
A Comparative Study of Anita Desai’s Selected Fiction and the Fiction of Selected Iranian Writers.

a. Fiction of Anita Desai

In this thesis, I am presenting comparative study of the themes in the selected fiction of Indian English writer Anita Desai and the fiction of modern Iranian Writers Shaharnush Parsipur and Zoya Pirzad. Anita Desai is one of the diaspora writers of Indian English fiction. Her mother is German and the father is Indian; she is thus the inheritor of two cultures, but she claims that ‘She feels about India as an Indian, though she thinks about India ‘as an outsider.’ She can, therefore, take a detached view of the complexity of the relationships, the Indian traditions and customs weighing on, the Indian minds, especially that of the Indian women, and the crisis of identity they face. She has shown in her fiction how women are marginalized in their family life. Anita Desai has mainly presented the middle-class life, the life of the educated men and women, in which, though educated, women feel alienated and marginalized. She has taken a close look at the marital relationships in the Indian Families, the disharmony the women feel, leading to the failure and suffering. In a way her fiction presents a tragic view of the family life of the Indian middle-class society. Since Anita Desai has been internationally celebrated writer there have been a number of research studies on her fiction.

Yet, there are only a few sporadic studies on the individual themes in her fiction. I, therefore, thought of the undertaking analysis of the themes reflected in her fiction, and the way they are presented through the life and action of her characters. It is felt that there is a need for such comprehensive study. In her interview she has pointedly said that she would focus in her fiction ‘purely subjective’ aspects of her characters and their situations. This is, of course, achieved by her, delineating the social contexts in the life of her characters. In her fiction, there is ‘violence plurality and volatility’ as well as ‘comforts and solaces’ that the characters experience. The characters in her fiction conflict with the oppressive or dissatisfactory social and family life. Her characters try to establish their identity and seek fulfillment, resulting often in tragedy or some kind of compromise. The themes in her fiction relate to the conflict between the outer world and the aspirations of the characters, who try to rebel against the constraints.

This, as stated above, undertakes comparative study of the themes presented by Anita Desai in her fiction and the themes reflected in the works of two modern Iranian women writers, Shaharnush Parsipur and Zoya Pirzad.

Shaharnush Parsipur (born Feb 1949), started her literary career as early as at the age of sixteen. A student of sociology, she took her first degree from the University of Tehran. Her first novel, which she wrote at the age of twenty-eight, was in Persian, the Dog and the Long Winter, which presents the tragic life of a young revolutionary, Hossein, and his younger sister, Hoori.

Parsipur was working for the national Iranian TV but she resigned her job as a protest against the meaningless cruelty and torture and execution of two journalist – poet activists’. She was imprisoned for a few months for this. She, then moved to France, where she studied Chinese philosophy and language. Here she wrote her second novel, Plain and Small Adventures of the Spirit of the Tree. (1977). She came back to Iran in 1979, when she wrote another novel, Touba and the Meaning of Night, which earned fame for her. In her next novel, Women Without Men, She openly wrote about the issue of virginity, and she was again imprisoned. This novella was translated into English, Swedish, Spanish, Malayalam, Italian, Dutch and French. She wrote her Prison Memoirs and a number of short stories also. Her novella, Women without Men has been filmed in the U.S, by Shirin Neshat. Her novel, Blue Reason, is yet to be published on account of the ban on its publication.

Zoya Pirzad is also a renowned Iranian-Armenian novelist, who’s Things We Left Unsaid has been the international best-seller. The novel is centered round the female protagonist, Clarice Ayvazian, living in the Iranian suburban life, where there is oil industry, and her husband is the officer serving there.

Zoya Pirzad is an Iranian-Armenian writer, and her characters, the women protagonists, belong to this community, minority which had to live rather tenuous life in Iran. The Armenians are still the ‘other’ in the mainstream of the Iranian polity. However, the Iranian modern writers and intellectuals

have portrayed Armenian stereotypes in their literature and the works of art. In her novel, *The Space Between Us*, Zoya Pirzad has dealt with the problem of marriage between a Muslim girl and the Armenian boy.

Zoya Pirzad presents everyday life of the Armenian Family in the township of Abadan. Her fiction is marked for its simplicity and realistic style of writing.

b. List of Critical Works Referred to, on Anita Desai and the Iranian Writers:

6. Shaharnush Parsipur. Life National UAE.
Apart from these, there are books and articles used for reference in the chapters, listed at the end of every chapter.

c. Aims and Objectives.

The thesis has tried to present comparative study of the themes in the selected fiction of Anita Desai, the Indian English Writer, and the selected fiction of the Iranian novelists, Shaharnush Parsipur and Zoya Pirzad, with reference to the themes presented in their fiction by delineating Characters, and situations in their life. The writers have portrayed the life of their women protagonists in their fiction, showing how they suffer emotionally in the patriarchal system of family life, and customs and expectations related to their role in the family.

The life of women presented in the Iranian fiction is not much different except for some cultural and social differences. As stated above, the researcher has taken the fiction of two Iranian women writers, Shaharnush Parsipur, and Zoya Pirzad.

d. Methodology and Technique used

The thesis presents thematic analysis of each novel, commenting on characters and social situations and their implication. The researcher will first analyses the primary sources, for the themes delineated in them, from the point of view of the social and culture milieu in them.
The researcher will then refer to the secondary sources, the books and critical articles as well as reviews appearing in journals.

**e. The Kinds of Conclusions Expected and their Possible Values:**

Novel is a realistic form of literature, which creates life on the basis of observed reality, focusing on the significant social issues, indirectly commenting on the characters and social situation. Anita Desai has earned great fame in the national and international field and has won many awards. She has presented men and women. Who are Sensitive to the life around them and their own predicament. Both, Anita Desai and the Iranian women writers have presented the life of women protagonists in their fiction underlining the problems women face in both the Societies. Fiction, through its realistic presentation of life, gives the reader insight into the ills of Society, because it presents what glaringly comes to the notice of the writer. Fiction is a kind of mirror reflecting the life of the society, its practices and problems. It indirectly informs, criticizes and lays bare the ills of Society making people think and act.

Chapter I: Theory of comparative Literature and Brief history of Indian English and Iranian English fiction.

In this chapter I have referred to the Aspects of the theory of comparative literature, its definition, and briefly explained the history of Indian English literature, Indian Diasporic writers, and the history and development of Iranian fiction in English.

Chapter II: Presentation of Themes in Anita Desai’s *Cry, the peacock* (1963), *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Fire on The Mountain* (1977), and Zoya Pirzad’s *Things We Left Unsaid* (2012)

In this chapter the focus is on the variety of themes reflected in the selected novels of Anita Desai and Zoya Pirzad. The themes of alienation, incompatibility, marital dissonance, detachment, etc. The comparison of both culture Iran and India are considered through the themes.


Various themes were considered in this chapter such as cultural decadence, Unfulfilled-self, colonization of Hindi wallas, incompatibility, alienation, etc.


As this thesis is a thematic analysis of the Indian and Iranian women writers; in this chapter also various themes were considered and compared with each other. For example the theme of racial discrimination explicitly revealed in *Bye, Bye Blackbird*, and theme of gender discrimination is profoundly explained in *Fasting, Feasting* and *Dog and the Long Winter*. There are some other themes which has been covered in this chapter.

Chapter V: Conclusions

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.

There are, of course, differences between the female protagonists in Anita Desai’s fiction and those in the fiction of the Iranian novelists selected here. The themes in the fiction of Iranian writers also illustrate Incompatibility between relations, Marginalization that women feel, Alienation as well as male dominance, Marital Dissonance, Unfulfilled-self and Emancipation. Shahrnush Parsipur uses surrealism technique to illustrate her themes, especially in her *Women Without Men*. 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.

Iranian women writers like Shahrnush 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.

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.