PROLOGUE
Prologue

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Prologue

Rationale and significance of the study and Brief history of Indian English and Iranian English Literature

• Introduction:

This Thesis is concerned with comparative study of themes presented in Anita Desai’s selected fiction and the fiction of the Iranian novelists Shaharnush Parsipur and Zoya Pirzad. It is true that there can be socio-cultural divergences between the two literatures, and yet there can be human values shared by people of different nationality, shared collective human experience and relationships within the family life. For example, the human societies, where there is patriarchy, reveal common problems faced by women. There are of course, cultural differences and different social practices.

In this thesis, therefore, the researcher intends to study the themes revealed in the fiction of Anita Desai and the Iranian women writers to compare and contrast the life and experiences of the female protagonists presented by them.

• A Rationale and Significance of the Study:

Anita Mazumdar Desai (1937) born to the Indian father and the German mother. Is the inheritor of two cultures, which has influenced her creative writing … She herself has admitted that, though ‘she feels about India as an Indian’, she thinks about it ‘as an outsider’. Her point of view as an
outsider has enabled her to take a detached view of the Indian family life, the cross-currents in the family relationships, the burden of the Indian tradition and customs weighing on the minds of characters, especially that of women, crisis of identity and self-fulfillment, the feeling of uprootedness and of being marginalized experienced by the Indian womanhood of the middle-class educated society, and the feeling of alienation resulting out of it. There are a number of such themes and issues that surface through her stories, which conflict with the stereo-typical image of men and women in the Indian society. Anita Desai’s fiction takes a close look at the marriage institution and tries to analyze the reasons behind the disharmony in the relationship between the husband and the wife, which leads to the failure of the marriage and in some cases, brings about a tragic end. In fact, Anita Desai’s fiction appears to be informed of her tragic vision of life married life in particular.

It is quite true that Anita Desai being an internationally celebrated writer, her fiction has been a target of a number of research studies. However, there are only sporadic studies of individual themes in her fiction. I have, therefore undertaken to analyze the whole lot of significant themes in her fiction, and the way they are presented and treated through the characters and situations created by her. There is a need for such a comprehensive study of Anita Desai’s fiction because in her interview she has explicitly stated that she wanted to write fiction ‘purely subjective’ rather than just ‘social documents’. This is not to say that she ignores or plays down the social context. Her aim has been to trace the predicament and travails of the characters, whose anguish has resulted from those very social contexts which
come in conflict with the aspirations and expectations of the characters in her fiction. In her fiction, we come across ‘violence, plurality and volatility’ as well as ‘comforts, solaces, and exuberances’ that characters experience in their life. In her fiction, the individual’s relationship with the world is at the center. Her characters are at war with the social and family life surrounding them because he or she is trying to establish identity and seek fulfillment, which either results into a tragedy or a kind of compromise ruefully accepted. The themes in her fiction emerge from the confrontation between the outer world and the psyche of the characters who try to challenge or shake off the constraints imposed by this outer world.

Iranian women writers whose fictional works have been selected here for comparative study are, Shaharnush Parsipur and Zoya Pirzad who represent the, modernist trend in the feminist fiction, portraying female protagonists, who try to search for their identity and express their individuality so far suppressed in the male-dominated society, It must be borne in mind that the awakening in the female world in Iran is much later than in India. Women in India have been beneficiaries of modern education as early as in the late 18th century and they were then exposed to western literature and philosophy, which influenced their thinking. They were recipients of modern education, and were exposed to women’s liberation movement in England. It was, of course, the result of the rise of the English-educated middle class in India, Which inherited liberal philosophy, and also the active participation of women in the movement for freedom, especially by Mahatma Gandhi. In Iran, the 1979 Revolution brought about social change, established values were
challenged and new values emerged to replace them. But, this revolution did not help the artists and writers, who had to lie low during Khomeini’s regime, and they had to go underground because of the censorship and lack of financial help. There was also lack of journals to help them publish their works. In the financial works of Shaharnoosh Parspour, and Zoya Pirzad we come across women’s experiences and personal circumstances dealt with seriously. They show how women’s personality, their independence was under constraints on account of the demands of the family, the norms and expectations of the society. The identity of women appears to be defined only in terms of the men in the family. But in her fiction Women Without Men (1989) Parsipur makes a case for women’s rights very strongly, which was unfortunately misunderstood. Her first novel, The Dog and the Long Winter (1974), republished in 1990 after the ban, is the story of a traditional Iranian family, whose son, Hussein, is radical young man with revolutionary political and religious views. The narrator, Hooray, Hussein’s sister, is the listener and the silent observer of the tragic end of her revolutionary brother. In the course of the narration, the writer gives us the picture of the contemporary society and the predicament of women as well as of the young men radicals like Hussein.

Zoya Pirzad, the Iranian Armenian writer is the author of the best seller novel Things We Left Unsaid (2012) her other novels are The Space Between Us, and I will Turn off the Light (2001). Zoya Pirzad’s fiction presents life of middle-class families living in the townships near the Refineries where the husbands work as engineers and officers. The women in the society these
writers present appear to be rejecting male dominance and explore their feminine self, they do not consider themselves to be inferior to men. They may not be as rebellious as the female protagonist in Anita Desai’s fiction, yet they do show their self-awareness and independent identities.

- **A Survey of the Work Done and the Need for Further Research:**

  As already pointed out, the fictional work of Anita Desai has been studied from different points of view such as Postmodernist. Feminist, social and psychological aspects in her fiction. Individual themes in her fiction have been examined in some articles and reviews. This study undertakes to deal with the significant themes that emerge through the creation of characters and situations in her novels. The survey of the important critical works done on her fiction is presented below.

  Similarly, a brief survey of the contribution of the women writers in the field of Iranian Fiction is presented here, with special reference to the contribution made by Shaharnush Parsipur, and Zoya Prized to the modern Iranian Fiction.
Works veneered to:


   These two volumes include critical articles by the editors themselves and by the scholars such as Gajendra Kumar, Merily Roy, Parvati Bhatnagar, Seema Malik, P.D Dubbe, Satish Barbuddhe, and others.

   Most of these articles deal with the individual fictional work from the point of view of Feminism, Postmodern treatment of the characters and situations, Images of women, and themes such as alienation, death and violence, imagery and style, etc. These scholars have noted how Anita Desai has been preoccupied with the exploration of the human psyche, the predicament of the characters caught in the conflict between the society around them and their own aspirations and expectations from life. These two volumes together cover the critical response to Anita Desai's fiction, and offer insight into these fictional works.


   This work by Neeru Chakraverty analyzes the novels of Anita Desai from the point of view of the struggle of the characters to discover or establish their own identity and find the meaning of their existence in the antagonistic social set-up in which they have found themselves. This critical study explores the dilemma the characters face in their inner world and outward reality. On the one side the men and women have been constrained by social and familial reality and on the other they have to struggle for fulfillment of their
expectations from life. Their disillusionment in their life is not due to the material well-being they seek, but their failure to attain fulfillment of their emotional and intellectual desires. The focus of this critical work is on the struggle of the characters. The conflict between ‘the attitudes of attachment and detachment and the search for identity.’ This analysis is applicable more to the female protagonists in the novels rather than to their male counterparts.


This critical work by B.L. Tripathi deals mainly with the inner world of the characters, exploring their mindscape. It is divided into six chapters. Each dealing with the novels published during the period from 1960. Tripathi is mainly concerned with the analysis of the psychological reality of the characters, cultural determinism that influences their adult life, and the danger the characters perceive of their very identity being obliterated. The characters in the fiction of Anita Desai suffer isolation, alienation, inferiority complex, which traumatize them. These characters nurse private fantasies, create their imaginary counter world, and eventually come to a tragic end. The novels of 1980s are noted to have a different perspective on the development of the female protagonists. The fiction of this period has an additional dimension of the passage of time, how life moves backwards and forwards during a period of time.

It is noted that the characters in Anita Desai’s fiction belong mainly to the middle-class life, and the life of women treated in them is generally miserable as they are not economically independent, but their education has
awakened their expectations from life. They are so constrained by their social set-up that they cannot even protest effectively for the ills they suffer.

The book offers close reading of all the novels. Exploring the inner and the outer world the characters inhabit.

4. The Impact of Modernity Discourse on Persian Fiction, by Honarmand Saeed, Ph. D. The Ohio State University, 2011.

Modern literature in Iran developed under the influence of the modern European, to be particular, the English literature. It avoided the traditional discourses and became closely allied to political ideologies, as a result it was disconnected from older tradition of literature. The book traces the development of modern fiction in literature of Iran, and accounts for the contribution of women writers, It ignored the past native tradition and tried to create modern literature based on the European literature. Saeed, in his thesis, examiner the contribution made by the Iranian women writers to the field of Iranian fiction,. He observes how the concepts of nation and nationalism, political freedom and social justice influenced the Iranian society as a result of Western Imperialism. He points out how the 1979 Revolution influenced writers to reject established values and norms and adopt the new modern values, which also influenced the arts and literature. Since modern writers could not yield to dictates of Ayatollah Khomeini’s they had to go underground. Or not write at all. They had to face censorship as well as poor economic conditions of the publishing industry.
During 1960, women writers made their entry in the world of fiction writers. Simin Daneshvar was felicitated for her novel, Suvashun (Mourners of Siyavash) 1969. Yet, there were only a few distinguished man and women writers. By the end of the 20th century, there were 370 women writers who published novels. After the eight year, war with Iraq women had active participation in the social and political field. There were large number of educated women, and they played important role in bringing to power the reformist leader Ayatollah Khatami. Women were greatly motivated to fight for social equality, defying legal and traditional barriers. They discovered writing to be the most useful, and inexpensive means of communication. Masses of women came on the street, in the 1979 Revolution and since then, despite restrictions imposed on them, they significantly influenced the literary market. By the end of the 20th century women writers started dominating the field of literature, as women became conscious of their individuality and their rights.


The article states that the presence of women writers began to be felt from the middle of the last decade of the 20th century. They made their contribution especially in novel. Shafiq / 2005, P.142) has noted that by the year 2000 about 1300 Persian speaking women writers were registered. Besides nearly 104 magazines were being published under the management of women, and there were female managers employed as publishers; as
noted by Rostami (2001). During this period, the writers such as Zoya Pirzad, Fariba Vafi, Moniru Ravanpour, Farkondeh Aqay, Azar Nafisi, Shaharnoosh Parsipur, Goli Taraqui, etc. not only contributed to the fiction but also won prestigious awards. Their fiction has also been translated into foreign languages.

It is observed that women found novel as the most suitable form to write about their experiences, and discover their inner world, and shape their own identity.

Apart from these there are books and articles used for reference in the following chapters, listed at the end of every chapter.

6. Shaharnush Parsipur. Life National UAE.

The article gives literary career of the writer, who suffered imprisonment for her views. In her novella Women Without Men, she openly wrote about women’s virginity, for which she was again imprisoned.

- A Statement of Aims and Objectives.

This research undertakes comparative study of the themes in the novels of Anita Desai and the selected Iranian novelists viz Shaharnush Parsipur and Zoya Pirzad from the point of view of their treatment through the presentation of characters and socio-cultural situations in which the characters are realized. As a literary artist, Anita Desai is concerned with presenting their expectations from life and hostile outer world they inhabit, which defeats their expectations. Her fiction presents mainly the female protagonists, who suffer most on account of the burden of the tradition and
customs which mainly the women have to carry in the Indian social situation, Anita Desai explores the psyche of the new woman of the post-modern world, who is educated and who is aware of her identity, and seeks expression of it; but she is constrained by unjust conventions and the compulsions of the routine family life. Desai has treated a variety of themes in her novels, such as women's oppression, family relationships, crumbling traditions, uprooted and marginalized identities, marital disharmony, male chauvinism, alienation, problems of compatibility, issue of maternity, and the stigma of barrenness, etc. These writers bring out these themes with their intuitive insight into the socio-cultural milieu in their countries.

Compared to the modern Indian Fiction by women writers, the contribution of the Iranian women to the field of fiction mostly relates to the late 20th century and the two decades of the 21st century. For the purpose of comparison of the themes, the researcher has taken up the fiction of two Iranian women writers, viz, Shaharnush Parsipur, and Zoya Pirzad. The socio-cultural situation faced by women in Iran is, of course considerably different from that faced by the Indian women in the modern post-independent period. However, oppression resulting from patriarchy is a common factor faced by women, both in India and Iran. The female protagonists in the Iranian fiction face different kinds of social constraints. Which emerge from their typical social and cultural tradition. Iranian women writers have to face imprisonment and exile for their fiction. However, like their Indian counterpart, they boldly take up issues faced by women and give realistic picture of the life of women in their society. The researcher believes that this comparative study can
reveal interesting similarities and differences in the life of women in these two
countries.

The writers being compared here for their fictional works belong to two
different countries, with different social and cultural milieu, and also different
literary traditions. The Iranian women writers, whose fictional works are taken
up here for comparative study, have had to face political restraints, and were
subjected to punishment and exile. However, life of women all over to world is
more or less influenced by patriarchy and male-hegemonic traditions. The
Iranian women writers have tried to give expression to the experience of
women in their country fearlessly and artistically. Shaharnush Parsipur and
Zero Pirzad have won national awards for and international awards for their
fiction.

The objective of this research is to show how these themes are
presented through the characters and situations in the fiction of these writers.

- **Methodologies and Techniques to be Used:**

  This study concerns mainly with the thematic analysis of the selected
fictional works of the writer. It also involves describing the devices of
character creation, depicting socio-cultural milieu in which the characters are
created and the psychoanalytic dimensions of characterization. Such a study
is essentially a library work. The researcher will first undertake analysis of the
selected fictional works, the primary sources, from the point of view of the
themes treated in them. This analysis will focus the socio-cultural situations
and events in the life of the characters, and the way they react to them.
Secondary sources for this study shall be the research works related to the writers, done so far, the critical articles and reviews published in the literary journals on the novels under study, the ancillary literature from the field of psychology and literary criticism, and its impact on the literary creations.

The researcher will also take help of the online libraries and bookshops for collecting the recent reference material.

**The Kinds of Conclusions expected and their possible value:**

This research is in the field of literature. Novel as a literary form is deeply informed of the present socio-cultural conditions of life. It deals with the reality around us. Anita Desai who has won several prestigious national and international awards, is known to be a very perceptive writer, who has an eye for social ills influencing, tragically, the life of sensitive men and women. The themes emerging out of the analysis of her fiction and the fiction of the Iranian women writers, and the socio-cultural situations they depict in the life of their characters, will shape the conclusions of this thesis. The conclusions will be based on the plausibility of the presentation and treatment of the themes and characters presented in the fiction of these writers. The women in the cross-section of the middle class society whether in India or Iran face similar problem of male domination in their struggle to express themselves. But, their socio-cultural situations are different.

Fiction, the realistic mode of literature, gives us insight into what ails our society, because it is the quintessence of our socio-cultural and political
life. It holds mirror before us for us to understand ourselves and our society and lays bare the ills of our society. This research work will be trying to bring home the message the fiction of these writers gives us about ourselves as citizens of the modern society whether in India or Iran. This is the possible value of such research work.
References

- Rahimieh Nasrin, "Women and Domesticity in Modern Persian Literature", University of California, Irvine.

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