Chapter: IV

Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting, Bye, Bye Blackbird* and Shaharnush Parsipur’s *Dog and the Long Winter*
Comparative Study: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting*, *Bye, Bye Blackbird* and Shaharnush Parsipur’s *Dog and the Long Winter*

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Chapter IV

Comparative Study of Anita Desai’s Novels: *Fasting, Feasting Bye, Bye Blackbird* and Shahrnush Parsipur’s *Dog and The Long Winter*

IV. Fasting, Feasting

Anita Desai’s *Fasting, Feasting* is divided into two parts, the first part dealing with the story of Uma, the eldest child of the family of a lawyer. Uma is a failure in her school studies, and she is also not a very good-looking girl. But she is very sensitive. Uma’s family is an upper middle-class family, her father being a lawyer, and possesses a bungalow, a car, and employs a cook and a ‘Mali’ to tend the garden. The life in their family is under tight control of MamaPappa, the mother and father, who rule as one entity. They both sit on a swing in the front room, and keep ordering Uma, the elder daughter, to do one thing or the other, run errands and take care of the infant son when he is born. Uma, being a failure at studies, has to leave school; though she very much wants to continue at school. She is pinned down to taking care of her new born brother and other household chores. Her parents are much more preoccupied with their son, Arun, than their daughters. Uma’s younger sister, Aruna, being good-looking and smarter, is happily married. But her uncle’s daughter, Anamika, though beautiful and a scholar does not have any luck in her married life. She commits suicide. The story illustrates tragically fate of girls in an insensitive patriarchal system. The novel illustrates how the adolescent girl, Melanie, in the Armenian social set-up suffers loneliness and feels unwanted by her parents in spite of the
affluence and independence the children enjoy. The writer, thus, presents two different cultures, of the East and the West, where children, especially the girls, suffer for different reasons. Mr. Patton, in America, cooks in the kitchen, his wife takes great interest in shopping and enjoys sun-bathing, but both hardly care for the children, or take interest in what they are doing. This neglect is also the fate of girls in the Indian family. *Fasting, Feasting*, thus presents two contrasting civilizations, both lacking in exercising human values. The girls in the Indian family experience ‘fasting’ at the emotional level, while their parents enjoy ‘feasting’. The same is true of the western family, in which the children, though enjoying freedom of choice, suffer neglect and lack of parental love and attachment. ‘Fasting’ in the title expresses paucity, starvation, while ‘Feasting’ indicates plenty. The Indian and American family life are thus contrasted to show how both lead to disastrous effects.

**IV.1.1. The Themes of Repression and Rejection**

Anita Desai’s fiction generally shows how in a patriarchal society women suffer repression and rejection in the family set-up. Indira Bhatt in her article ‘*Fasting, Feasting: Denials in Life*’ (2002)\(^1\), shows how Uma, the elder daughter in the family, is denied a normal woman’s life by her own parents, who are chauvinistic and grossly, patriarchal in their attitude. Uma’s father is an autocratic high middle-class father, who rules over the family. He is a typical Indian

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husband, who craves for a son to continue the name of the family. Mama, his wife, once tells her children how the girls in the family, in her own childhood, were given secondary treatment in comparison with their brothers, the male-children, in the family. She says:

"In my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat, if something special had been bought in the market, like sweets or nuts, it was given to the boys in the family. But ours was not such an orthodox home that our mother and aunt did not slip us something on the sly."  

Discrimination between boys and girls was, thus, a usual practice in the Indian families. When Uma's mother was pregnant second time, the father was so sure that it would be a boy this time, and he wanted to name the child Arun, but a girl was born. And she was named Aruna. When the third time Mama was pregnant, the father's hope was granted by God. The son was born, and otherwise sober father came home jumping and racing, shouting the news: "a boy! a boy! Arun at last!"  

The birth of Arun reduces Uma to the worst position in the household. She is not allowed to join school. Her father says.

"Uma is still young but may be considered of marriageable age and we see no reason to continue her studies beyond class eight".

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2 Anita Desai, *Fasting, Feasting*, P/6  
3 Anita Desai, *Fasting, Feasting*, P/17  
4 Anita Desai, *Fasting, Feasting*, P/74
Uma was not sent to school because both Mama and Papa needed her to look after their new born son. They wanted Uma to take proper care of him. But this is not the only duty assigned to her. She must keep watch on the garden to prevent boys stealing guavas in the garden. Any opportunity Uma gets to get out of the house and participate in any function is opposed by her parents. When Mrs. O'Henry invites Uma for coffee, Mama says she is enticing Uma, that she wants something in return. And Papa says, "...can't you think? She is trying to convert you of course".

Both, MamaPappa found something for Uma to do and kept her as busy as possible. After the retirement, Papa would sit with Mama on the red swing in the veranda, and ask Uma to do one thing or the other. Dr. Dutt once comes calling on the family for a purpose. She needs Uma’s help to look after the dormitory. Uma very much wants to go, but Mama says:

"...our daughter does not need to go out to work, Dr. Dutt. As long as we are here to provide for her, she will never need to go to work".

Uma’s parents somehow contrive to pin down Uma to the house slaving for them. Mama makes a show of false love, but what she really wants is Uma’s services for their old age. Uma tries to contact Dr. Dutt on phone and tell her that Mama is quite well. She tells the doctor to ask Pappa, but the doctor does not
like the idea, Mama tells lies to the doctor about her own illness to keep Uma at home.

Uma is blamed for costing her parents two dowries and no marriage. Her parents, in their hurry to get her married, hastily, arrange marriages without proper enquiries. But, the father blames Uma. The theme of rejection is realized in the life of Uma, who is like a bird in a cage. She cannot live her normal life. Her every effort to flee the cage is thwarted by the overbearing parents. The only ray of hope that occurs in her life is Ramu, her cousin. But, Uma is severely scolded by the mother for going out with Ramu. Parallel to Uma’s story is the story of Melanie, the daughter in the house of affluent American family. What Melanie lacks is parental love. She can have everything, except the loving care of her parents. She is the victim of emotional starvation. She can feast on sweets and ice-cream but she feels rejected by her parents because they hardly pay attention to her. Betty Friedan in her article, *The Feminine Mystique* (1970) has stated that repression of individuality leads to neurosis. Melanie appears to be the victim of the lack of parental love. Uma undergoes this feeling of repression and even rejection on account of the burden of matrimony and callous negligence in the upbringing.

Uma and Melanie both suffer this negligence and patriarchal attitudes. Melanie resents the way her mother pays attention to Arun, neglecting her, and keeps eating chocolates, which leads to her hospitalization.
Uma has once a chance of escaping her repression when Ramu, the cousin and the brother of Anamika, comes on a visit, Uma is full of joy. MamaPappa, of course, do not like this intruder, though he is a relation, and are not delighted like Uma. Ramu has come without any notice of his coming. Mama does not like the way Uma dances attendance on the unwanted guest, getting him tea, etc. They keep tightlipped silence, but Ramu makes himself comfortable. Ramu takes Uma out to dinner; which MamaPappa do not like. In spite of their tacit denial Ramu insists on taking Uma out for dinner. Uma enjoys this time out with Ramu. She even drinks shandy. For the first time in her life she has laughed and enjoyed freedom and company of a boy of her own age. MamaPappa shout at her on their return and call her a disgrace to the family. Uma’s another escape from MamaPappa’s tyranny was to accompany Mira-Masi on her pilgrimage. Before Mira-Masi turns her into the forever pilgrim like her, Ramu and Arun come to take Uma away. Uma’s holiday with Mira-Masi comes to an end, and she is back again in the prison of MamaPappa to serve them; and look after Arun. In this possible escapade of Uma, there was a danger of her being turned into a priestess of some god in the service of the priests of a temple this was perhaps the plan of Miramasi; But she narrowly escapes and comes back to serve MamaPappa, another trap for her.
IV.1.2. The Theme of Alienation:

In Anita Desai’s fiction the female protagonists mostly suffer from the feeling of alienation. Maya in *Cry, the Peacock*, Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Nanda Kaul in *Fire on the Mountain*, and others experience this alienation which is the result of the severe gap between their expectations and the reality of their family life as well as their emotional starvation. Uma in the typical Indian middle-class family and Melanie in the affluent American family feel alienated as they lack parental love and attention. Uma is viewed as a problem child in the family on account of her poor school record, and later, on account of her ordinary looks, which present a problem for finding her a bridegroom. Uma is unconsciously aware of the contrast between Aruna, her younger sister, and herself. She is often ridiculed by Aruna. Uma’s parents look upon Uma as she is blamed for the failure of marriage proposals, for which she is blamed problem. She can hardly get parental love. She cannot share her feelings with anyone in the family. When her brother is born, she is increasingly alienated from her parents because they look upon her merely as a maid to help in bringing up their darling son and to serve them tea, breakfast, etc. do their errands. Uma is looked upon as a liability. Deprived of social life, and being pinned down to household work, she finds solace in going back to her room and looking at her collection of Christmas cards. Uma, as an aging spinster, is seen as a burden in the family. Her father grumbles about the dowries he had to pay, to get her married, but she is still back at home. It is not her fault, but his own undue haste
and lack of proper consultation, with others about the boy's family and the boy. This naturally, results in her loneliness. Her parents use her for sundry services in the house, more as a maid-servant than as their daughter. She is treated as a slightly superior made rather that a daughter. She is called "slow-witted pumpkin head" She is seen as a liability because she cannot get married. She is often left alone. Uma is alone. MamaPappa have gone to the club to play bridge. Uma she does not have food with MamaPappa has her supper on a tray. "The cook has gone home early and left it for her on the veranda table" Uma feels anger, but she would not express it. She avoids interacting with MamaPappa, and feels estranged. She is deprived of interpersonal relationships, and mechanically goes on performing the daily chores. Her parents are absorbed in their own conjugal relationship or in the well-being of their son, Arun. The absence of her mother's love creates self-hatred in her. She once tries to commit suicide by drowning herself in the river. She is subjected to anger and scowls of her father, Aruna's jibes, her brother's tendency to avoid her, all of which influence her mental state. When alone, she wanders through the dark house because all the lights are switched off by MamaPappa. She tries to phone O'Henry memsahib but she is terrified that she may be discovered. The failure of her marriage turns her into an outcaste from the world of marriage. Uma is emotionally alienated from the world of her parents. She cannot connect either with her married younger sister or her brother. Like Uma, Melanie, in the household of an affluent American family,

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7 Anita Desai, *Fasting, Fasting*, P/98
experiences alienation from her parents, from her brother and also from Arun, who is clearly an outsider. She tries to hide her mental sickness, eating candy or ice-cream. Her parents hardly notice how she is poisoning herself. Like Uma, she also feels her being unwanted and lonely and alienated from her family. Both, Uma and Melanie suffer the alienation on account of indifference of their parents. Uma suffers quietly, but Melanie vociferously rejects anything cooked by her mother and rejects any attention by her.

IV.1.3. The Theme of Gender Discrimination:

There has been gender discrimination in Mama’s family, which she continues in her own family making Uma the victim of it. Mama tells her,

"In my day, girls in the family were not given sweets, nuts, good things to eat. If something special had been bought in the market, like sweets or nuts, it was given to the boys in the family" 8

The theme of gender discrimination is generally found in the Indian English fiction, as the Indian family universally cherishes the dream of having a son. The birth of a daughter is disappointing for the Indian parents because it entails fat dowry to be paid. The son is supposed to continue the lineage of the family, while a daughter is always looked upon as ‘the wealth of someone else's house’ the parents of Uma are not an exception to this feeling. Uma’s father thought it would be a son, when Mama was pregnant second time. So he fondly decides to name

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8 *Anita Desai, Fasting, Fasting, P/6*
would be son as Arun. But a girl-child is born, and disappointed, she is named Aruna. When the third time Mama becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son, the father, who is otherwise so serious and glum, cannot control his joy, and comes homes:

"Leaping over three chairs in the hall one after the other. " A boy,"
he screamed … a boy-boy! Arun, Arun” 9

At last! The birth of a son changes the mother’s [Mama’s] position in the house. She is now equal in status with Pappa. She, as if, won a medal giving birth to a son. There is a sea-change in the world of the family with the advent of a male child. They gather round mama’s bed, looking at this wonder:

“A son. The whole family came to a standstill. Around mama’s bed in the hospital, peering at this wonder” 10

Uma was also delighted to have a baby brother. For Mama are Papa, “Arun appeared to be the glue that held them together even more inextricably”11 The birth of a son proves the end of Uma’s education. So far, the girl-child in the family was washed and looked after by the “ayah” (a maid-servant), but Arun, the prize possession, could not be given to maid-servant’s care. Uma must look after the child, wash him, and clothe him and so on. Mama stops her school, telling her,

9 Anita Desai, *Fasting, Fasting*, P/17
10 Anita Desai, *Fasting, Fasting*, P/10
11 Anita Desai, *Fasting, Fasting*, P/130
"We are not sending you back to school, Uma. You are staying at home to help with Arun".\(^\text{12}\)

Uma’s mother tells her she would be happier at home, and pleads with her, "I need your help, Beti." Uma has to learn and keep in mind what MamaPappa want for breakfast, what fruit they like. She must put before Papa his finger-bowl after his breakfast. She was taught how to massage the child. Mama virtually uses Uma as a special maid for her son, while she herself continues to visit the club, decking herself with silks and jewelry, attending dinner parties and weddings. Gender discrimination in the case of Anamika, Uma’s cousin, ruins her life. Anamika is a beautiful girl, also a scholar who wins admission to Oxford. But the parents make use of this admission letter to get her married into a so-called good family. She is ill-treated, even beaten by her mother-in-law while her husband remains a dumb observer. The story of Anamika shows how the family of the in-laws can easily murder the bride and can claim a suicide on her part. Anamika’s mother-in-law says that Anamika poured kerosene on herself and set herself alight. The neighbors have quite different story to tell. She was dragged by the mother-in-law and the husband and set fire to her. In the opinion of Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan,

"…dowry deaths express socially sanctioned violence against women… which reinforces and is reinforced by the ideology of

\(^{12}\) Anita Desai, *Fasting, Fasting*, P/18

Melanie, in the American family, is dissatisfied and hurt because her mother would not ask her what she likes to eat. She has a grudge against everyone in the family. Her brother is preoccupied with his own fitness program. The father cooks what he likes, and mother pays more attention to Arun than her. In her case, it is more inattention than discrimination. She feels her mother should ask her what she likes but her mother does not realize this and she feels neglected by her parents.

**IV.2. Bye Bye Blackbird**

Anita Desai’s *Bye Bye Blackbird* treats immigrant experiences in England where the Indians go either for seeking jobs or for education. The protagonist, Adit, a Bengali young man, finds job in a tourist company in London. He falls in love with Sarah, the English girl; marries her and settles in the city. He is proud and very happy being in England, and finds a job as well as a wife. His wife, Sarah, employed in an educational institution, finds it difficult to face the native people of her own country. Walking through the streets, she tries hard to avoid people, brush off their questions, because she cannot proudly acknowledge her Indian husband. Even in the office of the school, she avoids personal talk with the colleagues. Adit, who is ambitious of shaping his career in the tourist industry,
keeps his social life restricted to the Indian market and Indian households in the city of London. He finally realizes the constraints he feels, and decides to go back to India. Dev, who has newly arrived in the city of London for higher education, is critical of the English and the city as well. He feels very uncomfortable in the London life. He feels that the Londoners, the English, are indifferent and uncommunicative and racial in their attitude to the Indians. Sarah, Adit’s wife, feels a loss of identity having married an Indian against the wishes of her parents. Adit, who is greatly enamored of English life-style and social milieu, finds it difficult to adapt to the alien culture. On the other hand, Dev, who is hostile and critical of the western culture is finally drawn to the life in London and succumbs to the influence of the other culture. Adit, Sarah (his wife), and Dev, all the three go through the phases of acceptance and rejection. If Adit and Dev feel alienated in the foreign country and its culture, Sarah, who is the native to the English soil, experiences alienation on account of her mixed marriage. Sarah has to face ridicule, taunts and mocking by the people of her country, even school children. Adit and Dev experience disparaging attitude of the native British, and all the three face identity crisis arising out of their socio-cultural situation. Anita Desai says,
"Of all my novels it is most rooted in experience and the least literary in derivation … practically, everything in it is drawn directly from my experience of living with immigrant Indians in London."  

Adit finally decides to go back to India taking his wife with him, while Dev occupies their house and becomes one of the Indians, who accept their immigrant status for the interest of their business, job or career. The immigration of the Indians or others in England, thus, creates a number of problems some of which are dealt with in this novel by the writer, forming the thematic structure of this novel.

**IV.2.1. The Theme of Racial Discrimination**

Adit and Dev are the examples of educated Indians who migrate to England for jobs, but being sensitive they are easily offended by the racial discriminating attitude of the native white people. Adit, to begin with, is quite nonchalant and dreams of being the citizen of this country. But, in his daily life, his movements are restricted to the Indian market places, and his social circle is restricted to the Indian families. Adit marries a British girl, Sarah, but, Sarah herself feels a sense of rejection and suffers ridicule at school. She furtively travels from home to school, and prefers to shop at big impersonal malls rather than at local market where she is afraid of encountering familiar people asking personal questions. Sarah’s act of marrying an Indian is a courageous act,

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14 Atma Ram, Interview with Anita Desai, "*Interviews and Indian writers*" (Calcutta : Writers Workshop, 1983), PP.21-23
especially in the 1960s, but she succumbs to the criticism and displeasure of her community and feels a sense of rejection. She is so susceptible to the social criticism that she is reduced to the position of a victim. She has doubts about what her real identity is. She questions herself:

"Who was she – Mrs. Sen who had been married in a red and gold Benares brocade sari, one burning, bronzed day in September, or Mrs. Sen, the Head’s secretary, who sent out the bills and took in the cheques, kept order in the school and was known for her efficiency? Both these creatures were frauds, each had a large, shadowed element of charade about it"\(^{15}\)

Sarah’s defensive attitude, her sense of guilt, invites ridicule even from the school children, who taunt her saying “hurry, hurry, Mrs. Scurry”\(^{16}\) which makes her dart through them. Sarah feels she must forget her life of past twenty-four years, but while in England, she has to play the double role. She feels as if she is on the stage.

Adit says he has become accustomed to the feeling of racial inferiority he is made to feel. Its daily experience has hardened him. He is used to being called ‘a wog’. He chooses to ignore the remarks of the English passersby, and advises Dev to do the same. Dev, who has newly arrived in London, is bitter and critical about the behavior of the British. He does not feel inferior to the British.

\(^{15}\) Anita Desai, *Fasting, Feasting*, P/36
\(^{16}\) Anita Desai, *Fasting, Feasting*, P/39
intellectually. But, eventually he is also tamed and he gradually succumbs to the influence of England.

Sarah’s mother, Mrs. Roscommo James, is unsympathetic to her daughter’s choice of a ‘colored husband’ when he visits the country house of Sarah’s parents, her father busies himself in the garden. Her mother is coldly cordial with him. The novel illustrates how the Indians are subjected to discrimination in the English society:

**IV.2.2. The Themes of the Loss of Identity and Nostalgia.**

Adit and Dev in *Bye, Bye Blackbird*, are examples of a number of Indians who migrated to the West in search of well-paid jobs and also escape from the chaos back at home, especially in the nineteen-fifties and sixties. They had to adapt to the culture of the West, very alien to them, which they found very difficult. Adit, who has a comfortable job in a tourist company, is initially very happy and dreams of leading prosperous life adopting England as his country. Dev, who newly arrives in England, is surprised to see how Adit has become immune to the humiliations at the hands of the white British. Adit tells Dev how he admires England and is quite unmindful of the treatment he or Indians like him get. He tells Dev, “I like the freedom a man has here. Economic freedom! Social freedom!”{17} He likes the pub, the Covent Garden, the opera house. He says he

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{17} Anita Desai, *Fasting, Feasting*, P/20
feels like a millionaire. The list of his likes goes on and on, and Dev harshly criticizes him calling him

"Bootlicking toady, spineless imperialist-lover. You would sell your soul and your passport too, for a glimpse at two shillings, of some draughty old stately home you'd probably vote for the Tory Government if you could...." 18

But, Adit does not realize that this fascination that he feels for the life in London, is not going to make him the ‘insider’, the integral part of English social life. He realizes that he has lost his identity in the world of the white man. That he hardly belongs here. Adit, the anglophile, suddenly changes his mood after the visit to his in-law’s house in the country. He looks at everything from a new point of view. The feeling of alienation, the loss of identity that he feels in the streets of London, in the market, everywhere, suddenly strikes him. He feels nostalgic for the Indian summer, for the glorious sunset. Back from the countryside, his view of London and the scenes and places he admired before drastically changes.

"The voices, laughter ringing out in the glittering white caves of the tube station had a sinister ring to them, profane and conspiratorial, like the laughter and voices of enemies and schemers" 19.

The posters at the tube stations such as ‘Nigger, go home’, which he used to ignore before, now he studies, and begins to feel like an ‘eternal immigrant’. He

18 Anita Desai, Fasting, Feasting, P/21
19 Anita Desai, Fasting, Feasting, P/177
used to be confident of his education, his feel for British history and poetry but now it is like a threadbare coat for him. Now he longs for Calcutta, "...its puja season, flying kites, on the terraces, jars of aromatic pickles..." Adit feels loss of identity in this foreign world in which he has to stick to the side-streets, Indian shops and hotels. He feels, stifled in this atmosphere. The news of the Indo-Pak war finally makes Adit break his tryst with England. He declares to Sarah, they must go back to India. He realizes the unreality of his life in England. He would like to go back to India, in his natural familiar surrounding where he can find his identity. But this sudden change in him, his hankering after his own country, is sudden without any preamble. He says to Sarah,

"I can’t stand it Sarah. I tell you. I’ v had enough. It’s all got to end now. There must be a change. A big change. I’ve got to do it ... you ... you understand?" 

Adit becomes aware of the unreality of little India in London, existing in shops and vegetable stalls. The loss of identity is also felt by Sarah. She feels as if she is performing a role on a stage. She feels lost because she cannot naturally mix with her colleagues at the office, as she wants to avoid personal questions. She feels sad because she has been living inauthentic life. She deliberately shops at big malls because there she can maintain her anonymity.

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20 Anita Desai, *Fasting, Feasting*, P/179
21 Anita Desai, *Fasting, Feasting*, P/197
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She is not herself because she finds herself playing one role or the other and never herself.

“Who was she? Mrs. Sen who had been married in a red and gold Benares brocade sari one burning bronzed day in September, or Mrs. Sen the Head’s Secretary, who sent out bills and took in the cheques, kept order in the school and was known for her efficiency? Both these creatures were frauds, each had a large, shadowed element of charade about it”\(^{22}\)

Both, Adit and Sarah, feel that they have lost their identity, that they are living inauthentic life. Adit is nostalgic for his country, which is not the case of Sarah. She has no nostalgic memory like that of Adit. But, she is nostalgic about the social life she freely enjoyed before. She decides to go to India with Adit, because there she can have chance to live her own life.

**IV.2.3. The Theme of Culture Conflict.**

Adit and Sarah get married for love, but they begin to realize the cultural difference when they actually start living together. Adit, to begin with, is enthusiastic about his adapted country. He feels that he is competent to cope with the new environment. But he begins to find how this adaptation to the alien culture is difficult. Audit ignores racial remarks and comments. He does not allow the bickering in his subconscious mind to come to surface. He realizes the

\(^{22}\) Anita Desai, *Fasting, Feasting*, P/36
difference between the sophisticated English culture and the gregarious, outgoing Indian culture. His last visit to his in-law’s house makes him realize this. Sarah’s father studiously ignores Adit and his friends, busying himself in the garden. The mother of Sarah politely offers tea, etc. to the visiting guests, but she too tries her best to hide her annoyance. Sarah is all the time on the defensive when Audit and his friends are boisterously enjoying jokes, and informally move about in the house and in the garden. Adit, being an Indian, cannot enjoy the privilege of being the son-in-law. When he finally visits his father-in-law’s house, he realizes his ‘otherness’ as an Indian, and cannot feel at ease, or rather his in-laws do not feel at ease when he and his friends visit them. He is married to Sarah, but he is not sure whether Sarah grants him equal status. for example, Sarah does not share with him her childhood play things like “one eared pandas and large jigsaw puzzles.” 23 Adit experiences a kind of culture shock, which makes him nostalgic about his own country. He suddenly begins to realize disparity between his native culture and the culture of his adapted country. He is reminded of Indian landscape, rocks and barren earth, the Indian cattle, the rivers like Mahanadi, and Brahmaputra’s floods. He hears ‘raving of peacocks and jackals’. Back at home in London, he listens to Bismillah’s Shehenai, and refuses to eat London-made ‘mango-Chutney’, which, he says, is made for ‘Anglo-Indian colonels and their memsahibs.’ [P/175] 25 Otherwise, Sarah remembers, he had finished one whole bottle of it in three days. Adit

23 Anita Desai, Fasting, Feasting, P/136
talked about the altar in the house, the widowed mother, spending most of the
day at it, ‘puja’ season in Calcutta, flying kites on the terraces, and jars of
aromatic pickles. Sarah is wonderstruck to listen to this splendor of cultural
variety. She realizes how Adit had kept hidden all this yearning shut up in his
heart for so long. Adit longs to see the fireworks and lines and lines of oil-lamps
in Diwali, Holy romp of flying colours when Bella, the Indian neighbor, angry with
Samar for picking up and bringing a slab of marble and remarks,

"… you’re Indians, you’re foreigners, you’ve got to be careful, you
do, and what’s a joke to you looked like a dirty Asian’s cheek to the
bobbies, and how would you feel then?"  

Adit is suddenly struck by this reality of their being Indians, he groans with sorrow
and holding his hands, he sorrowfully says,

"Oh. God, why does everything have to come to this … that we’re
Indians and you’re English and we’re living in your country and
therefore we’ve all got to behave in a special way, different from
normal people?"

Dev, on the other hand, appears to be in the first phase of attraction of the
Western life of affluence. While Adit feels frustration and longs for his homeland,
Dev appears to discover charms of the English scene. To begin with, Dev frets
against the British way of life. In the Western culture privacy is very important.

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\(^{24}\) Anita Desai, *Fasting, Feasting*, P/182

\(^{25}\) Anita Desai, *Fasting, Feasting*, P/183
The English have a habit of "guarding their privacy as they guarded their tongues from speaking and their throats from catching cold". Dev compares the Western culture with the Indian one, and is annoyed to realize how in the West "everyone is a stranger and lives in hiding". Dev tries to compare and evaluate the Western culture in terms of his own native culture. He is impatient with the feeling of being an unwanted immigrant, but he too becomes enchanted with the English environment. His attitude of aggressive immigrant changes after the visit to Sarah’s country house, after this visit, England appears to him the land of new vistas, and opportunities. Dev, thus, enters the phase which Adit went through after getting a job and getting married.

Sarah experiences culture conflict through her marriage. Her marriage to Adit makes her shed her name, her ancestry and her identity. She is afraid of the contempt of her own people. She avoids meeting her friends and acquaintances. She is reluctant to discuss her Indian husband with her colleagues in the office of the school, which invites the comment, from one of her colleagues, "If she’s that ashamed of having an Indian husband, why did she go and marry him."

Adit, Sarah and Dev, all the three go through the phases of culture conflict, while Adit and Dev lose their identity in the alien culture, Sarah loses her identity in her own native society as she has migrated to an alien culture.
IV.3. Thematic Analysis of Shaharnush Parsipur’s *Dog and The Long Winter*

Shaharnush Parsipur’s novel *Dog and The Long Winter* (2011) was published in 1974, but due to the Iranian Revolution its printing was stopped. In 1990, it was given permission for printing, but as it was printed the writer was banished out of Iran and the novel was banned. It was then reprinted in the US and other European countries.

*Dog and the Long Winter* is the fiction narrated by a girl in a middle-class Iranian family, who is greatly influenced by her elder brother, Hossein, a young man influenced by the leftist political and social thought. He is revolutionary, but believes in bringing about social revolution gradually as technology brings about change in society and prepares the minds of people for accepting new ideas and thought. He is imprisoned along with the other young men influenced by the Marxist thought. But even among them he is isolated because of his philosophy of gradual change in society. His father, being conservative and reluctant to go against the established regime, is terrified of the government’s action against his son. Hossein is jailed for his revolutionary ideas. His mother and sister, the narrator of the story, go to visit him in the prison. After Hossein’s release, his father would like him to take a job in the Registry office. He even tries to use influence to get the job for Hossein. But Hossein does not accept it. Hossein’s revolutionary ideas make him unpopular even among the relations in the family. His uncle is hurt by Hossein’s arguments. He has to leave his house under this
tense atmosphere, and he goes to live with the kindly neighbor, Mrs. Budrolssadat. When his health is greatly deteriorated, Hossein is finally brought back home, but it is transpired that he is affected by serious disease, and except for Hoori, the narrator of the story (his sister), no one goes near him. Hossein’s conversations with Hoori bring out his political and social views. Hossein, who is in love with Mehri, the daughter of col. Gazvini, attends Mehri’s marriage, but he creates a scene there, and Hoori takes him away. Fahimeh, the eldest daughter of Afkhami family, secretly loves Hossein, but she is an ordinary looking girl, who serves, as a nurse in a hospital. She is the one who is called to take Hossein to hospital.

The novel is the tragic story of Hossein, and his younger sister, Hoori, (the narrator), who becomes like Hossein following her own instincts. She also dies premature death. The last section of the novel presents Hoori living in the house of dead, which is like an office of the Dead. From there, she travels to her grave finally to rest there in peace for thousand years.

IV.3.1. The Theme of Alienation.

Hossein the son of Agha Jan and Khanom Jan, is well-educated, and has leftist leanings. His father expects him to join the Registry office, and be settled. His elder brother, Ali, is already settled in America. Hossein’s family has middle-class aspirations. They would like their son to get a decent clerical job, get married and be settled. But, Hossein is radical in his thinking. Though he has
leftist leanings, and would like his society to change, he is not really fanatical young man. He would not like to force change on the people. He thinks when the modern means of production, for example tractor and other machines, are introduced in the lives of the people, it will bring about change in the thinking of the people. They will gradually accept the new principles and there will be social change. But, Hossein’s radicalist friends do not appreciate his point of view. They are for bringing about sudden change in the society. Hossein is imprisoned for his radical, leftist thinking along with other young men. But, even among these young men, he is isolated because of his views. Hossein, thus, feels a lineated from not only his friends, but also from his family. Back at home, Hossein is drawn into argument with his great uncle. Hossein looks at change from the scientific notion of cause and effect. He points out how the Iranian society has remained backward for centuries by forming a bubble around themselves. He points out that the Iranians have remained backward because they have stayed behind in technological advancement. They are still in the Stone Age, he says. He contrasts the Western society with the Iranians and says that they respect each other, and this is what the Iranians lack. But, Hossein alienates himself by criticizing the elders. He defeats his father’s efforts to get for him a job in the registry office. He loves Mehri, but he cannot open his mind to her because he feels he can only bring misfortune to her. He is thus, alienated from Mehri. The doctor tells his parents that Hossein has a serious disease. The mother avoids

29 Shaharnush Parsipur, *Dog and The Long Winter*, P/30
going to see him because she is afraid of her infant getting contaminated by him. His father also does not come to see him. It is only his younger sister, Hoori, who stays in his room, brings him food and talks to him. Hossein is gradually alienated from the family and friends.

Hoori, Hossein’s sister, is also gradually alienated from the family. When Hossein dies, she believes her father is responsible for his death. Looking at her father praying after Hossein’s death, she says.

"I did not like him the father at all. It was an awful discovery for me but it was also true. I did not like him and he was no longer important in my life." 30

She accuses her father saying, “Hossein did not die, Agha Jan, we killed him; I mean you killed him” 31 Since then, She is alienated from her father and her family. Hoori gradually, gets alienated on account of her challenging the tradition; which Hossein has taught her. She tells Ali, her brother, that changing the boundaries, accepting the change is necessary. She says she is tired of being an object waiting for a husband. "I want to become human. I don't know why I should not be a human, a person” 32 this is against the current of the traditional notion of her great grand Uncle and people like him, who refuse to accept women as humans. She must get rid of the notion that a woman is just a sexual object.

30 Shaharnush Parsipur, Dog and The Long Winter, P/146
31 Shaharnush Parsipur, Dog and The Long Winter, P/147
32 Shaharnush Parsipur, Dog and The Long Winter, P/168
She would not like to run away, but like Hossein she would face the society. Hossein was alienated because he tried to swim against the traditional culture and social norms. Hoori, who is estranged from the family, becomes feverish, and in her feverish state she hallucinates. Even in this state she realizes how trying to contact others is getting difficult. She feels

"...there is a wall between you and others. You cannot cut it open at all, to destroy it there is always a misunderstanding." 33

She hallucinates about an ancient woman inside her; sitting by a cave, with a child in her belly. She creeps into the cave, hungry and lonely. This hallucination, just before her death, suggests loneliness and alienation of the womanhood.

**IV.3.2. The Theme of Social Evolution and Change**

Hossein has difference of opinion with his comrade friends in prison. His friends want a sudden, violent change in the society. But Hossein believes that society is not one human being. It is made up of a variety of individuals. In fact Hossein talks about still more expanded notion of society, which contains all the generations of the past and the future. It is not possible that all the members of society change their ideas, direction at the same time. Hossein argues that society evolves. It does not have a single mind. There are young members and the old ones. Naturally, there can be a conflict between those who want change and those who would like to stick to the old ways. Some people, according to

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33 Shaharnush Parsipur, *Dog and The Long Winter*, P/206
him, consider their belief to be a sanctuary, and do not see that belief evolves as the time passes. Every member of society has a mind of his /her own. For this reason the society has to make compromises. Regarding some of its principles. It is true that certain rules or conventions of a society may come in conflict with individual freedom. And yet these individuals have to obey the rules. When the whole era changes, these rules become obsolete. Hossein gives an example of the system of marriage. He gives example of the maid--servant Rubab, who is made pregnant by the son of the house where she serves. There can be many like Rubab, who are victims of the class division and poverty in the society. People like her must be dissatisfied with the rules and codes of the society.

Hossein underlines the theme of the conflict between the old and the new over the rules and conventions that go against the individual welfare. Hossein argues that society should be given modern means of production such as tractors. Let them generate wealth, and change their life style. Then these people can accept change or evolve the new ways on their own. He pities the old men gathered outside in the veranda of the house. Hossein is open-minded enough to accept Mrs. Badrolssadat's notion of God, because it is born out of the soil, a notion of compassionate and merciful God.

After the death of Hossein, Hoori, who was in a way his disciple, realizes what Hossein said about one being an object. Hoori refuses to be an object, a sexual object especially. She tells her brother, Ali, that Hossein did not go to America because he wanted to change this tradition which objectified people...
Hoori objects to women being treated as secondary citizens. She would like to be ‘human’, she says. She would like to get rid of her definition as an object, and the so-called reputation which has tied her hands. When Ali tells her to come to America with him, she say, it is running away. She would not like to be second-hand citizen going to America and losing her identity.

There is a remarkable and bold change in Hoori. She accuses the family for killing her baby, and when Ali asks her what about it, she says "the baby belongs to a thousand years ago"\(^\text{34}\)

In the bed, sick and delirious, Hoori hallucinates about being pregnant. She dreams an ancient human being, a woman, inside her, sitting crouched up, with a child in her stomach, without knowing where the child had come from. Her hallucination, in her feverish state, underlines the state of mind of eternal woman worried about her child, who seeks security. Her last dream is her father hitting her and she herself fighting him off. Hoori represents here the rebellious new generation throwing off authority. The woman in her dream is she herself, struggling to assert a woman’s right to have her baby. Hoori breathes her last in this delirious state of mind. But, she is now a spirit of an eternal woman. Like Hossein, Hoori’s character also undergoes a change. When alive, she told Ali that you must accept change, or you would be responsible for what happens. It may cause destruction. As a modern girl, she refuses to be an object waiting for a husband. Agha Jan, her father, listens to all this and remarks that she has

\(^{34}\) Shaharnush Parsipur, *Dog and The Long Winter*, P/170
become a shrew and does not care about reputation. Both Hossein, and after him Hoori, struggle against the stagnant society. Hossein appears to be worried about the problem of bridging the gap between the traditional society that clings to the old ways, and the minority in the society that wishes to bring about change. Referring to the people sitting and talking on the veranda, Hossein remarks

"And these guys are pitiful … these people who are sitting up there have neither been thrown out of the main body nor are they in conflict with the new body that is forming, rather they sit there waiting to be elected, when they are they will defend any principle no matter what." 35

Hossein criticizes the attitude of the common people like his Agha Jan, great uncle and others who accept life as it is. They avoid conflict. But he is also sympathetic about their mind-set. He knows change cannot be abruptly introduced. He would like to bring about change gradually, after bringing in technology.

IV.3.3. The Themes of cultural Assimilation and Mental Subjugation:

Hossein, though moderate in his thinking, is a leftist thinker. He does not commit himself to being an Atheist or a non-believer in God. He agrees that most people believe in God and have some notion of what God is like. When Hoori tells him about Mrs. Badrolssadat’s remark that he (Hossein) will believe in God,

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35 Shaharnush Parsipur, *Dog and The Long Winter*, P/40
which is quite human. He does not contradict her. He accepts that everybody has some notion of God. He also admits that Mrs. Badrolssadat’s, notion of God can be acceptable. She says God grows within you. This notion of God, he says, is native, born out of soil’. It is like a Jasmine shrub rising out of the soil. The Iranians believe this notion and cry. He (God) is one with nature. He bathes in a river, sits in the moonshine and listens to the sound of crickets. Hossein accepts this notion of God has saved the Iranian people from being collapsed. Iran was attacked by the Mongolians. Iranians described Changiz Khan’s Killing of their people as “God’s whip” but after four generations, Mongolians were assimilated in the Iranian culture and wrote poetry in Iranian language. They became one with the Iranians. This is how Arab invaders were also assimilated in Iran. Hossein gives credit of this process of assimilation to the Iranian culture. But Hussein contrasts the Mongolian and Arab invasions with the invasion of the Western countries. The white man’s conquest of Iran was different in that the white man studied the native culture carefully. They as if held the country and its people under a microscope. They studied every aspect of the Iranian culture and society. They did this with their technology and their polite smile. The Western conqueror could not be influenced by the religious mourning ceremonies, which is quite human. He thinks this notion of God because they have studied and written books about these things. They know what economic, political, and social reasons are responsible for the rituals and traditions. The western master uses this knowledge to manipulate the native population. The western master controls
and guides the thinking and imagination of the native people. Hossein tells Hoori how the Iranians were treated by the Western power like a mouse in a cage. Hossein is worried about this state of being in a cage like a mouse. He himself is like the mouse trapped in a laboratory, and he suffers because his fellow mice, like his father, uncle and friends, who do not know that they are in the cage. He is uneasy on account of their ignorance of their condition. He is very unhappy that the Western power has badly humiliated his countrymen. Hossein feels being in a trap and this very knowledge makes him feel helpless. His other countrymen, like his father, uncle, etc. do not even know that they are in a cage. He is afraid that the radicalist fighters, in their ignorance, wage war forgetting that they are in a cage like trap, and they are sent to the "slaughter house group by group"\(^{36}\)

Hossein is very unhappy with the state of affairs in the fight against the foreign conqueror. The earlier conquests of Iran led to cultural assimilation, because Mongolians and Arabs adapted to the Iranian language and literature, and became a part of their culture. But the British conquest did not lead to such cultural assimilation. The western culture was very different from the Iranian culture, and, besides, the Westerners were not interested in spreading their culture or accepting the Iranian one. They, dispassionately studied the native aspects of life with an intention of turning the natives into ‘Marionettes’, Hossein almost panics at the thought of how humiliated Iranians are, and feels on the

\(^{36}\) Shaharnush Parsipur, *Dog and The Long Winter*, P/42
brink of losing his faith. It is his personal tragedy as well as the tragedy of the militant young men, who hardly realize that they are in a trap.

### IV.3.4. Theme of Tradition vs Modernity

Hossein was pitted against the people like his father who preferred to live with ‘my head down’ (he says) He the father never made it his business to question his bosses, accepting whatever is around him, in his life, as right. Agha Jan, Hossein’s father, is a traditionalist. He is enraged when Hoori accuses him that he was responsible for Hossein’s death. Agha Jan quotes example of Adam, who was rejected by God and thrown out of heaven. Young men like Hossein are like rebellious children of God. They want to change everything at once. They think they are the center and the world moves is around them. Hossein and his likes, are according to him, "the filthy ones…. The disobedient kids," like Noah’s son laughing at his father. Hossein’s father believes that God punishes the disobedient ones. Agha Jan, the traditionalist, wants order, which the prophets have created. Young men like Hossein wish to destroy this order. He claims that Hossein was killed by the order which he challenged; because Hossein was trying to swim against the current of the river.

Agha Jan represents the old guard who meekly submitted to the foreign invasions and obeyed ager-old structure of the feudal society. Like all the others, Agha Jan would never dream of questioning ‘the bosses and those up there.’ Whatever is around him, for Agha Jan and his generation, was the right thing.
Chapter IV: Comparative Study of Anita Desai’s Novels: *Fasting, Feasting Bye, Bye Blackbird* and Shahrnush Parsipur’s *Dog and The Long Winter*

Agha Jan cannot understand the change in Hossein, who was Hossein, a dutiful and studious young man, changed into a radical young man. He denied God, began reading revolutionary books, he bought them and studied them, which totally changed him. The taxi-driver, who drove Hossein’s mother to the prison to meet Hossein, accuses the English education, which he believes, turned the heads of young men; making them faithless. Hossein, a dutiful and studious young man, changed into a radical young man. On account of this reading. On account of his reading. He denied God, began reading revolutionary books, bought them and studied them, which totally changed him. The taxi driver, who drove Hossein’s mother to the prison to meet. Hossein, accuses the English education, which he believes, turned the heads of young men; making them faithless.

Hossein, in fact, is a sensible young man, who tells his father and uncle and others, how the Iranians have suffered conquests and remained backward because they have remained behind in technology that they, the Iranians, never came out of their old traditional shell. According to Hussein they are stuck up in the Stone Age, when the West is thinking of outer space. He points out that in the West there is equality, people respect each other’s; they respect thoughts and opinions of others. And this is what people lack in Iran. Hossein points out how in Iran there is gross inequality. He gives example of the maid-servant Robab in his own house. She has been sexually exploited by the rich, and people like her can never be treated equal in the traditional Iranian society. Hussein analyses the
problem faced by society when the younger generation comes into conflict with the older one as a result of social change. The older generation feels threatened by the action of the young, and the society, therefore, tries to bring in compromise over some principles. There are then some established codes against which, eventually, the young generation rebels. There is contradicting body formed in the society against the traditional one. Hossein is not an outright revolutionary. He is ready to give time to the old body to understand him and the young men like him. He is unsure of the new axis because he is doubtful whether it has come up from within the society. Hossein is also worried about the potential of the Iranian people, who are still stuck up with old means to plough the land. He believes people should be given modern gadgets like tractors, (meaning modern means of production), and then they will naturally reach new way of thinking. As it is the people who are stuck up with old tools of living cannot be expected to understand revolutionary ideas of the younger generation.

Hussein also points out the difference between the conquest of Iran by the Mongols, and that of the West in modern age. The western conquerors are qualitatively different. They have studied the Iranians as if putting their society under the microscope. They know the native people much more deeply than the native people know themselves. They possess technology and are very polite and smiling. This conquest by the West is different because they have studied the culture and traditions and written books, about them, and they use this knowledge like the playing cards, reading cards in your hands with their
knowledge of science and technology. Hossein, therefore, feels like a mouse in the cage, he being the representative of the Iranian people. He feels as if the Western conquerors have put him and the likes of him in a laboratory. He feels that his revolutionary friends do not understand that they are in a sort of cage. Hossein thinks that young men must understand this situation, and they can fight against it. There was another issue of tradition and change related to Hoori. Ali had taken her to the doctor for check-up, suspecting she might be pregnant. Hoori and the neighboring young man, have shown their naked bodies to each other, and the boy had written about this in his note-book. Agha Jan is full of hatred for Hoori, while Hoori is quite nonchalant. Ali had taken her to the doctor, but there was nothing wrong with her. When Ali says to Hoori that this (Iranian) society is traditional, Hoori argues that he (Ali) forgets all about traditions when he leaves for the USA, and remembers them only after coming back. She reminds him that Hossein stayed in Iran to change this tradition. She indirectly charges young men like Ali of escaping, while Hossein remained in the country here to fight for reforms. She plainly tells Ali that she does not like being an object waiting for a husband. Hoori is walking in the footsteps of Hossein. She would assert herself as a human being, a person in her own right. She does not like to remain a sexual object in the eyes of the traditional society. She does not like her father’s talk of reputation, which turns her into one of the sheep in the herd. She boldly asserts, if it is disgrace then she seeks this disgrace. When Ali says she should come to America with him, if she has to assert her individuality,
she reacts saying it is running away. Then the society here, in Iran would remain the same. Who would fight for change? She refuses to be second-hand citizen. Hoori very boldly says that she is pregnant. But, she is not really pregnant, because when Ali asks her about the baby her answer is characteristic. She says, "The baby? It belongs to a thousand years ago."37

Hoori does not stop only with this staggering statement about a child. She holds Ali’s feet and says these people have murdered Hossein. Her father is enraged. Agha Jan accuse Hossein and Hoori as disobedient kids. He gives example of Noah, who disobedient kids. He gives example of Noah, who disowned his son because he laughed at the father. He is enraged against the young men like Hossein, who challenge tradition and want to change everything. He tries to defend order. He refer to young men like Hossein, as a bunch of infidels. Agha Jan is one of the majority of Iranians, who would submit to the circumstances with head down. Hossein and Hoori’s revolutionary ideas are unpalatable to the traditional people of older generation. Hossein and Hoori, both are martyrs to the new wave of thinking.

IV.3.5. The Themes of Death and Love

Ali and Hoori go to visit Hossein’s grave after their lunch in a hotel. As they go they come across a corpse being carried in an ambulance. Ali remarks on the meaninglessness of life. It is finished like a dream. They visit the tomb of

37 Shaharnush Parsipur, Dog and The Long Winter, P/170
Hossein, where Ali starts crying. Hoori takes a walk outside with a man, and their conversation turns towards death. Once you accept death you can live life with serenity. The man argues for accepting death without worries. Death should be taken as ever present. Even Tolstoy was scared at the moment of death. Nezami, the writer, has also described death. He reminds Hoori about the story of Farhad, and points out how love stories are closely connected with death. The origin of love lies in death. Hoori, walking with the man talks about love. The man says she consumes love like a drug. Hoori asks him to kiss her. He offers to walk Hoori to her house. The man Hoori encountered reminded her of Manouchehr, Who once tried to seduce her but this memory was not palatable to Hoori. She does not like to go to the cemetery. She is reminded how Hossein’s love story also culminated into death Hossein was in love with Mehri, but Hossein’s illness and his being confined in Mrs. Badrolssadat’s house puts a question mark on their love story. Mehri finally gets married. Hossein goes to attend this marriage, but his going there might prove awkward, so Hoori takes him away though he pleads that he simply wants to congratulate Mehri.

In this novel by Parsipur the theme of death and love are woven together. Fahimeh, the daughter of Mrs. Afkhami, is very much in love with Hossein. But she is an ordinary looking girl. She works as a nurse in a hospital. Her mother also tries hard to bring about this union. Fahimeh is already past twenty years and she would be considered an old maid by the Iranian social standard. Fahimeh really suffers because Hossein has not even spoken to her. She was
not good looking but she was certainly a good-natured girl. She remains secluded and rarely mixes with Neighbors. When Hossein is released from jail, Mrs. Afkhami begins to visit Khanom Jan, Hossein’s mother. She even starts sending cooked dishes, soup, etc. to Khanom Jan’s house. Fahimeh has told Hoori and others not to let Hossein know that she loves him, because she does not want his pity. Hossein’s condition worsens day by day. He starts hallucinating. When Hossein is normal he feels sad that he has become such a trouble for all. When Hossein’s condition worsens, they have to call Fahimeh from the hospital she is the one who takes care of Hossein in his last days. She comes to nurse Hossein on her own, though her mother does not like it. Fahimeh love for Hossein is certainly genuine and exemplary. The story of Hossein, the revisionary young man, is thus a tragic story of death and unrequited love.
Chapter IV: Comparative Study of Anita Desai’s Novels: Fasting, Feasting Bye, Bye Blackbird and Shahrnush Parsipur’s Dog and The Long Winter

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