CHAPTER: V

CONCLUSIONS
Conclusions

This thesis is a comparative study of the themes reflected in some selected novels of the Indian English writer Anita Desai, and the selected fiction of the Iranian women writers Shaharnush Parsipur and Zoya Pirzad, with a view to finding out similarities and differences in relation to the themes reflected in the fiction of their two different cultures.

The Indian and the Iranian Socio-cultural aspects are quite different from each other, in terms of religion, Social conventions and cultural practices. Yet, so far as the life of women is concerned, both the societies are basically patriarchal. Like India, Iran has also gone through the experience of foreign invasions. And like India, Iran too was under Western domination. Parsipur’s protagonist, Hossein, rightly says that the militant Iranians fight blindly because they do not know they themselves are in a cage and their white oppressors are watching and studying them as if in a laboratory. Although the social and religious aspects of the Indian and Iranian society are different, the women in both the countries face the same constraints and male chauvinistic attitude towards them. The novelists have portrayed the life of the middle-class women and housewives delineating respective socio-cultural aspects of their life.

Anita Desai has very effectively tried in her novels to capture the intense emotional life of her female protagonists, who try to find their identity in the basically oppressive patriarchal world. She appears to have a good grasp of
Indian wedding ceremony, rituals, funerals, cultural practices, system of education etc., which she reveals in her fiction. What is more important is her deep understanding of the social and psychological predicament the Indian women face in their married life. She is able to put her characters in the real-life social contexts. Her novels deal with a variety of themes through the representation of her characters.

Similarly, we come across themes related to the life of the women protagonists in the fiction of the Iranian women writers Zoya Pirzad and Shaharnush Parsipur, which also relate to the experiences of their women protagonists. The social and cultural aspects of the Indian and the Iranian communities are different even though the families portrayed in both belong to the middle-class or the high middle-class society. The Indian and the Iranian Communities, both, are, however, patriarchal communities, in which women have to face male dominance, and the norms of social life expected in their respective communities. Women of the middle-classes in India, especially during the post-independent period are well-educated, as we see from the characters presented by Anita Desai, such as Nanda Kaul, Bim (or Bimla), Sita, Sarla and others, who are aware of their individuality and can, occasionally, assert themselves. In Iran also the women of the middle-classes, especially after the revolution, have had education. But, this does not mean that the women in these two countries escape patriarchal dominance and even oppression or cruelty. There are, obviously,
cultural differences; and different socio-religious practices. The themes reflected in the fiction of Anita Desai, and the Iranian Women writers relate to the experiences of women protagonists in both the countries in their family life. These themes are more or less common, as they concern the patriarchal set-up, but they may differ in the degree of intensity felt by the women and their reaction to these themes.

V.1. Theme of Incompatibility

The most common theme in the family life of women, whether in India or Iran is the theme of Incompatibility. In Anita Desai’s Cry, the Peacock, the female protagonist, Maya, suffers incompatibility in her married life, on account of her intellectual, over-aged and unemotional husband, who does not understand her emotional and physical needs. She is emotionally starved and physically dissatisfied and driven to madness. She would like to have ordinary family life, with children of her own, which, for her, is the life of fulfillment. The Cry of the peacock symbolizes death, and Maya is obsessed with the idea of death, which is prophesied by an Albino astrologer. In Where Shall We Go This Summer?, Anita Desai’s protagonist Sita finds the life in the city incompatible. She had led a secluded life on the island of Manori, away from any city. It does not equip her to deal with the life in the large city community, where there is violence. Her reaction to everything in the city life is extreme. Nanda Kaul, in Fire on the Mountain, has come to live in Kasauli, in Himachal Pradesh, to seek escape from
her incompatible and oppressive family life, especially on account of her unfaithful husband, who was the Vice-chancellor of the University.

In the novel *In Custody* Anita Desai’s protagonist Deven and his wife are also in an incompatible married life, because Deven can hardly afford comfortable life style that Sarla craves for. Deven himself struggles to live between fantasy and reality.

There is Incompatibility in the relationship between Clarice, and her husband and children in the Iranian writer, Zoya Pirzad’s novel *Things We Left Unsaid*.

Clarice is a well-educated housewife, who is the lover of literature, but her husband is an engineer in an oil refinery, who has no interest in books. There is hardly any dialogue between them beyond the talk of food and the children. In Parsipur’s *Women Without Men*, there is Incompatibility in the relationship of Farrokhlaqua and her husband, which finally leads to the husband’s death.

V.2. Theme of Alienation:

The theme of alienation is very poignantly expressed in Anita Desai’s *Cry the Peacock*, in which Maya, feels greatly alienated in her married life due to the intellectuality and dryness of her over-aged husband. She can hardly make him understand her emotional needs, her craving for a normal married life with a child of her own. She increasingly feels alienated from him as he teaches her his
philosophy of detachment. In Desai’s novel, *Where Shall We Go this Summer?*, again, the protagonist, Sita, feels alienation and a sense of withdrawal in the life of the metropolitan city like Bombay, where she experiences violence, callousness and complacency. In Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* also we can see a sense of detachment and alienation experienced by Nanda Kaul, who is hurt by her husband’s infidelity and her children’s selfishness, as they remember her only to saddle her with some responsibility. Even the little girl Raka, her grandchild, develops sense of alienation on account of the violence of her father who gets drunk and beats his wife.

In the Iranian novelist Zoya Pirzad’s fiction, the protagonist Clarice feels alienation in her married life, especially when she reads her son Armen’s letter to his girlfriend. She appears to exist for her husband and children only for her work in the kitchen. Her husband and children take her for granted. Even in Shaharnush Parsipur’s fiction, *Women Without Men*, her female protagonist Farrokhlaqua feels alienated from her husband on account of his masculine domination and teasing her about her menopause. In her other novel, *Dog and the Long Winter*, Hoori, the daughter in the family feels alienated in her family on account of her radical thinking influenced by her brother, Hossein. He is also alienated from his family on account of his revolutionary thinking.
V.3. Theme of Betrayal

In *Cry, the Peacock*, Anita Desai’s protagonist Maya, feels, betrayed not only by her husband but also by her father who gets her married with the over-aged man, who hardly understands her own emotional needs. Maya cannot detach herself from the world around her and her sense of involvement with it. She is horrified with the idea of writing for another incarnation to have the fruit of this one. She feels betrayed because she is frustrated in her married life.

In fact, the female protagonists in Anita Desai’s fiction do feel betrayed for one reason or the other. Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* feels out of her element in the metropolitan city like Bombay. Uma in *Fasting, Feasting* is betrayed by her own parents for their own selfish purpose.

In the Iranian fiction, the protagonist, Clarice, feels a sense of betrayal when she realizes that her mother came to live with her not because of love for her, but to find a match for her grand-daughter. And Hoori, in *Dog and the Long Winter* feels betrayed by her father who, she thinks, is responsible for the death of her brother.

V.4. Theme of Vulnerability

The female protagonists appear to be emotionally vulnerable in the friction, of both, Anita Desai and the Iranian women writers. Maya in Anita Desai’s *Cry the Peacock* is emotionally vulnerable because she craves for her
husband's company, but he cannot be her companion. She grows schizophrenic on account of her husband’s ignorance of her emotional and physical needs. He looks upon sexual relation with horror. Sita, in Where Shall We Go This Summer? also grow emotionally vulnerable. She is horrified at the game of violence and mock fight the children play. She is distraught looking at the wounded young one of an eagle attacked by the crows; and she is in tears when her daughter destroys the water-colour paintings.

In the Iranian novelist Zoya Pirzad’s fiction, the protagonist Clarice is also emotionally vulnerable. She is hurt reading her son’s letter, and by her husband, who says he hates his mother does not understand her feelings. In Parsipur's Women without Men the protagonist Mahadokht is emotionally disturbed by the sexual scene between a fifteen year old maid servant and a male-servant. The female protagonists like Hoori, Farrokhlaqua and Munis are all shown to be emotionally vulnerable, which leads to their suffering or violence. Hoori is hurt by her father's treatment of Hossein, which leads to his death. Munis, a simple girl, is rendered vulnerable by her mother feeding her wrong notions about sex.

V.5. Theme of Loneliness and Withdrawal

The women protagonists in the fiction of Anita Desai appear to experience loneliness and withdrawal in their life. Raka, the child, in Fire on the Mountain is lonely and uncommunicative on account of her horrifying and violent relationship of her parents. As a result she is attracted towards the scenes of desolation in
nature, and the fire that breaks out in the forest. Her great-grandmother experiences the same loneliness after her long life of duty and obligation and experience of betrayal and rejection. When Maya, in *Cry, the Peacock*, realizes how there cannot be communication and emotional understanding between herself and her husband, she feels a sense of withdrawal from her husband. Even in a party, her husband Gautama talks disparagingly about women. When Gautama says love is merely attachment, she cannot understand how to connect with him.

Mahadokht in the Iranian novel *Women Without Men* also withdraws from human relationship and surrealistically changes herself into a tree. Similarly, Munis leaves her parents’ house and becomes a recluse, dying twice surrealistically and withdrawing herself from the family scene.

**V.6. Themes of Illusion and Reality**

The female protagonists in the fiction of Anita Desai experience disenchantment or the loss of their illusion, and come face to face with reality. Uma, for example, in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, had an illusion of magic power of the island house of her father, where she could keep her child unborn. But after her visit to the island, she is disillusioned and accepts reality however incompatible it was for her.
Some characters in Anita Desai’s fiction appear to be laboring under some ideal, or an illusion about the world around them. Deven in her *In Custody* has an illusion of the enchanting world of the Urdu poet Nur. But when he actually visits the poet’s house, all his expectations are defeated. Nur, though a great poet, is a greedy old man under the clutches of his overbearing wives. Adit in *Bye, Bye Blackbird* was enchanted by the life in London. But, the reality of his being a black Indian immigrant, and his being hated or unwanted, hits him at his in-laws’ house and he is disillusioned, and wishes to go back to India.

Anamika’s parents, in *Fasting, Feasting*, are under illusion that the letter from Oxford University from England, would ensure happy household for their beautiful daughter, but their daughter comes to a tragic death by burning. It is a case of bride-burning, and they blame fate for it.

**V.7. Theme of Marginalization**

Women appear to suffer marginalization whether it is Indian family life in Anita Desai’s fiction or the family life in the Iranian women writers’ fiction.

Nanda Kaul, in Anita Desai’s *Fire on the Mountain* lives a marginalized life, in the house of her vice-chancellor husband, as she is deprived of the husband’s love as well as the love of her children. In the same novel, we come across Ila Das, who lives alone and hardly has social life. Even though she is a social worker, trying to help women, she is ridiculed and laughed at even by
school children. Raka, the girl in the same novel, is also rendered as a marginalized character by her drunken father and helpless mother.

Uma, in *Fasting, Feasting*, is marginalized by her own parents, who reduce her to be a housemaid to take care of their infant son, and make her leave school. Similarly, Melanie in the American family is a troubled daughter, who feels ignored by her parents and feasts herself on chocolate getting seriously ill.

Women in the Indian household as well as in the middle class household presented in the Iranian fiction selected here, feel marginalized in the patriarchal society. Clarice, in *Things we Left Unsaid*, is the Iranian housewife, who finds herself all the time in the kitchen, and she is often treated as a valet. In Parsipur’s *Dog and the Long Winter* also, women are pinned down to the household chores.

Apart from these prominent themes, there are themes like Time (as a destroyer and a preserver) in Anita Desai’s *Clear Light of Day*. Time plays a part in the change of relationship between the characters. Bim, who is estranged from her brother, Raja gets reconciled with him. Tara, who feels guilty about leaving Bim alone when bees attacked her, is relieved to learn that Bim has no ill feeling about her.
There is also a theme of cultural decadence illustrated in the story of Misra’s two middle-aged daughters, abandoned by their husbands, and who earn money while their brothers spend time drinking and arranging music concerts.

There is also the theme of marital dissonance in Anita Desai’s *In Custody*, as well as in the Iranian novel *Things We Left Unsaid* by Zoya Pirzad. In *Bye, Bye Blackbird*, the immigrant Indians Adit and Dev experience loss of identity and nostalgia for the mother land. There is also a theme of cultural conflict, felt by the British wife, Sarah and the Indian husband, Adit. Adit realizes this when he travels by train, and when he has to stick to Indian market places in London. And Sarah faces this culture conflict, when she has to entertain Adit and his Indian friends at her parents house. She also experiences it at school, her working place, where she has to avoid people, who might ask questions about her Indian husband.

It is interesting to see that in spite of social taboos and constraints, Iranian female protagonists try to assert their individuality. But the female protagonists, in Desai’s fiction though rebellious, finally succumb to the social milieu created by the patriarchal world around them. In *Cry, the Peacock* Maya’s rebellion leads to the destruction of herself and her family life. Sita in *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, finally surrenders and goes back to her family life in Bombay. Nanda Kaul cannot remain totally detached from her family. Deven’s wife, Sarla, cannot even protest as all her dreams of marital life appear shattered. In *Fasting*
Feasting the Mama achieves importance only when she gives birth to a son, a patriarchal ambition to have a male child. The girls like Uma are reduced to an abject condition of slavery. In Bye, Bye Blackbird, even the British housewife, married to the Indian, undergoes racial tension as well as patriarchal notions of her Indian husband, Adit, who looks at his white wife as a possession. She becomes an exile in her own land.

Women's life as reflected in Anita Desai's fiction examined here is a sheltered and traditional life in a patriarchal society. They may rebel against it but appear to come back to it as we notice in the case of Maya, Sita, Uma and even Nanda Kaul (who accepts it until the death of her husband). The Iranian writer, Zoya Pirzad's protagonist Clarice, does not rebel, but finds her individuality in her love of literature and her little kitchen garden. But the female protagonist in Parsipur's Women Without Men, each female protagonist either, through violence or forsaking shelter of home, sets out to live her independent life. In Parsipur's novel, Dog and the Long Winter, Hoori tries to achieve freedom, blames her father for the tragedy of her brother's life, but ultimately goes to her grave. It appears, whether it is the Indian middle-class society or the Iranian one, women face more or less the same patriarchal dominance. Iranian women writers like Parsipur very boldly portray their female protagonists trying to assert their individuality while in Anita Desai's fiction the female protagonists do rebel but the social circumstances weigh against them, as they have to surrender or make
compromises with the system. In the Iranian fiction of Shaharnush Parsipur and Zoya Pirzad analyzed here, the life of women is as constrained as in India, dominated by the male members in the family. However, Parsipur, in her episodic fiction Women without Men, shows how Munis achieves freedom gradually. In the process, she opposes male chauvinism and moral taboos imposed only on women. Munis gains her emancipation through knowledge, which she acquires through reading.

She comes across a book on sex from a street vendor, with a title Sexual Fulfillment or How to know Our Bodies, after reading it, she feels she has grown mature and looks at the world newly. In the surrealistic account of the emancipation of Munis, she dies twice, yet goes on living, acquiring knowledge of life, and freedom from the male-dominated world. As in the fiction of Anita Desai, the fiction of the Iranian writers studied here, the women protagonists seek emancipation from the oppressive patriarchal system. Desai’s Nanda Kaul and Parsipur’s Munis are relatively successful, but Anita Desai’s Sita is not so lucky, and Maya destroys her marital life going herself insane. Farrokhlaqua in Women without Men, who is the victim of marital dissonance, seeks her freedom through violence. Bim in Desai’s Clear Light of Day experiences lovelessness and sacrifice for the sake of family, and fulfills her duty with a missionary zeal of Florence Nightingle. This is what Nanda Kaul does but finally withdraws to her secluded life in the hills of the Himalayas. Clarice in Zoya Pirzad’s Things we Left
Unsaid is also self-sacrificing, but she cannot find escape like Nanda Kaul. Like Nanda Kaul, Clarice also faces incessant claims on her by the children, the husband and the guests. And Like Nanda Kaul’s children, she too faces being blamed or ignored by her son.

The female protagonists in the fiction of Anita Desai as well as the fiction of Iranian writers Shaharnush Parsipur and Zoya Pirzad, react against the oppressive authority of the men in their life. Women in the fiction of both, experience marginalization, which is most severely faced condition by women in the third world countries. The subservient condition of women is rooted in the age old tradition in both the countries. Anita Desai has dealt with the themes influenced by liberal feminism. She exposes in her novels the unjust conventions and practices which exploit women in society. In Parsipur’s Dog and the Long Winter the protagonist, Hossein and his younger sister, Hoori, both are pitted against conventional Iranian society. But, Hossein makes allowances for the traditional Iranian society to move forward until it acquires new technology and modern means of production. Hoori, however, harshly condemns her parents, whom she blames for the death of Hossein. The female characters in Parsipur’s Women without Men, challenge patriarchal dominance either by becoming violent; or leaving the house.

Anita Desai as well as the Iranian women writers represented here deal with the problems and social constraints experienced by their women
protagonists. In Anita Desai’s fiction her protagonists like Sita, Maya, and Nanda Kaul try to assert their freedom of choice. The liberal social conditions allow them freedom of action. Sita may have to go back to her family, and Maya too has freedom, though she is dissatisfied with her husband. But in the Iranian social scene, Munis experiences violence at the hands of her brother, who virtually kills her. She achieves freedom, surrealistically and goes out of the house. Farrokhlaqua has to kill her husband to achieve freedom of action. In another surrealististic account, Mahadokht, turns herself into a tree. The Iranian writer Zoya Pirzad’s fiction is, however realistic. In Things We Left Unsaid her female protagonist, Clarice, is a middle-class housewife, who is pinned down to her household duties. Her situation is like Sarla, in In Custody who is disappointed in her married life but stuck into it. Clarice experiences some precious moments of emotional attachment for Emile, which is short-lived. Kamala in Desai’s In Custody does not crave for such escapade, because what she needs is well-equipped middle-class house, with fridge, etc. The girls in Parsipur’s social fiction, Dog and the Long Winter, are also bound by tradition. Their dreams too relate to decent married life. Only Hoori, the young rebel, influenced by her revolutionary brother, challenges tradition and social norms. There is a female character, Robab, a maidservant from a village, who is a victim of lust of the young men in the middle-class household. Social Taboos do not allow girls much freedom of choice. Even in the educated middle-class society. However, Parsipur’s fiction very boldly expresses the theme of emancipation of women.
The fiction of Anita Desai and also the fiction of the Iranian women writers examined here mainly deal with the Socio-cultural milieu of the middle-class society. In India the constitution has given equal status to women. Which is not the case in Iran. But, the life presented in the Iranian fiction referred to here is also the life of the middle-class Society, in which women are educated and feel relatively free. Even though, women in India enjoy legal equality, the social practices are still different in the sense that life of women is influenced and controlled by the system of patriarchy. The life portrayed in the Iranian novels also reveals the same system. The brother of Munis can enjoy extra-marital relation with Faiza, but Munis is not allowed to remain outside the house without permission. There are social taboos in both the societies. However, women being educated, or literate at least, can meet their day-to-day economic demands, and sometimes come into contact with the other worlds, as Farrokhlaqua does in Parsipur’s novel, or Nanda Kaul, Sita or Tara in Desai’s novels. Yet there are constraints on them. Iranian middle-class women appear to be subjected to more constraints than the Indian women. Clarice in Zoya Pirzad’s novel is well-educated and she belongs to the minority community, to a high-middle-class family. She enjoys greater freedom as a housewife, but not so Munis or Mahadokht or Farrokhlaqua. The female protagonists in Anita Desai’s novels are comparatively free, and can take their own decisions. Uma, for example, decides to go to Manori Island with her children, and Raman cannot say no. Farrokhlaqua’s husband exercises control over his wife, and can express
displeasure about who she talks with in a party. The social set-up in Iran is comparatively more traditional in respect of women than in India, where women in the middle-class families are largely well-educated and find jobs in the offices (Private and public), schools, colleges, etc., Even then there are evils of patriarchal system which they have to face. The families in the city like Abadan, in the region of the oil refineries in Iran, have industrial society, people coming from different regions and even from abroad. This changes the social scene, as reflected in Zoya Pirzad’s *Things We Left Unsaid*. But, the Iranian social scene, where Khanom Jan and Agha Jan’s family lives, is different as it is not in the industrial belt. The Iranian families in this region are much more conservative than those in Abadan. We can come across this social change in India also in the industrial belt or metropolitan cities, and the towns and villages outside this belt. Besides, there are religious, social and cultural differences in the societies of the two countries represented in the fiction. Despite all this, the problems women face in these two patriarchal societies are basically the same.

This research has pedagogical importance in the sense that it closely analyses the literary texts bets selected here from the point of view of themes presented in them. Students who are doing research in language and literature would find this analysis for understanding and appreciating fiction. This research also has pedagogical importance from the point of view of two cultures presented here, the Indian and the Iranian, which underlines social and cultural aspects of
two national communities, focusing on the life of women in them. This comparative study of women’s fiction reveals cultural unity as well as diversity in the literature of the two countries, which can be useful for the students of literature from sociological point of view. The analysis is of the literary works presented here can also be helpful to the students of literature in practical criticism of literary texts they study. But, there is hope that the close reading and analysis of themes presented here can be helpful for further research in the field.