between major and minor writings. So she attempts an in-depth analysis of his minor writings, mainly radio plays and essays, providing both a description of their contents and an evaluation of their place in his corpus as a whole.

A comparative analysis of the stories of Manto and Gorki has been presented in “Humanity at Bay: The Conflict Between Men and The World in The Stories of Gorkii and Manto” by Frederick I. Kaplan and Surjit Singh Dulai. The major similarity in the worlds created by Manto and Gorkii is the existence of a strong conflict between men and their circumstances. The circumstances are such that they tend to destroy men or their humanity. Both writers emphasize the need for men to assert themselves and prevail over their circumstances. But in doing so, they want their characters to be also concerned with the well-being of those who are too weak to cope with the world in the same manner as they can. In other words, each author indicates that the thoughts and feelings which may lead men to deal successfully with their environment should not have their source entirely in self-interest. These thoughts and feelings and the action to which they give rise should be tempered with responsibility to others. The combination of self-assertion and altruism becomes in both writers the very definition of
humanity. During the comparison Manto’s short stories like “New Year”, “Cold Flesh”, “Kali Shalwar” and “A Hundred Watt Bulb” have been analyzed.

In an article published in *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, comparing the portrayal of common whore in the works of Manto and a famous nineteenth century Urdu writer Mirza Muhammad Hadi Rusva, Daniela Bredi says that Manto does not preach morality but it does not mean that his stories have no ethical content. Transcending the cultural specificity, his stories reach universality which is the distinctive sign of art (109-127).

As Manto’s birth centenary was observed last year i.e. in 2012, the newspapers were full of tributes for him but because of the limitation of time and space only some of these articles have been mentioned here. Writing on May 11, 2012 i.e. his hundredth birthday, in her article entitled “Curator of a Hollowed Conscience” Ayesha Jalal suggests “If there is a birthday present Pakistanis and Indians can jointly give Manto, it is to admit the reality of the problems he spelt out in his writings on partition” (9). Asif Noorani pays tribute to him by assigning his works a title of “Timeless Appeal”. He says that though Manto’s works were a mirror to his times, they continue to be relevant in ours as well. In the article “A Moment for Manto” drawing attention towards the relevance of Manto’s writing in the present political scenario, Rafia Zakaria says, “His rebellion was directed at the demarcations that remain the curse of India-Pakistan relations even to this day” (9). But contrary to the popular view that Manto’s centenary has been observed in both India and Pakistan with great enthusiasm, in her article “Owned by the Disowned”, Vandana Shukla opines that what can be said of Tagore’s 150th birthday celebrations, can’t be said of Manto. “Reasons are obvious. Manto never pleased the civil society, nor the state, for their power constructs. Instead, he offered a de-powering experience of the two through his narratives” (9).

Both Indian and Pakistani theatre paid tribute to him by adapting his stories into plays. The stage productions of his stories which started last year are going on this year as well. “Kaun Hai Yeh Gustakh” by Ajoka Theatre and “Mantaroma” by NAPA Repertory Theatre, Lahore (Tankha 1), and in India “Dafa 292”, “Khol Do” and “Mozel” by NSD (Vincent) (Tankha 10), “Partition” by Asmita Theatre (Singh, Kalyani), and “Ek Kutte ki Kahani” by Wings Cultural Society (Bajeli 3) are some of the very popular stage production based on Manto’s life and works. The most recent of all these celebration is the event organized by Sahitya Parishat, Bangalore on June 09, 2013 to commemorate his birth centenary (“Fond reading . . .” 4).
event included performances, talks and the release of the Kannada translation of his book *Letters to Uncle Sam*. M.S. Sathyu, the famous film director emphasizing the relevance of Manto’s stories in contemporary times said, “He had an eye for suffering and pathos, which is reflected in each of his writings. And his writings, like most literature, knew no boundaries” (4).

Like Manto, Krishna Sobti too has earned wide critical acclaim. Though many research articles on her writings are available but the number and range of these articles is very limited in comparison to the wide range of her work. Many articles and literary reviews of her works have been published in different books, journals, and newspapers. In her article “Unflinching Reality”, reviewing *Sunflowers of the Dark* Anjana Rajan describes Sobti as “Ahead of Times”. She says, “In a world still largely male-oriented, those who write of a woman’s search for complete fulfillment are in danger of becoming cynics, or aggressive, or just plain clinical. But in Sobti’s *Sunflowers*..., one finds the unflinching presentation of reality suffused with compassion, and devoid of judgmental hostility”. She says that Sobti weaves the themes of searing relevance to society into compelling tales. In another articles, she describes Sobti’s stories *To Hell With You Mitro* and *Memory’s Daughter* as the “Tales of determined women.” She describes Mitro as a strong and courageous woman who has audacity not only to taunt a closed society but has also “ability to change her attitude when she feels it necessary.” Reviewing Sobti’s *The Heart has its Reasons* in her article “Uniquely Sobti” Aditi De says, “Recreating the waves of love between Mehak Bano and Kripanarayan, and its impact on the home shores through his wife Kutumb, the writer summons up the troubled waters beneath a seething calm.” She says that the twists and turns in their fates, the social impact of their desires, the creation of outcasts by duty-bound familial hierarchy, the role of the radical individual within the societal framework, the impact of passion within the confines of an arranged marriage defined by social benefit are among the myriad themes lyrically explored by Sobti. Anup Beniwal analysis the role played by ‘word’ and ‘dialogue’ in Sobti’s writings in his review of Sobti’s *Shabdon Ke Aalok Mein*, and in *Sobti Vaid Samvad* respectively. In another article titled “Politics of Reading Krishna Sobti”, he discusses the different ways to understand her multi-layered works. Subhash Chandra in his article “It’s My Body, My Desire” published in *Indian Women Novelist* says that through her novel *Blossoms in Darkness* Sobti conveys the idea that protest is possible in the patriarchal society and woman’s body is a sanctified entity and whether she gets marginalized entirely depends upon her (115-122). While analyzing Sobti’s life and works in his article “Krishna Sobti: The Sound of
Silence”, G. R. Taneja says that she dugs deep into the wells of life and that had forever gone unnoticed. He analyzes *Mitro Marjani* as a legitimate craving of the body for the body. *Surajmukhi Andhere Ke* is seen by him as the story of a woman scarred by childhood rape who learns to deal with the demons of her mind with the passage of time. Usha Saksena Nilsson presents a review of *The Sunflowers in the Dark* in “A Woman’s Experience: Three Novels of Hindi”. She calls it “the first detailed study in Hindi of a woman scarred for life by circumstances beyond her control, victimized by a man’s lust” (16). In another review of the same novel, Ann Lowry Weir says that Ratti’s “sexual behaviour is opposite of what people imagine – rather than being a slut, she is a virgin until towards the end of the novel” (210).

“Narrating Life: Krishna Sobti’s *Zindginaama*” is the discussion of her *Zindginaama* by Jasbir Jain.

Besides these articles and reviews, many research works have been conducted on her works in different universities also. *Semi’otics in Bi’lingualism* is a pioneering endeavour of the research conducted by R.S.Gupta in his partial fulfillment of the requirement for awarding the Degree of Master of Philosophy in the teaching of English from the Department of English and Modern European Languages, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. It is a stylistic study of the novel, *Ai Larki* in comparison with its English translation *O Girl!* with a view to discover a new approach in the Linguistics of Hindi and English language. In Mohanlal Sukhadia University at Udaipur (Rajasthan, India) a research was conducted on “Krishna Sobti ka Katha Sahtiya Samvedana aur Shilpa” by Anupma Sisodia. Another research has been conducted in JNU by Kumool Abbi on the discourse in *Zindginaama*. In GNDU, Amritsar also research work has been conducted on the topic “Krishna Sobti Ka Katha-Sahitya mein Shilpa Vidhan” by Rama Sharma. The focus of this study is the architectonics of Sobti’s narratives. “Thematic Matrices in Krishna Sobti: A Study of Her Major Works in Translation” a study conducted by A. Verma is available on *shodhganga inflibnet*. It analyzes Sobti’s novels primarily in the matrix of power structure. Each novel depicts characters surrounded by the power structures in their disparate forms. Sometimes characters resist the oppression and sometimes they succumb to the forces operating on them. Ratti of *Sunflowers of the Dark*, and Mitro of *To Hell With You Mitro* are the characters who in their own individual manner resist the oppressive forces in a potent manner and thus assert themselves. The theatre adaptation of the *Mitro Marjani* was staged on June 13
and 14, 2013 by The Ank Theatre Group as its 80th production. This play was also premiered at the NCPA festival last month (Naik).

He detailed review of the already existing literature on the selected topic can be summed up as follows. *Mitro Marjani* has been analyzed as the unhesitant expression of sexuality by a middle-class woman. *Surajmukhi Andhere Ke* earned critical acclaim as a story of protest against society by a victim of childhood rape. “Mozel” has been interpreted as a partition story from the perspective of religion. Only one of these i.e. “Hatak” has been studied as a story of existentialist assertion but it does not take into account the issue of individual desire and social boundaries. And it seems strange that “Sharda” and “Mera Naam Radha Hai”, his masterly creations which deal with as important issues as his other so-called controversial stories, escaped the attention of critics.

7. The Hypothesis of the Proposed Research Problem

The most important and common issue in all these narratives is not the unhesitant portrayal of sexual desires but the desire for existential assertion. Women protagonists in the selected works of Manto and Sobti are the conscious beings who assert themselves in situations which appear as obstacles in the way of their free project. The major difference in the narratives of the two writers is that their protagonists represent the two opposite sections of society. Sobti’s protagonists belong to the mainstream society whereas Manto’s protagonists are the outsiders in the social system. Either society rejects them because of the transgression of social norms or they reject society because of its oppressive tendencies. Thus, their protagonists represent the two sections of women i.e. ideal and fallen respectively. The base of this absolute demarcation between ideal and fallen, and center and margins is the social conceptualization of desire and freedom. Society demarcates and defines desires as acceptable like desire to attain *moksha* and as unacceptable like desire for physical and material pleasures. Those who accept and want to fulfill these unacceptable desires are regarded as ‘fallen’ from the higher standards of life and relegated to the position of the marginal. Those who follow the social code of conduct are regarded as ideal and they occupy the central positions in society. But the dialectical study of desire and freedom in the selected narratives reveals that this demarcation between center and margin is not fixed. Rather it is in a state of flux. It shows that, on the one hand, center and margins are opposed to each other and, on the other, they are interconnected, interpenetrating, and interdependent as they not only co-exist in society but also transform into each other. The change
in the social structure is caused by the internal contradictions, that is, the contradiction between
the social and existential perspective of the relationship of desire and freedom. Here lies the
major similarity between the worlds created by Manto and Sobti. In their narratives the social
perspective of desire and freedom is challenged by the desiring women protagonists who want
exist as free beings. The hypothesis that the conflict between existential perspective and the
social conceptualization of this dialectics leads to the transformation of both individual and
society is a point of departure for this research.

8. Chapter Scheme

The thesis has been divided into the following four chapters.

Chapter one - Theorising Desire and Freedom
Chapter two - Dialectics of Desire and Freedom in Manto’s Narratives
Chapter three - Dialectics of Desire and Freedom in Sobti’s Narratives
Chapter four - Cultural and Historical Paradigm in Manto’s and Sobti’s Narratives:
A Comparative Study

The first chapter traces the concept of desire and freedom as perceived in different
systems of thoughts like religion, philosophy, psychology and, particularly, in Sartrean
Existentialism. It provides us with a theoretical background necessary to comprehend the
dialectics in the selected narratives. The second and the third chapters focus on the analysis of
the dialectics of desire and freedom embedded in Manto’s and Sobti’s narratives, respectively,
using Sartrean insights. In the last chapter, a comparative study of the worlds created by the two
writers has been attempted in the backdrop of the cultural and historical dimension. In this
chapter an attempt has been made to trace the history of the institution of marriage and
prostitution, the religious myths about mother goddess and Radha-Krishna relationship, and the
concept of love and marriage in the folk-legends of Punjab in order to understand the creation
and displacement of the social boundaries.

In the thesis there are a number of references from the Vedic tradition of thought to bring
to the fore the cultural traditions related with the social institutions like marriage and position of
woman in Indian society. In these references the term ‘Hindu’ has been used. But the semantics
of various kinship relationships particularly husband/wife or man/woman relationships is not
clearly differentiating so far as the division of Indian society, in different religious streams, is
concerned. Wherever required the cultural and historical paradigm has been sought to be
delineated by putting in references from various other sources like those of Buddhism, Jainism and even folk-legends. The aim is not to make the discussion religion-centric but to bring out the overarching cultural and historical paradigm which still governs the human relations in the Indian subcontinent.

This study is based upon the original Hindi editions of Sobti’s narratives and the original Urdu text of Manto’s Narratives brought out in Devnagri script by Rajkamal Publications. For understanding Urdu words I have depended only upon the meaning of these words in Hindi given at the end of each story. The translations of all the quotations from these editions are mine. The literal translation has been attempted with the aim to keep the appeal of the original intact. In order to avoid any confusion over the translation of the titles, the original Hindi and Urdu titles have been used in this work.