

AN EXPLORATION OF SADAT HASSAN MANTO'S SELECTED SHORT STORIES  
FROM EXISTENTIALIST FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

**Zubaida Anwar Mandokhail**

M. Phil student at English Literature, University of Balochistan

Email: [zubaidaanwar222@gmail.com](mailto:zubaidaanwar222@gmail.com)

**Dr. Saima Mnazoor**

The University of Balochistan, Quetta main Campus

**Abstract**

*This study examines women's suffering in Sadat Hassan Manto's work, focusing on the patriarchal society in his stories set during the 1947 India partition. The society depicted in his stories is deeply patriarchal, where men are portrayed as superior to women. The author vividly illustrates male dominance in his narratives, representing how they constructed women's image and identity, leading to their sexual exploitation and abuse due to the socially constructed conception of them. In Manto's narratives, the world is predominantly masculine, with leading male characters. Echoing Simone De Beauvoir's views on male superiority, men are portrayed as the citizens and the natives of the world while women are marginalized as the 'others,' constantly under male scrutiny. This is qualitative research. It is descriptive, analytical, and interpretative. The qualitative Content Analysis Technique' is applied to analyze the short stories of Manto while applying Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist feminist theory (1949). The analysis focuses on women's empowerment in Manto's short stories through Beauvoir's existentialist feminism, revealing how female characters transcend societal constraints to assert their existence. The narratives illustrate women's resilience and ability to carve out their place in society, challenging hierarchical structures that perpetuate male dominance and oppression (Yusuf and Iskandar, 2020).*

**Keywords:** Feminism, Sadat Hassan Manto, short stories, The Second Sex, Existentialist Feminism, Simon de Beauvoir

**Introduction**

Boundaries are said to cause anxiety, and individuals suffer as a result of anxiety. Colossal powers who believe they are superior to the oppressed are to blame for the oppression that causes suffering for people. History bears evidence to the historical suppressions of women who have been oppressed by powerful males. Global conversations on gender and identity revolve around limitations placed on females, whether they be mental or biological. Gender stereotypes persisted in the portrayal of men because they relied solely on the same methodology. As Collins and Rothe stated (2017) "Nowhere is this perhaps more evidenced than through the consumption of patriarchy and gendered inequalities, where gender constructions that privilege men over women are prioritized over equality" (pp. 161- 174). It is believed that sexual inequality persisted in the form of gender inequality, which distinguished the fundamental notion of man and woman. As a result, the twenty-first century is thought to be flexible in its portrayal of gender and identity. Gender, which was meant to be in man's culture, now appears to be done equally when it is performed by the self or the inner regulator. Whereas identity, which was termed after men's designations, today appears neutral since a change in women's conduct appears to be developing.

**Beauvoir's Feminism**

All of the theories that suggest women experience injustice due to their sexual orientation promote feminism, which is the philosophy of women's liberation. Because women were discriminated against in society and were often seen as the second sex, this movement was born. It refers to opposing the social caste system and the notion of static myth in society rather than the radical revolt movement of women against males. According to Beauvoir, men's chauvinistic

attitudes throughout history have contributed to the status of women as the “Other” of men. Women have never been able to get a proper human dignity as free and independent beings alongside men because men have always been intimidating in terms of power. Ever since her teenage years, when her strong sense of individualism led her to believe that every person was in charge of securing their own, women have believed that if they had accepted a lower status in life than men, they would have been nothing more than parasites, diminishing their own humanity. Claiming to be one of these women, Beauvoir was lucid enough to see that her problems were the same because she "happened to be a woman," and that if she tried to address the issue "qua individual" rather than "qua woman," she would be in control of the situation. It is for this reason that she deviates from the nominalist abstractness of the meaning of womanhood to the existentialist definition of the human being, which defines her as a "concrete" existent who is always a unique subject. According to Beauvoir (1949), the life of a woman is a human existence whose sociohistorical development in the world must be understood holistically (instead of with reference to one particular dimension like biological, psychoanalytical, economical, etc.). Consequently, she concludes that existentialism provides the best framework for this analysis since it allows one to transcend life's one-dimensionality and arrive at the context of humanity as a whole, which can be understood in terms of its "ontological substructure," which is defined by human nature. Because it incorporates all categories of defining human life that make separate, ineffective attempts to achieve the same goal—namely, biological science, Freudianism, and Marxism—Existentialism, in Beauvoir's opinion, is the only paradigm that can portray the most transparent picture of human life.

### 1.1 Background of the study

India was divided in 1947. It split India into two sections: Pakistan and India. In Indian history, it is referred to as a "black day." It breeds violence, betrayal, and riots. Millions of people were killed, raped, and abducted in what is now known to be the most horrific and terrible incident in human history. During the Holocaust, most women were executed and residents were burned. The people who moved from India to Pakistan and from Pakistan to India felt the brunt of the partition. Therefore, it is conceivable that the division of India was a horrific and agonizing experience for both Pakistan and India. Men did suffer, no doubt, but women's suffering transcended all boundaries. Two things were done to them. As Nisid Hajari states in his book *Midnight Furies: The Deadly Legacy of India's Partition*, "there were dead bodies everywhere on the railway connecting India and Pakistan." It is a dishonorable deed in Indian history to be freed from the slaughter of so many innocent people, one could argue (2016).

There is no shortage of writers discussing partition in the modern era. For instance, Kmlshwar, Manohar Malgonkar, Gulzar, Bhisham Sahni, Khushwant Singh, and so on. They reflect the true picture of society in their literature. On this horrible occurrence, they have written poetry, memoirs, and novels.

British Indian playwright and author Saadat Hasan Manto (1912–1955) was born in Ludhiana, Pakistan. He paints a graphic picture of the riots that broke out during the Holocaust of the Partition. He'd studied the women closely and held a particular place in his heart for them. Clearly, Manto's characters fall into the categories of widows, insane people, and prostitutes. In his stories, he painted the most pitiful image of women. Manto asserts that although men did suffer, women's suffering was greater. These tales were written by him during the division. Manto illustrates every kind of danger that women face through Sakina, Sughandhi, Madhu,

Sultana, Kanta and many other female characters which is analyzed in this paper. It represented the ways that women suffered during the partition due to their communal identities and their efforts to make their own identities among it. Author Ismat Chughtai uses the following words to eloquently describe the trauma brought on by partition: '*Hearts were broken in those whose bodies were whole*'. Family units were split apart... Human relationships were in shambles, and many souls ultimately stayed in Hindustan while their bodies departed for Pakistan (2009).

This study is driven by an interest in the ways that women move on their own, particularly in an effort to overcome obstacles and make themselves better in life, through the transcendences of Beauvoir's existentialist feminism. Additionally, the stories main female characters demonstrate how women's movements to overcome adversity and better themselves in order to survive have made women in the world capable of accomplishing what they do and how constructed roles made them a target of sexual exploitation.

However, the article is further narrowed down to the genre of short stories by Sadat Hassan Manto. In addition, the theoretical framework will be the existentialist philosophy for women's rights and self-determination for themselves by Simon de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* (1949). Taking the theoretical framework into account, an attempt is made to find solutions of women's struggle for their transcendence with a detailed textual analysis of Sadat Hassan Manto thirteen stories named as: Colder than ice, The Assignment, Mozail, The Return, A Women's Life, Oduor, The Gift, The seven magic flowers, The Girl from Delhi, On the Balcony, Pro Devi, A Women for all and Khusia.

## 1.2 Statement of the problem

Throughout history, literary genres have consistently addressed significant themes that appeared to be prevalent in society. In the postmodern period, among other issues, women's issues are receiving more attention and should be widely discussed. Beauvoir wrote, men are labeled as human while female is categorized as female or lady – her behaviour as a human titled her as she imitates the male' (Beauvoir, 1949). The function of man telling women how she has to be or not once again gives an existentialist reading of the text, this gives women the sense that her control of being is not with her. Consequently, the focus of this work will be the simultaneous debate on whether women embrace their circumstances and struggle for their liberation as the matter of reclaiming their freedom and recognizing their responsibility to create their own lives. Significantly, female problems are widely discussed topic. However, considering females performance along with their significances seems to be a vital subject to be focused on.

## 1.3 Significance of the study

- a) The significance of finding existentialist feminism in Sadat Hassan Manto's short stories plays a great contribution to the existing body of knowledge.
- b) Though feminism is widely discussed topic in literature but Beauvoir was the first to view it in a philosophical manner.
- c) Beauvoir's examination of existentialist theory is more critical as she applies it to the query of women. Simon de Beauvoir writes "the Second sex is critical not only for its contribution to feminist philosophy but for its more basic contribution of knowledge" (Simon, 1949).
- d) Beauvoir existentialist perspectives also portray her feministic politics as she sees the struggle for women's liberation as the matter of reclaiming their freedom and asserting their responsibility to create their own lives. Specifically, this analysis could provide

insights into their existential crises, shedding light on how women steer existence and identity within a patriarchal framework.

## 1.4 Research Objectives

1. To Investigate and discover the elements of Simon de Beauvoir Existentialist feminism in Sadat Hassan Manto's female character.

## 1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the elements of Simon de Beauvoir Existentialist feminism appearing in Sadat Hassan Manto's female characters?

## 1.6 Scope of study

The work will emphasize on the women specific roles which are socially constructed for them. The woman believes that she will always be in a condition of conflict, hesitancy, and reliance because of these irreconcilable roles or inescapable destinies. According to Simon de Beauvoir, this in turn is the cause of her unbalance. Moreover, the fight for existence will be major focus which the researcher will be concentrating about. The emphasis will be the how women steer existence and identity within a patriarchal framework. However, the paper will further be delimited to the genre of short stories of Sadat Hassan Manto. Furthermore, the theoretical framework will be feminist aspect of gender inequality and labeling of women as inferior or subjective, along with the existentialist philosophy for the rights and self-determination of women for themselves by Simon de Beauvoir in her book *the second sex* (1949).

## 1.7 Limitations of the study

The article is further narrowed down to the genre of short stories by Sadat Hassan Manto. In addition, the theoretical framework will be the feminist aspects of women constructed roles in society and they are seen as an object for sex, along with the existentialist philosophy which will debating the ideas whether women embrace their circumstances and struggle for their liberation as the matter of reclaiming their freedom and recognizing their responsibility to create their own lives on Simon de Beauvoir's book *The second sex* (1949)

## 1.8 key terms

### Feminism

This theory advocated the women rights (whether political or social) to protect them from inequality. As Judith Butler stated (1990), "Feminism should be understood how the category of women is produced and constrained by the power structures through which emancipation is sought" (p. 5). However, feminist theory basically concerned with the social and political rights that she lacks. Butler specified that feministic issues represent broader discussion in terms of just the political system as it is a concept that aims to be equally unbound.

### Existentialism

The word "existentialism" comes from Latin and means "to stand out". Existentialism is based on the idea that humans attempt to make rational decisions in an irrational universe. They choose their own path in life and are therefore freed from moral values and religion. The existentialist movement places a strong emphasis on the existence, freedom, and choice of the individual.

### Existentialist feminism

Existentialist feminists place great emphasis on these concepts: freedom, interpersonal relationships, and the experience of existing as a human being. They highly value the potential

for radical transformation that can impede this process while also recognizing that certain aspects, such as self-deception and the anxiety that arises from the prospect of change. A woman makes deliberate choices regarding the ways of her life and endures the anxiety that accompanies isolation, freedom, or nonconformity, yet maintains her autonomy, effectively embodies the fundamental principles of Existentialism (Wikipedia). De Beauvoir (1949) argues that masculinity has evolved into a concept of a "being for oneself," defined by attributes like fluidity, freedom, and certainty, as a result of the physical differences between men and women as well as the profound impact of social conditions. Furthermore, femininity has evolved into a "being in itself," possessing attributes like being on sidelines, affection, and tranquility

### **Literature review**

Patriarchy denotes a longstanding custom where men have historically marginalized women. This phenomenon appears to have significantly hindered women's accomplishments. Women have consistently been portrayed as inferior in societal and political contexts. Nevertheless, Judith Butler (1990) challenges the idea of predetermined gender norms. She argues against the fixed notions of masculinity and femininity, asserting that women are capable of performing tasks traditionally associated with men. Butler (1990) contends that upholding traditional gender roles and sexual norms contributes to inequality. Consequently, it is imperative to dismantle these conventional practices in order to ensure gender equality. It is essential to emphasize to women their roles and capabilities in order to empower them for a meaningful struggle. Gender identity should be based on performance rather than biological differences (Nagoshi, Nagoshi & Brzuzy, 2014, p. 23).

### **2.1 Inequality due to economic conflict**

Engels (1845) had a somewhat different perspective on the freedom of women. The main idea that needs to be emphasized is that Engels does not dismiss class oppression as a factor in women's oppression, he does not reduce gender conflict to class conflict, and he does not think that interpersonal relationships can be reduced to those that occur during the production process. Actually, women's oppression includes an economic component, according to Engels' perspective. One reason for this is that women's labor, or housework, is viewed as a private service that married women provide for their husbands and children and is hence unpaid. Engels' statements on 'proletarian marriage' highlight the impact of economic changes on basic ties inside marriages. However, he also acknowledges that marriage is more than just economics. According to the author, large-scale industry has made women the breadwinners of families, leaving no room for male dominance in the proletarian household, except for the brutality against women that has spread since the introduction of monogamy. Engels mentions domestic violence, implying that it penetrates all boundaries, including that of class. (J. Mahon, 1997).

Looking for the same view, some researchers has also emphasized that Work-family conflict is exacerbated by opposing demands for conventional gender roles and "ideal worker" expectations (van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2020).

### **2.2 Unconventional stereotypes**

Along with Sadat Hassan Manto many others writers throughout history have depicted the women fighting for their freedom. Female writers have played a pivotal role in reshaping the portrayal of women in literature, moving away from traditional stereotypes and presenting more diverse and complex female characters. Women writers like Virginia Woolf, Dorothy Richardson, and Katherine Mansfield have depicted women in a more nuanced light, highlighting their struggles, aspirations, and individuality. They have challenged the traditional roles assigned to

women by the male-dominated society and brought forth feminist perspectives in their works. Lahiri is an Indian writer, *Diaspora's*. Her female characters suffer the most from losing their identities in a place which their husbands have claimed as their own. After immigrating to other nations, her women find it difficult to adapt. As a result, people remember their predecessors and continue to behave and dress in the same way. Most of the female characters in the book are stay-at-home moms. Their duties haven't changed even if they've moved to different nations: giving birth, cleaning the floors, cooking, and tending to her spouse and kids. As a result of their quiet pain, these women remain oppressed, reliant, and ignored. "The challenges of exile, the alone, the persistent sensation of estrangement, and the knowledge of longing for a lost world are more explicit and agonizing for immigrants than for their children," the author claims (Sajida & Selvaraj, Vijayakumar, 2021)

The evolution of Indian English literature has witnessed myriad alterations in writing styles over time, coinciding with the rapid expansion of literacy that enabled women to wield the power of the written word. Nevertheless, the journey was arduous for women, as they had to surmount longstanding barriers of male dominance, societal taboos, and entrenched beliefs. The historical conflict between genders persists to this day, with men historically shaping women's narratives and imposing patriarchal norms that perpetuated gender disparities. Women authors have expanded their thematic horizons to encompass contemporary global issues such as environmental concerns, energy, equality, justice, human rights, peace, racism, and others, reflecting a broader engagement with the challenges confronting humanity in the present era (Das, 2003).

The presence of women as subjects have been ignored by the patriarchal societies and woman as a category has been constructed according to the male fantasy, the inscriptions of which we find in cultural institutions and the media. The paper revisits the question of woman construction even in this postfeminist or further in the post humanist era, from the perspective of the existential school of thought, putting forward some elemental questions regarding the objectification of women in this age of cultural exchanges. With the 'self' being already 'split', the modern human fails to address the degradation that is wrought not only on the body but also on the psyche of the oppressed, when put to presentation in terms of objects (Arghya & Das, 2015).

#### **2.4 Fight for Existence**

Townsend, Kray and Rushell (2023) also discussed in their paper, how one can overcome these differences generated by the society. Women who work outside the house and adhere to stronger essentialist ideologies may experience higher levels of work-family conflict since they are going against biological imperatives for raising children. Though all of these concepts are connected, we think gender role mindset—which gauges how much individuals feel roles may change—is the most useful tool for understanding work-family conflict, which arises from competing role expectations (Dweck, 2006; Yeager et al., 2019). However, since work-family conflict arises directly from traditional gender role expectations, we did not anticipate that our impact would be explained by more general latent personality assumptions either. We showed that treatments targeted at establishing a growth gender role mentality in particular minimize work-family conflict among women and may increase their sense of pleasure in their relationships and at work (Townsend et al., 27 April, 2023).

Sahjida and Vijayakumar (2021) in their work also discussed the Existentialist characteristics of female characters in the work of various Indian writers. which are, although

there is nothing new about women being represented in Indian literature written in English, the writers' methods are very different from one another. In 1960s Indian fiction, women were shown as perfect beings possessing an array of virtues and no notion of rebellion; conversely, women in subsequent books are portrayed as revolting. Women are asking to be given their rightful role in society because they are educated, aware of their rights and advantages, and assertive. Unquestionably, the influence of western feminist views, as espoused by authors like Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1994), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1952), has been felt in more recent times (1970).

Manto's characters are situated on the significant periphery of Indian society, as noted by Mahnaz Ispahani in her comprehensive evaluation of Manto's literary works. An essential point highlighted by Ispahani is the resemblance of his writing to journalistic naturalism, focusing on themes of alienation and sexual violence culminating in tragic outcomes (Ispahani. Pg. 184). The uniqueness and essence of womanhood that Manto's ladies possess are uncompromised. The ladies of Manto's stories who work as prostitutes in society are very different from the stereotype of prostitutes. They don't have this "waiting to be Merced upon-pathos filled nature" and instead stand out from the pack. They serve as a symbol for the demeaning patriarchal worldview that permeates their culture, but they do not teach morals that is nearly impossible to abide by. These ladies are full of rebelliousness and battle their way out of a painful and terrible environment.

Similarly, this article has emphasized that Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories are distinguished by his unashamed strong voice and are empowering. They are filled by female characters, generally sex workers, who, despite being victimized and marginalized, seek to make a livelihood and make sense of their chaotic surroundings. However, are the women in his stories just passive victims, as popular opinion has portrayed them, or do they, at times, exercise agency as a result of their marginalization? Contrary to popular belief, some of his characters use their agency to influence the lives of others or, in certain cases, to build a self-identity, as in '*Mozail*' or '*A woman's life*'. To illustrate the statement mentioned above, this study examines the short tales in *Bitter Fruit*, organized and translated by Khalid Hasan (2008), a collection of English translated short stories. Hence, these stories are analyzed through the Lense of Feminism, more specifically through Simon de Beauvoir theory Existentialist Feminism, which she has discusses in her book "*The Second Sex*" (1949). The present study scrutinizes thirteen particular short stories from the collection 'Kingdom's End', which features English translations of Manto's works, in order to substantiate this argument.

### **Research Methodology**

The chapter focuses on the research methodology, theoretical framework, research procedures, data collecting, and analytical framework for the study Exploring Existentialist Feminism in Sadat Hassan Manto's Short Stories. The scholar seeks to examine the characteristics of Existentialist Feminism in Sadat Hassan Manto's short stories, using Simon de Beauvoir's Existentialist Feminism theory. Despite several feminist critiques of his works, the female characters are primarily portrayed as everlasting victims with little autonomy or influence. The current study underlines the fact that certain characters in his stories have agency to influence the lives of others or build their own self-identity. To support the above statement, this article looks at the thirteen translated short stories from *Bitter Fruit*, an anthology of Sadat Hassan Manto's short stories. Despite taking a feminist stance, these interpretations are different from earlier ones in that they view these short stories as narratives in which people rise above their victimization to become independent agents.

## 3.1 Methodology

The Qualitative research method was utilized, with a literature review. According to Creswell (2014) qualitative research design as a strategy that focuses on data collecting, analysis, and writing while also drawing on disciplines and flowing through the research process, likely sorts of difficulties, and the importance of ethical considerations. Meanwhile, content analysis method under the category of textual analysis is utilized to analyze the difficulties and research findings based on Simone de Beauvoir's perspective on the concept of feminism. According to Sarantakos (1998, pp. 280-281). Content analysis includes selecting the area of research, designing the research, gathering data and analyzing them.

### 3.1.1 Data Collection

The data collection approach is carried out with the close reading of the undertaken text/lines Sadat Hassan Manto's short stories. The study's core data is Sadat Hassan Manto's short stories, which Khalid Hasan (2008) translated into English; secondary sources include articles, journals, or books that relate to the main subject and support the analysis (Creswell, 2014).

## 3.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on an Existentialist Feminism by Simon De Beauvoir (1949).

### 3.2.1 Background

Simone de Beauvoir introduced existentialist feminism as a feminist theory in her 1949 book *The Second Sex*. The ontological and ethical vocabulary of existentialism serves as the foundation for Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist philosophy. Men labeled "woman" the other and "man" the self, according to De Beauvoir. Woman is a menace to man if the other is a threat to the self. Consequently, a women must submit to men if she wants to continue being free (Simone De Beauvoir, 2003, p. 89; Tong, 2006, p. 262; Wiyatmi, 2012, p. 25). The historical reality of women's subjugation is one of mutual exclusion; it is an event that has been constantly refuted and rewritten. Additionally, it shows that men are always superior to women (Tong, 2006, p. 262; Wiyatmi, 2012, p. 25). The historical reality of women's subjugation is one of mutual exclusion; it is an event that has been constantly refuted and rewritten. Additionally, it shows that men are always superior to women (Tong, 2006, p. 262; Wiyatmi, 2012, p. 25). According to Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialist theory is referenced in her thought on women. Conflict is the foundation of all human relationships, according to Sarte, and it is what makes intersubjective relationships unique. As evidence of men's control over women, according to Simone de Beauvoir, the world of women will always be connected to the world of men. As an example of an institution that limits women's freedom, Beauvoir cites the institution of marriage. Unlike other feminist schools that battle in the public arena, existential feminism is characterized as women's struggle through individual movements in the home sphere. According to De Beauvoir, women only become Liyan for males. The woman starts to see herself as a creature that requires protection because of her physical fragility, which is when the Liyan's issues begin. Since she was created from a man's rib, she begins to think that she would not be able to survive without a guy. Women are therefore expected to rely on men. Whereas women are either objects or the other, men are the subjects and are absolute (Sitepu et al., 2023, pp. 359-369).



### 3.2.2 Foundational concepts

Simone de Beauvoir thoroughly examines the objectification of women as sexual entities, their perceived subordination, and their classification as the "Other." She also contemplates how, from an early age, she was restricted to particular roles imposed by patriarchal standards, anticipated to rely on men for the entirety of her life (1949). Nonetheless, this analysis will mainly concentrate on the existential challenges women encounter as they navigate their situations and forge paths for themselves. Additionally, societal norms push her to project an appearance of alienation. A man's clothing should speak to his transcendence, just like his physique does. He does not typically view his look as a reflection of who he is, since he believes that neither elegance nor beauty make him an object. Society, on the other hand, even demands that women turn into sensual objects. She is enslaved to fashion, which seeks to cut her off from her transcendence and turn her into a target for masculine lusts rather than to achieve her aspirations. Instead of advancing her goals, fashion works to obstruct them.

### 3.2.3 Women Existential Credibility

Beauvoir claims that existentialism happens when a woman stops being an object and starts becoming a subject in her own right. Women would experience an internal metamorphosis as a result of achieving "complete economic and social equality," according to De Beauvoir. Additionally, each man and woman will exist for themselves as well as for the other; they will acknowledge one another as subjects and continue to live for one another. But rather than asking women to negate who they are, Beauvoir urges them to remove all the pressures that will make their lives better and help them find their true selves. This will help women to transcend the limits of their existence (Tong, 2006, p. 264).

"Her condition has stayed the same through surface changes, and it is her condition that defines what is called the "character of woman," continues Beauvoir (2003, p. 567). However, according to Beauvoir, a woman or wife is more capable of handling difficult circumstances than a man; she can endure all of the hardships and face everything with greater vigor than a man. This includes dealing with poverty, tragedy, crises, and even physical suffering. Despite their inherent strength, women continue to be underestimated in society. Owing to the aforementioned conditions, Tong (2006, p. 264) asserts that women must transcend the pressures of circumstance in order to stop being the second sex or *liyan*. The idea of transcendence holds that women should have the same views and methods as males, especially when trying to better themselves and overcome obstacles in life. Women can struggle and better themselves in life while traveling the path to transcendence. According to De Beauvoir, women might employ four tactics—referred to as Beauvoir's transcendence strategies—to proliferate women's movements: women can reject the role of otherness (object status), work, become intellectuals, and reform society (Bornedal n. d.).

### 3.2.7 Prostitute as a scapegoat

Prostitution has a direct correlation with marriage, as we have observed. Morgan states, 'Hetaerism follows mankind in civilization as a dark shadow upon the family.' A man is wise enough to designate his wife for celibacy, yet he finds no joy in the strict regimen he forces upon her. According to Montaigne, the wives of Persian kings were once invited to attend their feasts. However, when the wine started to warm them up and they were forced to indulge in pure sensuality, they were sent back to their private rooms to avoid involving them in their excessive appetites. Instead, they were asked to bring other women in their stead, to whom they owed no such duty of deference. The Church Fathers asserted that sewers were required to ensure the

hygienic conditions of palaces. In another well-known work, Mandeville stated: "It is obvious that some women must be sacrificed in order to save others and to prevent an even more abject filth." A scapegoat, the prostitute is the object of the man's turpitude, which he then repudiates. She is seen as a pariah regardless of whether her employment is covert or her legal status puts her under police scrutiny. Her circumstances are identical to those of the married lady in terms of money. According to Marro, "the price and duration of the contract is the only difference between those who sell themselves through prostitution and those who sell themselves through marriage." Since masculine desire in prostitution is particular rather than individual, it may be satiated on anybody. If they do not have a unique influence over men, wives and courtesans cannot successfully take advantage of them. The fundamental distinction between them is that the oppressed legitimate woman—a married woman—is valued as a human being, and this regard starts to effectively put an end to oppression. Nonetheless, the prostitute represents the culmination of all forms of feminine servitude at once and lacks the rights of an individual (Borde & Chevallier, 2009).

### **Textual Analysis**

Manto's short stories faced harsh criticism during his era, often dismissed as obscene and pornographic. This overt backlash to the author's works stemmed not only from the provocative themes he explored but also from his character portrayals—the individuals in his narratives defied conventional understandings of sexuality, gender, and patriarchy. His most notable tales revolve around pimps and prostitutes; they feature characters who struggle for acceptance in a society largely responsible for their decisions, many of whom are victims of physical and sexual abuse, subsequently ostracized due to the "social unacceptability of a 'despoiled' woman." (Jain, 1969). Additionally, Robinson contends that the majority of women involved in prostitution carry a history of physical and sexual trauma, suggesting that their situation is less about choice and more about exploitation of vulnerable adolescents (p. 23). Manto's placement of his characters in specific settings serves as a critique of societal norms, acting as a mirror to illuminate its biases, hypocrisy, and stagnation. Most of these narratives—centered around marginalized or victimized individuals—are set against the broader backdrop of the Indo-Pak partition. Manto intertwines the physical violence of partition with the ideological cruelty that sex and sexuality endure within the social framework of the Indo-Pak subcontinent. The majority of Manto's characters are not only female—further victimized by their subordination to men—but are also sex workers and prostitutes; they are marginalized to an even greater degree for being not just women but deviant women.

Manto's stories explore the misleading representation of women in society, showcasing how they are frequently reduced to mere sources of amusement for men, lacking authentic feelings and emotions in his chosen short stories. Through his narratives, he uncovers the hollowness of the middle class, often spotlighting protagonists from the oppressed and marginalized lower segments of society. These characters are destined for bleak existences yet find ways to transcend their circumstances; he does not lament their lost innocence. The stories unveil the contradictions of the conservative protectors of society who stifle and belittle women with their moralistic doctrines. The author offers a "reflection of life" to both the reader and the broader world.

The narrative of these characters holds a profound significance as it highlights the violence, turmoil, and unpredictability that characterized the personal experiences of individuals in that environment. More critically, it underscores the unique relevance for the protagonists at

the heart of these tales and their capacity to carve out a sense of agency for themselves on the margins. Manto's portrayal of his female characters stands out in contrast to the typical roles that women occupy in most male-driven narratives. Jain observes that 'male narratives position events at the core of the story—such as incidents of rape, flight, and massacre. Women are either missing or reduced to mere victims' (1657). However, this is not reflective of Manto's works; the women in his stories are portrayed as fully realized characters rather than flat, secondary figures.

#### 4.2 Existentialist feminism aspects

In a short story *A woman's life*, the character Sugandhi also depicted as a strong woman who have seen and been through and could possibly handle this situation in her profession as a prostitute. Which can be seen through the following lines.

*"Jamuna, you are still very naïve. I know how to deal with men..... but never give them enough time to do what they really want; keep them occupied and they will leave happily and you will be spared possible misadventure."* (A woman's life) (Hasan, 2008, pp. 51-53)

Her strong character can also be analyzed through her earning for herself. She did not need anyone to fulfill her desires or to earn for her. She was an independent working woman. This can be seen through the following lines.

*"True, she hadn't had happiness she would have wished but she had managed. money had never interested her much. she charged 10 rupees for what she did, out of which one forth went to Ram Lal what she was left was enough for her needs."* (A woman's life) (Hasan, 2008, pp. 51-53)

Sugandhi strong character can be also be analyzed that she knew the true colors of men who desire to use her for their benefits or fulfill their desires which can be seen or analyzed through these lines.

*"When a man said to her, I love you, Sugandhi, she would go weak in the knees, although she knew he was lying. Love, what a beautiful word, she would think. Oh, if only one could rub love like a balm into one's body."* (A woman's life) (Hasan, 2008, pp. 51-53)

Sugandhi strong character in a short story *A Women's life* can also be depicted through the following lines where we can see that though she has less but she still was happy in that minimalism.

*"So, Gandhi had argued to herself that, if one was unable to buy real gold, one might as well settle for what looked like gold."* (A woman's life) (Hasan, 2008, pp. 52-54)

Sugandhi, for herself has been went through difficult times and suffering but apart from her difficult survival she decided to help a mother and daughter who has been away from their home. She wanted to earn money for them and wanted to send them back to their homeland which depicted how strong character and personality.

"She had grown-up daughter and they wanted to go back to Madras..... the money of course, was to be earned by Sugandhi herself. She put on the flower Prince saree and a bit of makeup, and then drink another glass of water from the pitcher." (A woman's life, pp. 53-54)

Sugandhi after being left on the street alone and humiliated she has been ghosted by the word **ugh!** said by a saith, throughout her day. However, Sugandhi was a strong female who knew her worth and value and she decided she did not need any man to love her or told her actual worth.

*"Sugandhi, she said to herself, you are not ugly. While it was true that the bloom of her early youth was gone, nobody had ever said she was ugly. In fact, she was one of those*

*women men always steal second look at. She knew she had everything a man expects in a woman.” (A woman’s life) (Hasan, 2008, pp. 54-55)*

She took stand for herself against any insult or humiliation every man would do to her. She knew who she is and how pure her soul is no matter she has been used r humiliated, her body could be used r humiliated by them but her soul is far more untouchable.

*“If that man come back, she would stand Infront of him, tear up her clothes and shout, “This is what you came to buy! Well, here it is. You can have it free, but you will never be able to reach the women who is inside this body.” (A woman’s life) (Hasan, 2008, pp. 54-55)*

After considering her condition and the selfishness of men around her trigger Sugandhi rage. She started to take out everyone out of her life in order to fight for her respect and her strong existence which is not impecunious to anyone. This can be seen through the following lines.

*“Sukandi started to hold down all the four pictures hanging on her wall. she pulled down the fourth picture, a man in a turban..... together through the window. they heard them fall on the street, the glass breaking. Madhu somehow managed to say, ‘well done! I didn’t like that one of mine either..... ‘You didn’t like that one yeah? Well, let me ask you, is there anything about..... She ignored him. when she pulled out his handkerchief from his pockets, raised it to her nose, made a face and said with disgust, it stinks! look at yourself, at your filthy cap and these rags that you call clothes. they all smell! get out!” (A woman’s life) (Hasan, 2008, pp. 57-58)*

In story *The Gift*, sultana portrayed the character of a strong women, who despite her profession was the owner of her own life. She chooses her customers, whom she wants to serve and who she didn’t want to serve. She only serves to gora’s, who also pay her well. Despite, she could say anything to them they would not understand.

*“They would look at her, quite puzzled as to what she is going on about, and she would say, ‘Sahib, you are ek-dum, ullo ka patha, an owl’s offspring, and haramzada, of illegitimate birth. The Goras would laugh and sultana would chuckle.” (The Gift) (Hasan, 2008, pp. 109-110)*

Buying jewelry and clothes for herself also portrays her self-love and she knew her worth. Buying something for herself and for her house women feels the satisfaction of self-authority. In Manto’s literary oeuvre, no two women are alike. The notion of the prostitute...works because it was these women that could claim to be free. The sex worker is free, even though the choices she has to exercise her liberty are constrained, and constrained by the same rules that keep the homemaker’s freedom in check. (Rumi, p. 83)

*“Sultana has by now saved enough money to buy herself a pair of silver earrings and eight gold bracelets. She also built up a wardrobe of fifteen nice saris. she also brought some decent furniture for her house.” (The Gift) (Hasan, 2008, pp. 110-111)*

In the story *The Gift*, female characters urge to participate in Muharram and preparing black clothes in order to take part in their sorrow also portrayed their freedom of choice. There might be somethings which they cannot control but participating in such rituals still shows their liberty to be the part of society. It shows their stand for themselves making their selves as the part of society.

*“That was one time of the year when sultana observed every somber ritual commemorating the martyrdom of Hussein, the prophet’s son. Mukhtar, had got herself a*

*black lady Hamilton shirt stitched. Another girl Anwari had brought herself a georgette saree.*” (The Gift) (Hasan, 2008, pp. 113-114)

The story “**The girl from Delhi**” portrayed the character of women who is the head of kotha. She is the lead who takes every decision regarding every matter. She has good connection with the Seths of that time as well which broadly profits them in every difficult situation.

*“The Bhuri bhai, herself the toast of Delhi in her youth, send a message to Seth Gobind Prakash..... The message conveyed that her daughter was terrified of all these Hindu-Muslim business and would he kindly come and send her mind at rest? He came the next morning.”* (The girl from Delhi) (Hasan, 2008, pp. 233-234)

Fleeing to Pakistan was also one of the best decision Nasim Akhtar has taken for herself. She left the old life and wanted to start new life the way she wanted. She wanted to get married and have her own family and identity.

*“They got a ride and were in time to board a train going to Lahore in Pakistan. They were taken to refugee camp in a place outside the city called Walton.*

*Delhi is behind me. That life for me is finished. I just want to live like a normal woman.’ One day she said to him, I would like to get married, that is, if someone would have me; otherwise, I would remain a spinster.”* (The girl from Delhi) (Hasan, 2008, p. 236)

Though Nasim Akhtar has not desired this life for herself, but she also did not wish to sell off or to be sold by the hands of others. Any decision regarding the possibility of becoming a courtesan again would be solely her own.

*“She cried for a long time, then she dried her eyes and unpacked the clothes she had brought with her from Delhi and quietly walked out of the house, making straight for the kotha where Ustad Achan khan was employed.”* (The girl from Delhi) (Hasan, 2008, p. 238)

Kanta was beautiful and have a nice body. She knew her worth and value, so, she has a great confidence on herself. She would not let anyone decide her payment.

*“She charged ten rupees for a throw and that was not much considering what she had on offer. The other day, the bank clerk who had gone back because she would not bring down the price by two rupees was surely an ass.”* (The girl from Delhi) (Hasan, 2008, p. 267)

In story *A Woman for all seasons*, character Lateeka Rani was depicted as a strong educated women who was a great actress of her time. She consciously chooses her life decisions for the betterment of her life. Rather being fooled by the flattering remarks.

*“Latika came to the conclusion that Prafula Roy was no ordinary man. She was not short of admirers because she was young and in her own way attractive. However, she was not fooled by the flattering remarks young man made to her, treating them as a boring formality.”* (A Woman for all seasons) (Hasan, 2008, p. 271)

Latika was a smart girl. She had carefully made her circumstances into her benefit.

*“She always calculated her moves carefully and she was good at forecasts. In the two months that she has known Prafula Roy, she has seen the possibility of her dreams coming true.”* (A Woman for all seasons) (Hasan, 2008, p. 272)

In *On the Balcony*, Sheila is represented as a competent female figure who collaborates with her father. Possessing an education and expertise in the field of medicine, she exhibits a capacity to make equal contributions to her father's pursuits. This representation highlights her robust character and serves as a testament to the resilience of women in roles historically dominated by men.

*“She is the only daughter of my neighbor who is doctor. All day long, she sits in her father’s dispensary. Sometimes when passing by, I have seen her standing next to the medicine cabinet. Looking inside.... Which were being sprinkled on my handkerchief.”* (On The Balcony) (Hasan, 2008, p. 337)

Once again, strong confidence Sheila showed as a strong educated female who was sure of herself, her emotions and capability to overcome her problems also satisfy her existentialist feminism perspective of Manto’s female characters.

*“Her reply was sharp, ‘I don’t need anyone’s sympathy.’ I said I know... in such situations, no sympathy is needed. . . if the game consists of jumping into the fire, no instructions are required.”* (On The Balcony) (Hasan, 2008, p. 339)

After experiencing the profound betrayal by the love of her life, she found herself consumed by fear and despair. Devoid of hope and direction, she experienced an overwhelming sense of void, as the man she once cherished as her entire world had vanished from her life. In this bleak condition, she began to ponder the idea of death, convinced that she had nothing remaining to live for. Her determination for living her life depicts her fight for her existence.

*“I will have to live,’ she said in a soft voice. Her voice was an indication of her determination. Leaving her tired youth in sleepy moonlight, I walked down from the rooftop to my flat and went to sleep.”* (On The Balcony) (Hasan, 2008, p. 341)

In the story *The Oduor* character Hazel also depicted that rather surrendering to the suffering caused by war, she chose to be a woman who fight against it.

*“Since the war, most of the young Anglo-Indian girls of Bombay had joined the army’s women’s auxiliary corps, ..... She was proud and flirtatious, expecting any man she came across to pay court to her. She had also ignored Randhir.”* (The Oduor,) (Hasan, 2008, p. 66)

In the story *Mozail*, the female protagonist Mozail embodies the essence of a tenacious woman who has established herself among the tumult of battle. She could negotiate situations just as well as a male. She exemplified the attributes of a truly courageous lady, giving up her own life and dignity just to preserve another women's honor from being defiled by rioters. According to Ispahani, his female characters are depicted through their sexual vulnerability in scenarios such as sexual humiliation, rape, and prostitution. She asserts, “they are almost always victims, possessing only the ability to bring about their own downfall.” (Ispahani, p.186). While this observation holds true in the majority of his narratives, given their realistic nature and the reflections of societal issues that Manto himself acknowledged, I contend that there are moments in certain stories where his female protagonists possess the capability to rescue others, even if it comes at their own expense, thus granting them a means to positively influence someone else’s life. One such example can be found in the story *Mozail*.

*“Take her away, ‘she told Tarlochan. She untied the girl’s hair so that it hung over her shoulder. ‘Go’..... she addressed Tarlochan, ‘when I open the door, I’ll rushed out and run upstairs..... Her arm fell limply on her bare breasts and she said no more.”* (Mozail) (Hasan, 2008, p. 37-38)

Paro was a prostitute, fully aware that society would label her as such. Despite this, she aspired to make a name for herself and dreamed of becoming an actress. She longed for her own identity and a sense of existence beyond the stigma attached to her profession.

*“ She came from the courtesans’ quarter, had a happy disposition and was extremely friendly. She came from my Meerut where she was a big hit with all the rich*

*man of the city. she had money of her own and quite a bit of it; all she wanted was to become an actress." (Paro devi,) (Hasan, 2008, p. 564)*

### Findings and Recommendations

This thesis explores the challenges faced by Sadat Hassan Manto's female characters imposed by a patriarchal society, through the lens of existentialist feminism as articulated by Simone de Beauvoir. Analyzing the conflicts between female and male characters reveals that the male gaze, the objectification of women, and the sexual targeting and harassment are three significant barriers hindering the advancement of gender equality. Within the framework of existentialist feminism and the objectification issues presented in Beauvoir's seminal work *The Second Sex*, this thesis highlights the societal foundations of sexism, specifically male chauvinism and patriarchy. By examining Manto's characters' responses to these challenges and their acts of resistance, practical strategies for women to break free from imposed roles and societal operations can be summarized as follows: reject the internalization of "the other" and affirm and enhance self-worth.

Choosing prostitutes as his main characters, Manto emphasizes that even those who have been relegated to the lowest tiers of society can forge their own identities. The figures that inhabit Manto's narratives have been dehumanized by society because, at some point in their lives, they either stepped outside the boundaries set for them or were compelled to do so, challenging the societal expectations of women, particularly those who were conditioned to embody the ideal of the perfect domestic woman: submissive, compliant, and devoted to their husbands, among other traits; they have strayed from the "roles designated for women—such as mother, wife, or daughter—categories into which women are expected to conform (Ranjan, 2018); they either fail or choose not to engage with that interpellation. Being labeled as deviant now, having already distanced themselves from the socially endorsed concept of a 'Woman,' they experience a partial liberation from control and while this does not equate to total freedom, these characters are indeed able to construct an identity for themselves with significantly fewer limitations. Pramod Nair, reflecting on Simone De Beauvoir's perspectives from *The Second Sex*, observes that women, by accepting the stereotypes imposed upon them by a patriarchal society, become their own agents of self-oppression (Ranjan, 2018). It logically follows that to escape this oppression; to transcend the passive role of an object and transition into an active subject necessitates breaking away from the 'woman' construct that has been ingrained in them and indeed diverging from it. Manto's characters manage to liberate themselves from this self-imposed limitation as a consequence of their marginalization. In addition to emphasizing the oppressed and subordinate position of women in society, such narratives reflect society's hypocrisy concerning sexual morality. While it is the male gaze that transforms a woman into a sexual object, it is the collective apathy of society that diminishes her to the status of non-existence. From ancient times through to the present, women are viewed merely as sexual objects.

Manto, as a writer, has captured not just words but also feelings and societal truths that are simple to comprehend yet difficult to absorb. Things remain as they were yesterday, and it is nearly hard to forecast whether the traditional attitude of viewing females as a subordinate, disparaging, and inferior gender will disappear in the near future. In other words, the likelihood of such events not occurring is extremely low; therefore, Manto must be understood and interpreted in a way that benefits humanity as a whole. Manto's dramatic

representation of partition reflects the current scenario in wars and bloodshed, in which most women are victims of such slaughter. Manto's characters are not only delicate but also courageous, inspiring today's women to speak for themselves. As a result, it is argued that Manto's writings give confidence to both men and women to take a firm stand for themselves in order to present a defense against rights violations. The sensuality portrayed in Manto's writings is essentially the description of how he perceived the world around him and what it meant to him and others. His outspoken works enraged people not just in his day, but also now, when people are still bound by patriarchal relations. His works free women who are fighting to do well for themselves and strive to reach greater heights in the future.

### 5.1 Recommendations

The future researcher can sightsee many undiscussed parts from the selected south Asian Literature. Where women can be analyzed through social constructed specific roles for them and how they can tackle their circumstances to make their own identity and life for themselves. Moreover, the concept of Existentialist Feminism of Simon de Beauvoir can also be applied on the novel "The Mercy" by Tonny Morrison.

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