Chapter II

Women and their Portrayal in Iranian Cinema: Case Studies of Two Women and Killing Rabid Dogs
Position of Women in Iran

Nowadays the position of women and gender equality are controversial issues especially in developing countries. Women’s presence in personal and public realms shows their empowerment and indicates the partial removal of gender discriminations in patriarchal society. The empowerment of women occurs in developing their personality and qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political and cultural functions and thereby improves their socio-economic status. Women’s empowerment with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence can help to reduce inequalities and also acts as a means to improve their status within the family and also for changing women’s position and development process in the society. According to this view it should be noted that the situation of women in Iran has been the subject of much reporting commentary and analysis over the past several years.

In recent years a great deal of discussion at the international level has addressed the issue of the place and status of women in present day Iranian society and the influence their social position has exerted in the spheres of art, literature, religion, politics, economics and history and thus, critical eyes are focused on Iranian women (Tapper, 2002). Iranian women's lives are part of a national dynamics of cultural and political transformation. Particularly for women, this means a re-evaluation of their personal experiences over the past twenty years and an examination of their own life choices within the context of larger national events. In the post 1990-2000 period, women's issues are being discussed more frequently and these expressions and discussions cover a wide spectrum of topics, ranging from debates over feminism and patriarchy to women's position within family, and their roles in the spheres of employment, law and education (Rostami, 2001).

The number of women attending institutions of higher education in Iran has been steadily increasing since 1989. They have gained control over their familial activities, perform social roles and they participate in socio-political life of their society. There are some important social and demographic factors such as rising age of marriage, fertility reduction, and universality of education to the level of the secondary schooling, women’s active presence in universities and an increase of women’s role in decision-making which can shed more light on women’s situation and thus portray an accurate picture of the contemporary Iranian women. Importance
of women's participation in all areas of social life, leads us to consider the film industry as one of these areas. The cinema in Iran among many of other institutions is a place for expression of women's voices.

**Iranian Cinema and Emergence of Women Directors**

Iranian cinema is recognized as one of the most pioneering in the world and films from Iranian directors are receiving increasing acclaim at international festivals (Mir Hosseini, 2005) and winning prestigious awards such as the Academy Awards, popularly known as the Oscars. Cinema has become a major focus and arena for discussions and debates whose root concern is the nature of Iranian culture and identity. It represents cultural, social and political changes and progress in Iran. Cinema in Iran is an established art form and cultural practice. It is a flourishing film industry with a long history. The political, historical and the cultural history of the country have influenced the country's film history in a major way. Iranian Cinema has excelled in both commercial and art films. Many popular commercial films are made in Iran annually, and Iranian art films win praise around the world. After the revolution in 1978 Iranian films have survived, undergoing remarkable transformations corresponding to the wider changes in Iranian culture and society. Post-revolutionary Iranian cinema has been celebrated in many international forums and festivals for its distinct style, themes, writing, idea of nationhood, and cultural references.

The most popular genre of the Iranian cinema is the Iranian New Wave Films. These films have gained appreciation in the film festivals circuits. The films are based on varied topics and great Iranian male film directors such as Khosrow Sinai, Abbas Kiarostami, Bahram Beizai, Mohsen Makhmalbaf and Jafar Panahi have made some significant and effective movies about the Iranian society with special attention to women's issues. The challenge of gender roles has been taking place in every aspect of life in Iran. Media have made an important contribution to gender issues and gender consciousness. Given the intensity of cultural traditionalism in contrast to an equally intense appetite for modernism, cultural production in Iran lays vast claims to a dialectical creativity that vitalizes the redefinition of the national, cultural and even gender identity (Khalili, 2006). The cinema in Iran is among many of other institutions that are awakening to the voices of the 'second gender'.
Following the rise of the Iranian New Wave Cinema, there were numbers of film school graduates in Iran and each year about two dozen new directors make their debut films, many of them women. In the last two decades, there have been a higher percentage of women directors in Iran than in most countries in the West. In the early 1990s, Iranian cinema has been dominated by great women film directors. They have focused their films on pointing out women related issues that plague the women in Iran even today. Some remarkable work has been done by several female Iranian filmmakers. They have tried to choose ways through which a realistic image of women can be portrayed in Iranian cinema.

The strong presence of women behind the camera was officially recognized in 1990, when the Fajr Film Festival, the foremost national film festival in Iran, devoted an entire series of programs to "women's cinema". This cinema was very diverse, as women were involved in all aspects of feature, documentary, short subject, and animated films, as well as, in all aspects of television films and serials production. Some of the filmmakers were experts in film making and had made documentaries, television soap operas, and feature films. Since that time the situation of women's presence in cinema had gradually and increasingly improved. Of particular significance in this cinema is the emergence of a new group of women directors of feature films trained after revolution, who have begun to concentrate on women's performance with powerful roles. Since the past couple of decades more women directors of feature films have emerged than were found in all previous decades combined. The most well known works have come from writer-directors such as Rakhshan Bani-Etemad, Pooran Derakhshandeh, Samira Makhmalbaf and Tahmineh Milani.

From the above it becomes clear that film is one of the main vehicles that have been used to explore the various dimensions of Iranian private life and the complexities of women's lives (Clarie, 1999). The cinematic representation of women in Iran has played an important role in social and political constructions of gender from the beginning. An interesting aspect of post revolutionary cinema in Iran has been the changes it has experienced due to a rise in the position of women in that industry which has resulted in more positive portrayals of women in films. There is a much larger presence of women in the cinema and their representation is no more simple and one dimensional, but fraught with complex theological, ideological, political and aesthetic consideration.
In the view of Bahar (2010) two reasons based on cultural and social circumstances have resulted in the increase in the importance of women in Iranian cinema. The first is the presence of social, economic, political and developmental programs in Iran that have enhanced the educational and didactic levels. As a result, the public are more literate than before and hence, social knowledge has increased. Secondly, women are now able to participate more in social affairs and fewer prohibitions are enforced on their presence in social arenas. Also, during the past two decades the institutional reforms in relation to women's issues and the question of democracy and the establishment of civil society have had a great impact on media and politics in Iran.

The growth of female participation in Iranian cinema can be measured in terms of the number of women behind and in front of the camera, in terms of the diversity of characters that populate the narrative, and also in terms of the box office success of films that are centered on lead female characters (Rostami, 2001). These quantitative and qualitative approaches provide evidence of women's success in transgression from the private to the public sphere, not only as fictitious film characters, but also as significant participants in the cultural practice of cinema (Khalili, 2006). Women's protest against their unrealistic portrayal in cinema was shown in the form of films, which they made themselves. In recent years the major development has been the appearance of an increasing number of assertive and successful female film directors. In fact, women have moved from the background of the stories and the shots into the foreground.

As was mentioned above while introducing some famous women film directors who have produced significant cinematic works, their films deal with a range of topics from family and housing problems to physical and mental disability and genres from social comedies to psychological dramas. What stands out in of all these directors’ films is the presence of prominent female stars, feminist social criticism, focus on the theme of women's rights, feminist views against the patriarchal culture and noticeable commercial success as well. It is pertinent to mention here that all these successful attempts occurred because in Iran certain women in the film industry eventually stimulated a movement among other women to go behind the camera to have their voices heard. The emergence female directors in Iran, is partly a
result of the earlier void of a feminine voice in cinema. The women filmmakers have drawn upon some issues to tell women's stories and put forward a different image of women as workers, mothers, lovers, politicians and so on (Rostami, 2001). They have tried to sympathetically deal with the problems of Iranian women and portrayed the various issues through women's performances in the films. In this sense, we can consider the cinematic representation of women as a measure of the success of the Iranian women's discourse of social equality.

**Representation of Women on Screen in Iran**

The evolution of the presence of women both behind and in front of the cameras has passed through various periods: 1) In the primary years following the revolution (1979-1988, i.e., the period of revolution and the imposed war), the films mainly focused on men while women were given only peripheral roles in front of and behind the camera; 2) The period that immediately followed (1989-1999), covered events taking place during the war, and after it, women started being presented alongside men but only in their conservative avatars; 3) The next period started in the 1990s and went into the 2000s, during which time movie were being produced by both men and women, the women had bigger roles in the films and in some films the women was the core of the film (Bahar, 2010). The two Iranian films studied by us, namely, *Sag Koshi* (Killing Rabid Dogs) by Bahram Beizaie and *Do Zan* (Two Women) by Tahmineh Milani fall in this category. However, the glorious period for women in Iranian cinema has suffered a set-back since 2005 as the political situation has made it difficult for them to make the kind of films that they want to.

In the first few post-revolutionary years the cinema was not very dynamic for a period of time. In this stage, women did not appear on the screen as strong characters and their presence was in the background or as domesticated subjects in the home such as mother and wife. In most of the films women played insignificant roles although some directors in their works chose specific social or individual features related to the women and displayed their world in the most dramatic manner in the films to the audience. Whether it was the context of family, education, political or economic sphere, in those films women were shown in a sympathetic light, for instance, in films such as *Bashu, the Little Stranger* (1986) directed by Bahram Beyzaie and *Marriage of the Blessed* (1988) by Mohsen Makhmalbaf.
However, gradually women found their place to overcome their marginal roles and slowly educated women with new perspectives entered the field. When the war ended in 1988 and the country became politically more open, women who were interested in the film industry tried to make up for their absence in front of the camera by working behind it. They first announced their presence in TV, in such roles as assistant directors, designers, stage managers, reporters and documentary makers. By the end of the war, there was a more dramatic presence of women both on the screen in strong leading roles and behind the cameras as directors. Thus, for examining the representation of women in post revolutionary era, it is crucial to appreciate the essential role not only of the female directors but also of female actors.

In view of the above discussion, it is important to note that in Iran the cinematic studies in the field of Sociology and gender (women) performance specifically needs to be analyzed. Accordingly, this study aims to investigate the relationship between women's role in cinema and society. If we believe the fact that cinema is a social mirror, and there is an unmediated relationship between cinema and society, we could say that cinema is an important art form in the modern era, which can reflect women's image in a certain society. Hence, this study is trying to relate the media portrayals of women to a broader view of women's lives. However, before going on to discuss the two selected films, a brief look at the socio-political scenario in Iran that influenced the making of these films needs to be mentioned.

**The Islamic Revolution, Women and the Selected Films**

The Islamic Revolution of 1978–1979, led by Ayatollah Khomeini, was one of the major sociopolitical shifts of the latter third of the past century. The Iranian revolution was controversial in terms of both its causes and its results. The revolution occurred because the Shah's modernization was considered a major risk to Iranian culture. The revolution took a cultural turn when dissatisfied social groups joined together to reject modernity because they thought that the modernization has harmful effects on Iran's traditional culture and social structure. In fact that Iranian revolution primarily was against rapid modernization and from the year 1979 it took the form of a Cultural Revolution.

The Cultural Revolution (1980–1987) was a period following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran where the academia of Iran was purged of Western and non-Islamic influences to bring it in line with Shia Islam. Directed by the Cultural
Revolutionary Headquarters and later by the Supreme Cultural Revolution Council, the revolution initially closed universities for three years (1980–1983) and after reopening banned many books and purged thousands of students and lecturers from the schools. The Cultural Revolution Headquarters was established June 12, 1980 and was given the responsibility by Ayatollah Khomeini for making sure that the cultural policy of the universities was based on Islam, that selected professors were efficient, committed and vigilant, and dealing with other issues relevant to the Islamic academic revolution. In this regard most of the university students were very active and participated in demonstration against the monarchy regime. They published newspapers to give their protest and voice to other people for helping change the government.

The Iranian Revolution had significant effects on the citizens of Iran, particularly women. Women, especially those from traditional backgrounds participated on a large scale in demonstrations leading up to the revolution. They supported the Revolution for various reasons such as political deprivation, economic deprivation, and a sense of self-identification with Islam and the loss of Islamic values under the Pahlavi regime. However, after the revolution, several laws were established that altered gender relations in Iran and further privatized female roles (Moghadam, 1988). With the introduction of the Sharia Laws declared with the announcement of the Islamic Republic, the new laws and Islamic traditions (Islamization of the politics) started to govern both public and private lives of women’s living within the State. Iran's policy of Islamization affected all the aspects concerning women – marriage, family planning, divorce, and child custody. Mainly three general developments affected women's lives in the early years of post-revolutionary Iran, viz., the introduction of a set of norms and ideological pronouncements on gender and the enforcement of veiling and segregation of sexes in public space, the implementation of a number of explicit or implicit restrictions on educational access, choice of occupations, and opportunities in the state bureaucracy and the creation of a new legal system with drastically modified criminal and civil codes that placed women in a highly disadvantaged situation (Kazemi, 1996).

The ironic thing was that women had taken active part in the Iranian revolution. One of their claims during the revolution was claim for equal rights. Thousands of women had marched for their rights during the revolution. These
women demanded equal rights, both politically and socially, in what would become the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is another matter that things took a different turn after the Revolution. However, by the end of the 1980s circumstances improved and women’s status took a turn for the better.

As was mentioned earlier, people had been affected by the Iranian revolution and the war. The two selected movies to some extent deal with this topic. The time depicted in the film Two Women is the Iranian revolution. During this time the social and political conditions of Iran were under the fundamental change. This film has shown Cultural Revolution which resulted in the closing down of universities during the revolution. Fereshteh, the female protagonist is a student and the closing of the university brings about great changes in her life. She has to leave the city where she studies and has to go to her home town to start a new life which she has never imagined. The film shows how a brilliant student with a great deal of self confidence is forced to turn into a traditional woman who cannot be herself and has to follow patriarchal rules. The second film, Killing Rabid Dogs shows the condition of Iran during the war time. At this time the social, political and specifically economic conditions in Iran were in a major crisis. In this film the female protagonist, Golrokh comes back from abroad to Iran and faces substantial changes in society. She has to adjust her life to these changes which occur in society. She tries to get her husband freed from jail and starts her struggle against corruption, decadence, lust, hypocrisy, illiteracy and ignorance. She has hope for rebuilding her broken family, metaphorically, a troubled society.

Thus, in case of both the selected movies, we can see similar points which are related to women-centric issues. We decided on these films to show women’s strong representation in the Iranian cinema by focusing on the issues of women’s agency in the structural system of patriarchy in Iranian society. The next sections contain the analysis of both films in this light.

Iranian Films under Study: Two Women and Killing Rabid Dogs

Two Women directed by Tahmineh Milani

Two Women is a very popular Iranian film by writer and director Tahmineh Milani, released in 1999. Feminist filmmaker Tahmineh Milani is one of Iran's few high-
profile female filmmakers. Constantly at odds with the government, her often melodramatic films usually deal with women's rights and the Islamic revolution, featuring fearless female leads confronting an oppressive regime. Interestingly, despite her feminism, she is famous for stating that a filmmaker's gender is insignificant when considering cinematic creations that reflect feminine perspectives and experiences. *Two Women* (1999), her fifth film depicting the story of a scholarly woman whose spirit is crushed by the male characters that inhabit her life, took seven years to be approved. She was arrested in 2001 for her subsequent film, *The Hidden Half* (2001) about a judge who discovers that his wife was once a revolutionary, before an international uproar among filmmakers led to her release.

Milani is an avowed feminist who focuses on the conditions of urban women and their everyday struggles at home, in the context of patriarchy and in the realm of politics in a society where the culture and laws conspire against them. She is known for touching controversial and sensitive issues, including women's rights in her films. She usually adopts a highly melodramatic style and focuses more on gender issues and her female characters tend to be the subject of intense oppression and discrimination. She has received critical accolades and awards for her films, especially for *Two Women*.

**Plot Outline of Two Women**

*Two Women* is an angry and heartbreaking film, made in Iran by a woman, about a patriarchal society that puts cruel limits on the freedom of women who want to lead independent lives. The film charts the lives of two promising architecture students over the course of the first turbulent years of the Islamic Republic, creating a portrait of traditions that conspire to trap women and stop them from realizing their full potential. In an extensive interview, Tahmineh Milani stated that the name *Two Women* alluded to two different potential life-stories of one woman. The film won the best screenplay award at Iran's Fajr Film Festival in 1999, as well as, Best Actress award for Niki Karimi's performance in the Taormina Film Festival.

As far as the story of the film goes, it tells us about the life and experiences of Fereshteh, a brilliant student who is leading an ordinary life in Tehran of the early 1980s till the madness of men reaches out and pins her down arresting her flight of freedom (Darznik, 2000). Fereshteh is from a provincial town, and it is to her father's
credit that he allows her to attend university; although he believes that her proper place is at home, married, giving him grandchildren. In Tehran, she excels in a ‘man’s’ field, namely sciences, and loves the heady freedom of books, classrooms, campus life and her friends. Although Fereshteh lives independently in a university dormitory, she is formally in the care of her uncle, her father’s brother, who lives in Tehran.

The film starts at some fourteen years after Fereshteh and Roya became friends, while studying architecture at a university in Tehran. Roya is now a successful architect married to a liberal minded husband, who was earlier her classmate. However, the film narrates the events in the life of Fereshteh over the course of the preceding fourteen years, which are revealed through a series of flashbacks that represent Feresheh’s and Roya’s reminiscences (Schwartz, 2003).

Fereshteh, whose family lives in financially strained circumstances in Esfahan, is an excellent student who brims with hopes and expectations for her future and what she would do for her family on graduating. This fact is accentuated by her rejecting a marriage proposal (conveyed by a female intermediary) by a student of mechanics in his last year, studying at the same university, whose father is a university professor. We are further informed that the family of this fellow student is very wealthy. Fereshteh supports herself financially by giving private tuitions to fellow students. Roya’s family, on the other hand, is quite affluent. She becomes one of Fereshteh’s private pupils and gradually, a deep friendship develops between the two.

Fereshteh is stalked by an obsessive young man named Hassan who stops at nothing in an effort to gain her attention and, as he puts it, marry her. He creates many problems for her, including inflicting serious bodily harm by throwing acid on Fereshteh’s cousin by mistaking him as Fereshteh’s boyfriend. This prompts Fereshteh’s father to force her to return to their home in Esfahan as through some inverted logic, her father believes that the actions of the stalker must have been provoked by some impropriety on the part of his daughter.

These events take place at the time when the universities are being closed by the government of Iran, which in reality took place in the second half of 1979 as a result of the Iranian Cultural Revolution of 1980-1987. Fereshteh does not see her departure from Tehran as life-changing, but as a temporary event with no significant
consequences for her studies and her future plans. The stalker follows Fereshteh to Esfahan and during a chase involving his motorcycle and her car, causes a fatal accident involving two children playing football on street. Implicated in this accident, Fereshteh is asked by the court to pay a hefty amount to the parents of the injured child as compensation, which her family’s financial conditions do not allow.

A neighbor named Ahmad, who helps Fereshteh and her family with the legal case following this accident, asks for Fereshteh's hand in return and despite her initial fierce opposition to the proposal, he succeeds in gaining Fereshteh's consent by promising to be supportive of her plan to pursue her studies following the opening of universities, and the two marry. After marriage, he proves to be an utterly jealous husband who bars Fereshteh from having contact with anyone in the outside world whom he does not approve of, including her association with Royā. Although he does not know Royā at all, he feels hatred towards her, believing that she represents the liberal society that he finds so despicable.

When Fershteh applies to the court for divorce, the presiding judge dismisses the case outright, stating that none of the actions of her husband, that suffocate her both emotionally and intellectually, were sufficient for the court to grant divorce. The judge's decision is based on Fereshteh answering a series of questions – such as whether her husband was violent, whether he was unfaithful, whether he had drug addition, etc. – in the negative. In response to Fereshteh's repeated pleas and appeal to consider her as a human being first, the judge retorts that she should not waste the time of the court. It is notable that although one never sees Ahmad beating Fereshteh, in reality he is a violent man, as he constantly verbally abuses Fereshteh and often brandishes a kitchen knife while doing so. This is Milānī's subtle way of showing how domestic violence is often not recognized even by its very victims. Fereshteh and her husband have two sons (both in their teens when Fereshteh and Royā meet after fourteen years) who outwardly love both parents equally, but inwardly stand on the side of their mother, who, amongst others, teaches them to the best of her ability.

In the last scenes of the film, after yet another fight with her husband, Fereshteh runs into Hassan, now out of prison but even more embittered and vengeful than before. He chases her with a knife in hand, and corners her in an alley. Sure that she is going to die, she falls down on the ground and waits for him to knife her. The
assailant and the victim whose paths first crossed thirteen years ago now encounter each other again. Both look back at that time long past, and she berates him for being responsible for all that has happened to her. At this point her husband Ahmad bursts in on the action, attacks Hassan, and is knifed by him while Fereshteh watches in horror. Thus, a chance meeting of Fereshteh, her stalker still stalking her on being released after spending thirteen years in jail and Fereshteh's husband in the same place proves fateful to the three.

The film’s last scene is richly poignant. It is as if Fereshteh has finally woken from a long nightmare. She contemplates the liberties and responsibilities represented by her husband's death. She cries and says "I feel like a free bird without any wings" implying that although she is finally free of the marriage, yet it is too late for her as not only does she have the responsibilities of caring for her sons, she has lost not just fourteen years of her life but also her self-confidence.

Specifically, Two Women expresses powerful currents in Iranian society. The film brings out most prominently the issue of women struggling to come out from under the thumbs of the men that rule them. It works because we see the contrasting lives of a woman who is allowed basic freedoms by her family, and one who is not. Its feminist statements are really strong and also have strong themes of sexual politics. This film depicts the fate of contemporary Iranian women and shows limitations on freedom of women in patriarchal societies and how they fight for their rights to have independent lives. Two Women deals in the details of daily life in post-revolutionary Iran, in the unspoken ways that a woman's duties, her clothing, her behavior, who she speaks to, what she says, all, express her servitude in a male-dominated society.

_Killing Rabid Dogs directed by Bahram Beyzai_

Bahram Beyzai, born to a literary family in Tehran in 1953 is one of the most enigmatic figures of the contemporary Iranian cultural scene. He is a leading expert in Iranian dramatic arts and his outstanding command of the Persian language and narration ranks him high on the list of Iranian script writers. Beyzai is one of the major names in Iranian art cinema even though his reputation beyond the borders of Iran remains far behind those who are known as the pillars of the new wave of Iranian neo-realism. In international film festivals Beyzai's multi faceted and complex work leaves many confused as how to fit his work into any genre.
The most controversial theme in Beyzai's films which has frequently led to official banning of his films is the iconic representation of women. Women's issues are frequently addressed in the Iranian social cinema. Beyzai's depiction of women on screen, however, dates back to the early 70's and deviates from the typical contemporary realism that draws attention to the cultural, religious and social webs in which the average women of Iran are supposedly caught. The women of his films although challenged by unjust realities, transcend the boundaries that surround them by the virtue of their natural superiority. In his depictions, women are entangled in the ropes of the patriarchal society yet they are not victims to it. While Beyzai's films metaphorically address the potentials of feminine mobility in the early years of Islamic revolution, yet in his later films for portraying the issue of femininity he even resorts to the use of actual props. For instance, automobiles have become an indispensable vehicle for extending the presence of women in the public sphere. Nevertheless, Beyzai's key interest is to show the empowerment of women, how they challenge the norm, how they reject the tradition and how they are empowered by their independence, power of will and their invincible love as mother, lovers, sisters and wives. These women however signify more that their traditional roles. Their pivotal function in the majority of Beyzai's films is as political signifiers or symbols of the spirit of life and the soul of the nation. Their representations are based on the reality and the complexity of their life. It can be said that in his cinematic works these women portrayed as having an internal power to augment their status in the face of the most difficult of circumstances. In truth, we can see the aspects of both subjectivity and resistance in his film *Killing Rabid Dogs*. In fact, this film is considered as a critique of social situation with specific attention to the women's issues in Iranian society.

**Plot Outline of Killing Rabid Dogs**

*Killing Rabid Dogs* (Sag Koshi) is a film, which tells us the story of a cruel fraud who destroys the lives of many people, including his wife and friends, so that finally the victims decide to kill him like a dog. In fact, the idea behind the film may be that those who live like rabid dogs should be killed like them, which is the fate of the character Naser in the film. The story traces the life of an Iranian woman writer, Golrokh Kamali, who had left her husband, Nasar Moaser, because of her suspicion regarding his relationship with the secretary of his company. She returns to Tehran at
the end of war and sees her husband who has lost all his money and is going to prison. Golrokh learns from her husband that his partner has plotted to take the entire fund of the company and fled the country leaving her husband to face the creditors and pay off all the debts of the company. Golrokh feels responsible for his plight as she experiences guilt for her suspicion towards him. So she pays the creditors off, proves her husband’s innocence and obtains her husband’s freedom. In order to do all this, Golrokh, with her simplicity of heart and intellectual bend of mind has to enter the world of commerce, which is far removed from her way of thinking.

In her effort to help her husband she has to deal with each of the creditors and complainants, and while doing so, she has to face many difficulties and situations that she finds very daunting, but which she faces with great determination and resolve. She tolerates everything, from derision and insult to annoyance and violence. At the end, she succeeds in setting her husband free. But instead of showing gratitude, he gives her a letter asking for a divorce. Golrokh now realizes that all of these events have been part of a plan hatched by her husband to become the sole legal owner of his firm. He had, in fact, sent his partner abroad on the pretext of work and then embezzled all the money from the company and advised the partner to stay abroad till the situation is resolved. By making Golrokh clear all the debts, he now became the legal owner of the company, cheating even his partner. Now that he is free and has all the money, he plans to marry his lady love and go abroad for their honeymoon. However, his plans are foiled by the return of his partner who not only tells Golrokh the truth but also kills Naser Moaser. In the end Golrokh finds herself cheated, manipulated and empty inside and decides to pour her feelings into her writing. Despite her pain, we see that she doesn’t become defeated and depressed and with this beautiful expression that: "I have tried my abilities and proved myself somehow" comes out from this intolerable pressure. In spite of this heartbreaking experience, she does not lose heart and instead chooses to keep moving forward which is depicted in the last scene portraying her driving her car on a road, metaphorically showing us her movement towards the future.

*Killing Rabid Dogs* is one of the women-centric films in the history of post revolutionary Iranian cinema, which criticizes the social realities in Iranian society. The film traces clearly the impact of social structure on women's lives. Beyzai in this film portrays different aspects of women's lives in private and social spheres. It deals
with injustice and violence against women by the male dominated system. It is about women's fight against the patriarchal culture. This film represents a realistic image of women as empowered and rebellious beings both in cinema and in a broader extent in society. Women’s portrayals in his films go beyond the stereotypes of ordinary women in Iranian culture and they are depicted as agents of social change fighting social inequality and discrimination in order to protect their feminine identity and their rights as women. The film shows that in spite of many difficulties, the protagonist independently challenges all social barriers and doesn't stop her efforts to achieve her will. Her story illustrates the situation of contemporary women in Iran who are facing various social, cultural and traditional challenges and problems.

Portrayal of Women in the Films through Structure and Agency

After above description of the storylines of both films, next we look at the indicators of social structure and women's agency which affect the representation of women in the selected films. As defined in the previous chapter, the structural elements taken into consideration for this study are patriarchy, religion, class and/caste, gender stereotyping and violence while the sub-themes underlying agency are empowerment, decision making, education, rebellion, participation.

Themes of Social Structure

Patriarchy

The question of patriarchy and its persistence in the Middle East has received a great deal of attention in the scholarly literature (Ahmed, 1992; Moghadam, 1993; Tohidi, 1996). Generally, religions have a patriarchal view of the relationship between the genders. Patriarchy has been a major institution in the area since ancient times and is deeply rooted in religious, legal and cultural practices. Studies of the women's movement and early feminists have also focused on this problem in the Middle East. Topics such as women's low status, women’s chastity, honor killings, sexuality etc., are focused upon which have a considerable impact upon women’s lives and experiences in countries where patriarchal systems exist.

A look at the conditions in the Iranian society reveals that since the revolution in Iran patriarchy has been promoted and strengthened by reverting to ancient Islamic codes and with enforced patriarchal practices that control female appearance and
mobility. As an Islamic society in Iran, gender (jens, jensiyat) is generally understood in the sense of gender identity, roles and relations, premised on the binary categories ‘man’ (mard) and ‘woman’ (zan). Gender distinction and gender stereotypes are crucial to an Islamic worldview and play an important role in the organization of everyday life in Iran today. The way Quran is interpreted usually upholds the view of man’s superiority and domination over woman. It is implied that it is men’s responsibility and duty to keep women under their protection and control. The Muslim woman has been portrayed as submissive, oppressed and the mass media and educational systems have played a major role in the construction of this representation (Darvishpour, 2003). In this sense women’s status is reflected in the Islamic thought and Quran. Islam as a religion, and the Quran, the prophet’s sayings, and Islamic Shari’i as the source of personal statutes laws have been considered as important determining factors of the Iranian women’s status. As a result, in the Islamic societies women occupy a secondary and inferior position to men. In this regard there are some Islamic rules, such as social rights, marriage and divorce laws, and other crucial areas which affect women’s lives in society.

In Iran, one important social factor contributing to the increase in the rate of the women being stalked is “patriarchy”, which is most evident in small cities and villages. One significant consequence of patriarchy is that some men may believe they have the power to interfere in all of the women’s affairs, or even make decisions on their behalf (Kordvani, 2002). Yet, it is also interesting to note that the Iranian women have constantly indulged in practices that contain or limit the impact of patriarchal controls imposed upon them soon after the Islamic revolution. Patriarchy in Iran in fact, raised higher the bar of challenge for attaining equality for women’s right.

Gender distinction operates not just within the realm of religious ‘belief’ or cultural ‘symbols’, but also at the level and core of state institutions. This means that the whole political process is gendered (Mir Hosseini, 2007). Relationships between men and women are highly guarded in an Islamic society such as Iran. It is a society strongly segregated by gender. According to gender relations in patriarchy, it should be stated that the two sexes are created differently and should accordingly assume different responsibilities in public and private spheres. Men and women are dichotomously identified with rationality and emotionality.
As family is considered the only proper locus for the expression of sexuality for both sexes, regulation of female sexuality becomes a main preoccupation of the male family members. The regulation of the behavior of family members primarily falls on the shoulders of the father who is responsible for the maintenance of his wife and children. Other male members of the family, especially sons, exercise similar restrictions on their sisters and, in some cases, mothers. Men’s economic power, their right of divorce, albeit conditional and automatic custody of children puts women in a vulnerable position. As “queens of the house,” however, wives are also responsible for maintaining the house, which includes supervising children’s behavior. Sons and daughters are raised in this atmosphere to assume similar roles as grown-ups. Daughters grow under their mother’s wing and are supposed to be properly trained for assuming the roles of wives and mothers in due time. Sons, on the other hand, learn their roles primarily by emulating their fathers. Sons are raised to assume their economic responsibilities in the family, as well as, their authoritative role of the patriarch; daughters are raised to be honorable, chaste, and skillful in managing the household.

Regarding gender relations patriarchy has been institutionalized in Iranian culture. Accordingly, in the selected film *Two Women* men are shown as stereotypically dominant and conservative. Some illustrate their patriarchal mindset by showing emotional dominance over women while others may do so by perpetrating physical violence against them. In the first category is the leading character Fereshteh’s father who is a traditional man, afraid for his dignity and worried about his daughter’s chastity, who tries to control his daughter in order to avoid inappropriate behavior. In most situations he gives the feeling of guilt to her because of her actions. He forces her to give up her studies and return to her hometown because he feels that by living alone in a hostel in Tehran, she is vulnerable to bad influences. As he says to her that "damn you for doing this to me, is this why you came to Tehran, to ruin and humiliate me." Not only that but when her stalker Hassan attacks her cousin mistaking him for her boyfriend, instead of blaming Hassan, her father accuses Fereshteh instead for creating this situation. His words are: "I am disgraced, robbed of my dignity. I wish you were dead, go pack your stuff. I’ve bought tickets for tomorrow. You have done all the studying you needed. You gained us enough glory". And when she meets with an accident, he says: "We’ve been disgraced, my daughter at the police station. What am I going to do with you? You
have humiliated me. Totally disgraced me. God damn me for sending you to college. What a mistake, I have to pay for it the rest of my life. We have lost all dignity, our daughter is either in jail or in court, what is left of our dignity. I will kill her tonight. I am not my father's son if I don't do that. I sacrifice my family so she can go to school to make me proud, instead she is a disgrace". It is clear that he dominates her life and doesn’t let her make her own decisions. All that matters to him is his dignity. Such characters are found in real life in the patriarchal system the world over where the father and the other male members of the family decide everything for women.

Similarly, Fereshteh’s husband is also depicted as a person who has a dogmatic thinking and believes that his wife should obey him and follow his orders without question. He is possessive and has a paranoid personality. He wants to limit her to just domestic work and stops her from continuing her education. He thinks provision of financial security to his wife is enough and other dimension of her needs are not important. In one of the scenes he tells her "you don’t love me. I have done my part, bought you a house, clothes, I saved you. I sacrificed my family, my pride for you". In his view providing financial help to her family should make her satisfied and appreciative.

At the time of marriage he told Fereshteh that he will give her whatever she wants and also that she could go to college: "I'll provide everything you want. We will live anywhere you want. I'll provide the wedding you want. I'll give you written permission for college". But when her friend goes to Fereshteh's place to inform her that the university has re-opened, her husband says that "she doesn’t want to study. Her life has changed. She has her family life. Don't ruin it for us". In another scene when Fereshteh says that she wants to go back to her studies and then find a job, he just laughs and says "your school is your life, your family. I'll tell your school that as your husband I don’t approve and that I didn’t sign anything". He even adds that "When you finish your college what do you want to do? You want back your liberties. You don’t have emotion for your children because of studying. You want to live loosely and freely. You and I walk along different lines. You are set in your ways, I can’t change you".

The way a woman’s voice is silenced in a patriarchal system is symbolically depicted poignantly in one scene where when Fereshteh is having labor pains the nurses ask her to scream loudly but her husband forbids her to do so and asks her to
be silent as no one should hear her voice. This scene signifies her silence in the other dimensions of life, as well as in a patriarchal system, women are supposed to be silent and just follow the oppressive rules.

Men in patriarchal societies usually try and break the spirit of the women whenever they try to achieve something. In this film too, it has been shown that Ahmed wants to suppress her freedom and give the feeling of inferiority to her just because she wants to be different and progressive. He tells her mother "She is careless. She has no maternal instincts. I tried to train her, it was useless, and your daughter is a lost cause, you are all the same". And he says to her in front of her mother "You don't know anything, and you want to ruin my kids, to wreck my nerves. It was obvious from day one you weren't my type. I fooled myself because I loved you. You can be sure that I can take care of the kids. I feel sorry for you and your shady past. You will be miserable. No one will take pity on you. I was a fool".

It is obvious that he tries to limit her freedom and tries to control her, because he wants her just as a submissive wife who cannot do anything without her husband's permission. "You have got a lot of nerve talking this way. I should control you. You have had way too much freedom". Even immediately after marriage he starts to suspect her even from the time before marriage and suspects that she is not a woman with a good character. "You used to go to Tehran by yourself. Did you meet people on the bus? Did you talk to men? How about your classmates? You were really a liberated girl. I am a psychologist and sociologist. You can't fool me, I read people like a book. I know what you are thinking. I know what kind of life you want". He thinks that he knows everything and he can judge her and make decisions for her. When Fereshteh tries to look after her body in order to avoid gaining weight after the birth of her children, he gets angry when he sees her exercising and says: "If you take care of your husband and your children instead of your body you will have a good spirit". He insists on linking every little action of her to her marital life and her duty as wife and mother.

The other dominant man in this film is the stalker Hassan who destroys Fereshteh's life by trying to force her to love him and marry him. He represents that face of patriarchy where one's manhood is displayed through aggression and violence. He tells her "You can't get away from me. Nobody says no to me". He asserts in court that he loves her and expected that when he proposed to her she would say yes. "The
first time I saw her I fell in love. I wanted to be everything for her, her man, shadow of her head, but all she did was to ridicule me, hurt me. She destroyed me. I hated everything. My heart fluttered for her. She provoked me. I wanted to show her that I am special”. In the last scene when he is disappointed with her and thinks that she ruined his life he tells her "I have finally found you. You destroyed me. I wanted to marry you, you didn't let me. I wanted to make you happy, you didn't let me. I wanted to be your man, you didn't let me. I wanted to do right, you didn't let me”.

In Killing Rabid Dogs too, the focus is on sketching a picture of a patriarchal social set up. However, unlike Two Women in which most of the action takes place in the so called private sphere of the family, here the focus is more on the gender relations in the public sphere. In addition, men are shown as being not only dominant but also exploitative and manipulative. For instance, Golrokh's husband tries to use her to gain his freedom from the jail. He tells her "You are the only one I can trust. You are my last hope. But I can't bear it. It is a hard job". At the end of the film we, along with Golrokh realize that he has lied to her and has manipulated her for his goals. Nevertheless, in most parts of film the stress is on depicting the power relations between the genders, which is shown through the words, actions and general behavior of the men in the film towards the female protagonist. For example, when Golrokh telephones one of those men he tells her: "I won't talk to a woman. Tell your man to call. I won't deal with a stupid woman. Send your man. Find a man to speak for you". Similarly, when one of the men she deals with sees her beauty, he asks her to come to his place if she wants her work done. He tells her that "If you want the stamp and the cheque, come to my house. There won't be anyone except us. I can make you my temporary wife to silence the gossip". This shows how traditional men don’t value the dignity of women and view them merely as sex objects apart from considering them as inferior beings, the second sex.

**Gender Stereotyping**

Gender stereotypes in the traditional society see women as confined to the home, where they perform various domestic tasks associated with managing a household and rearing children whereas men are supposed to work in the public sphere, that is, in the fields, factories, bazaars, and offices. From this point of view, women adhering to the traditional roles are identified as “good women,” implying that those who comply
with the social codes of chastity and virtue would have men’s respect and protection while those who fail to conform would be deprived of social respect and protection. The underlying idea here is that because women are the weaker sex, all female members of the family need close supervision. Clearly, the effort is to control the sexuality of women. In this sense, hejab (veil) is not just an external cover, but an internal one and whether the woman wears the veil on the outside or not, she is supposed to mask her innermost desires and yearnings. She is supposed to conceal her true nature from others. Women’s “chastity” and “virtue” have been essential elements of Iranian cultural identity and virginity has become a sign of chastity (Shahidian, 2009).

In this sense it should be noted that patriarchal and repressive family structure that is common to all the Muslim societies. The supreme position of the father economically and politically as defined by the Islamic social system is readily supported by Iranian law. The father has the sole responsibility for his wife and children's maintenance as he is obligated by law to do so. His sons also develop a strong identification with him that enables them to identify emotionally with every kind of authority. The daughters on the other hand are trained to identify with the submissive and resigned attitudes of the mother to all male members of the family (Azari, 1983).

Gender stereotyping is portrayed in both films. Two Women shows that whenever a woman doesn’t follow the traditional rules and is not a ‘proper’ model of womanhood, she has to face many problems. For example, Fereshteh is depicted as a dynamic woman who has great plans for her future. But her husband wants her to be under his control and follow the footsteps of his mother, which involves being satisfied with her marital life and rearing children. For him his mother is an ideal typical woman who is uneducated and just does routine work at home. He wants to change his educated wife’s personality into a passive and submissive woman. Several times he tells her that "You are not a good woman as a marriage partner, I should control you and change you. You are not good enough to rear children. You want to be liberated and do whatever you want. You don’t give attention to your marital life because you just think of yourself and your personal life".

In Killing Rabid Dogs also similar gender stereotypes can be found. We see the protagonist Golrokh who is an educated and strong woman and who
independently deals with different types of men during the course of the film. In this way because she behaves unlike a traditional woman, and treats them as equals, men cannot stand her assertive behavior. Consequently, they want to lower her self esteem by using abusive language, emotional violence and even rape.

In both selected films one can clearly see how the traditional view of gender stereotyping holds that woman should be passive, weak and submissive to be accepted by society while the men must be dominant and have authority over their women. And in both films, when the female leads break these stereotypes by the way of thinking, talking and acting, they have to suffer the consequences.

**Social Class**

Iranian society has a strong sense of class structure. Classes in Iran have been divided into upper class, middle class, working class and lower class (Katouzian, 2007). The post revolutionary upper classes consist of some of the same elements as the old elite, such as large landowners, industrialists, financiers, and large-scale merchants. They remained part of the upper class by virtue of having stayed in Iran and having retained a considerable part of their wealth. A new element of the upper class is those with great political influence, many of them being the religious elite holding key government administrative positions. The middle class includes social groups like entrepreneurs, bazaar merchants, professionals, managers of private and nationalized concerns, the upper level civil service, teachers, medium-scale landowners, military officers etc. The working class is divided into various groups of workers: those in the oil industry, manufacturing, construction, and transportation; and mechanics and artisans in bazaar workshops. The workers within any one occupation, rather than sharing a common identity, are divided according to perceived skills. For example skilled construction workers, such as carpenters, electricians, and plumbers, earned significantly higher wages than the more numerous unskilled workers whom they tend to look down upon. Finally, there is the lower class distinguished by its high illiteracy rate, performance of manual labor, and generally marginal existence. The lower class can be further divided into two groups: those with regular employment and those without. Those who have regular work include domestic servants, bath attendants, porters, street cleaners, peddlers, street vendors, gardeners, office cleaners, laundry workers, and bakery workers.
After a brief introduction of the class structure in the Iranian context, it can be mentioned that in the two films under study social classes have an important relevance for the story and the events described. For instance, in *Two Women* the protagonist Fereshteh belongs to a working class and a traditional family and hence her life experiences reflect the elements of that particular social class. Her family is not wealthy and she has to work in order to pay for her education in Tehran. Later, it is because of lack of money that she has to agree to marry a wealthy man who offers to pay off her penalty amount fixed by the courts. The marriage causes her a lot of grief but she is unable to escape because of her financially weak position. On the other hand, her friend Roya belongs to a wealthy and modern family. She is able to continue her studies and fulfill her desire of becoming an architect. She marries a man of her own choice and becomes a successful woman who has a good standing in society. Thus, it appears that the economic and cultural nature of the family affect the current and future position of women in society as is depicted in *Two Women*. In the second film *Killing Rabid Dogs*, class distinctions are shown in a different way. Here the story focuses on issues such as corporate corruption, business and bankruptcy etc., which are phenomena that occur in the upper classes. We are also provided with a portrayal of different types of men's behaviors towards women and towards other men. The director tries to show wealth as a source of power for men through which they dominate others. Thus, although shown differently, both films do base their stories in the context of certain social class arrangements.

**Violence**

Violence against women is a very important issue and an international phenomenon. It is a result of gender discrimination and oppression specifically in patriarchal cultures and it is this discrimination that prevents men and women from having equality in all aspects of life. Historically, in many cultures there is a pattern which has been functioning through the overall subordination of women and dominance of men. Here, sex determines the roles and behaviors of individuals. Accordingly, values, customs and laws are based on sex differences, with men being the powerful and the dominant, and women being the weak and the subordinate. This pattern is found in the Middle Eastern societies as well, particularly in rural and tribal areas. Most Middle-Eastern societies have followed the sex-biased pattern of the family relations. This pattern embodies men’s responsibility to protect, control and whenever appropriate, to punish the female members.
In Iran, too there exists a patriarchal family structure where the man is the head of the family. The families are male dominated and the women are supposed to do what the men want of them. Women in Iranian society are victims of domestic violence, physical and mental abuse outside the household, honor killings and dowry murders. One of the common abuses in Iran is mental abuse in the form of domestic violence. This abuse includes harassing behavior towards the woman to disparage her, preventing her from meeting her relatives, prevent her from studying or working outside the home and imprisoning her in the house. Studies have shown that low level of education in women, insecurity of jobs, psychiatric disorders of men, and coercive marriage for women were associated with an increased risk of domestic violence. One major reason for greater incidence of violence against women is that psychological abuse in not considered as violence and women are not protected by law. In fact an old belief in Iranian traditional culture is that “women should sacrifice themselves and tolerate all types of maltreatment meted out to them”.

In relation to violence in the selected films, both films clearly portray exploitation of women and violence against women in a patriarchal system. In *Two Women*, the men in Fereshteh's life carry out various kinds of emotional and mental forms of violence against her. Her father forces her to discontinue her studies and get married to a man not of her choice. Her stalker Hassan is responsible for ruining her life. Her husband is a negative and suspicious person and forbids her to study and achieve her goals. He continually controls her, imprisons her at home and doesn't allow her to even read a book. He abuses her verbally, emotionally and mentally. It is worth noting that when she goes to court to apply for a divorce, she cannot prove her sufferings from mental violence. Therefore, Fereshteh suffers a lot from men's violence in different stages of her life – as a daughter of a dominating father, as a wife of an unfeeling husband and as a woman in society.

In the case of *Killing Rabid Dogs* also we observe many forms of violence against women. Golrokh is manipulated by her husband and despite her efforts to help him, he ultimately divorces her. In the process of helping her husband, she has to meet different men who perpetrate different types of violence against her. She gets assaulted many times and in many ways. Many of them suggest that she sleep with them, others humiliate her and she even gets raped. Thus, some impose physical injuries on her while others abuse her verbally and emotionally.
After analyzing the various themes of structure, namely, patriarchy, gender stereotyping, social class and violence, which have been represented in both films, next we come to the themes related to women's agency that can affect women's lives in the next section.

**Themes of Agency**

In Iran some films are referred to as women's films. These kinds of films negotiate with gender roles and challenge the patriarchal attitude. The purpose of these films is to show how women struggle against the hegemony of the patriarchal system. In this portion we shall attempt to examine the link between cinematic representation and female agency. We will focus on how indicators of agency are incorporated in the selected films to help identify women's agency within social structures. The themes we shall discuss are education, decision making and participation and empowerment and rebellion. Accordingly, in the following section the analysis of *Two Women* and *Killing Rabid Dogs* will be concerned with and investigate the possibility of women's agency under the oppression of patriarchal system and how the performance of agency by the main female character is constructed within those films by focusing on the agency indicators such as education, empowerment, participation and decision making and rebellion.

**Education**

The educational status of women is one of the most important indicators of development in any given society. Education is one of the foundations of individual awareness and a means of bringing about equality and empowerment. Women's education in different fields at different levels and subsequent career in a professional field enables them to rediscover themselves and to experience an independent identity. Education has been regarded as the most significant instrument for changing women's subjugated position in the society. It not only develops the personality and rationality of individuals, but qualifies them to fulfill certain economic, political and cultural functions and thereby improves their socio-economic status. Lack of education has been the stumbling block keeping women from attaining equal status in society, separating them from their male counterparts.

Since gender equality in education is part of gender equality in society at large, it is important to view the educational status of women within the broader framework of female agency in the social, political, and economic arenas. From this
perspective it should be realized that the right to education has been a major demand of the Iranian women’s movement from its formative days in the mid-nineteenth century. Women activists considered access to education a vital means for overcoming social barriers. Iranian women have been using university studies as a way to leave home, postpone marriage, and generally earn greater freedom and social respect. The growing numbers of young women in Iran’s universities is considered a phenomenon that has already brought substantial change to the country’s traditionally male-dominated society. The number of women, primarily from the upper middle class, attending institutions of higher education in Iran, has been steadily increasing since 1989. Education helps them gain control over their familial activities, perform social roles and participate in socio-political life of their society. In other words, in the present circumstances of Iran, women occupy a position which has rendered them capable of acquiring more opportunities.

However, there is a dilemma for educated Iranian women: their chances of finding a job are minimal. Gender discrimination abounds in the Iranian labor market, and college-educated women continue to remain largely outside the paid workforce. College-educated women find that the social role still assigned to them relegates them to the private sphere of their homes. For them, college is an experience of intangibles: of feeling uncontrolled; of increasing their ‘worth’ for marriage; of gaining respect; and of acquiring independence (Shavarini, 2005). For many young Iranian women, college or university is the avenue through which they discover an alternative to their prescribed gender role. These places represent a space where young Iranian women can, for a short time, escape their confining, restrictive home environments. The most salient factor that attracts Iranian girls to college is their desire to escape, and experience a world beyond, their restrictive home environments. These girls want to free themselves from the scrutiny of family and neighbors who want to protect them from contact with the opposite sex. The desire to gain independence is another factor which is closely associated with women's desire to escape their heavily controlled family environment and having financial autonomy.

In Two women for the main character Fereshteh education is the most important thing in her life. She is a very hardworking student of university and tries to continue her studies and find a good job. She is a modern women who is able to teach her friend English and math and also how to drive. She persistently wants to be
independent and help her family financially as well. She says to her friend that she doesn’t want to get married right after she finishes her college but instead wants to help out her family and has many plans. Discussing her love for reading she asserts that "I am starting to look like a book; I want to find myself in these books, my circumstances". Even when she is taken away from the university by force she still wants to learn and find a good job. When she hears that the university has re-opened, she says to her husband "I have to go to college to study. It will be good for our kids; it would take some pressure off me. I can transfer to another university or change my major. My mother will help and manage the kids. When the children have grown I can work. I want to go to college because of our children's future".

When her husband wants to stop her from studying because he is afraid of her becoming empowered and aware, she tells him "you didn’t let me go to school, didn’t let me learn a skill. But I will go. Let me show you something. Look real close at my books. These are all mine, you can't stop me from reading". She says to him that "this is a book that imparts knowledge. That is not a sin, how else am I going to learn".

Roya (the supportive character) is also a student of university. Through her the film provides a contrast to Fereshteh. By continuing her studies she is able to get a good job and marry a person of her own choice. It is thus portrayed that education becomes an important source for a woman to improve her life. She can manage her personal and social dimensions. She and her husband have an effective and mutual understanding relationship. On the other hand, because of the pressure over women from the traditional system Fereshteh cannot continue her studies and is unable to achieve her plans. Thus, in the film Two Woman the director Milani gives a lot of attention to the issue of women's education.

In Killing Rabid Dogs too, although nothing is mentioned directly regarding the importance of education, yet the main character Golrokh is a highly educated and socially active woman. She is a writer and belongs to a high cultural and intellectual family. She has a strong personality with self confidence. Due to her deep awareness and understanding she is in control of her life and leaves her husband on learning about his infidelity. Later when she comes to know of his predicament, she chooses to help him and does so by venturing into the big bad world of corporate relations. In fact, throughout the film she is shown as a capable woman who despite all the
hindrances put in her way by various men, has ability to face the problems and find a solution of overcoming these difficult and hard situations. Once again, even in this film the director Bahram Beyzai has portrayed the female protagonist as an educated woman.

**Decision Making and Participation**

After examining education as a key component of women's agency, we now consider women's power of decision making. A large body of research has attempted to explore the links between women's agency and their power of decision making. Although, the gender phenomenon in power and decision making has a historical background in human culture and is dependent on production of social, cultural, legal, religious and political structures, the question of liberating women from gender inequality has created an upheaval in power institutions globally. Equality in decision-making is essential to the empowerment of women. Women perform different tasks depending on the socio-economic structure they live in, the number of people in the family, the nature of professions they are involved in and many other factors (Reddy and Narayan, 1987).

The power relations that prevent women from leading fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making provides a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. Women's equal participation in decision-making is not only a demand for simple justice or democracy but can also be seen as a necessary condition for women's interests to be taken into account.

However, in a traditional country like Iran socialization and negative stereotyping of women and men, including stereotyping through the media, reinforces the tendency for decision-making to remain the domain of men. Not only are women not given the role of decision makers in the home, the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions in the areas of art, culture, sports, the media, education, religion and the law have prevented women from having a significant impact on many key institutions.
However, ideological power is reflected not only in the male characters in a film but the female characters also show their strong ideas about gender relationship, which is a demonstration of their challenge to masculine power. As Bertens points out once the social and cultural chains on women have been broken, women will be as independent and self-determining as men (Bertens, 2010). Women will openly display their power, knowledge, and skill, receiving public recognition and honor. Yuehua (2009) adds that the conflicts of power struggle have become more and more intense because of the gradual unfolding of the female's strength of control in the gender relationships and her struggle against the males' control. Women's awakening is on its way and women's struggle for equality, freedom, and independence greatly challenge the patriarchal power and reverse the political and social roles of gender at home and in society.

When we look at the film Two Women, Fershteh is sharp minded and can make decisions and handle every situation competently. When her stalker troubles her she does not get intimidated but tells her friend that "There is nothing to fear; we have to decide things for ourselves". She even talks about taking a proactive step to deal with such men. "There is got to be another way. We have to start a group. Our own group. The apaches. This jerk can't follow us around and say whatever he wants. We have to build ourselves up, have to become physically strong and learn karate". It shows how much power she has inside her.

In the other scene when she thinks that she cannot live with her husband, she decides to go in for a divorce. She goes to her parents' house and tells her father "I can't go back to that house. If you don't want me here, I'll go to Tehran to my uncle's house. Let him go file a complaint. It will take at least a few months. Let me find myself. I can't take it anymore". Not only this, but she even goes to the court and complains about his behavior toward her: "He is negative, suspicious about me, insults my intelligence, and locks me up. I am living with a man whom I didn't choose. He is destroying me. He is destroying my self esteem. I am not the woman he wants. I am totally different. I am a human being, look at me. I want to live like one. How come a man is considered bad if he doesn't pay the bills, but it is okay if he abuses me emotionally? I just want to be an equal in this marriage to have some say". It shows that she has the capacity to take a decision regarding serious issues such as divorce.
In *Killing Rabid Dogs* too, Golrokh is shown to have an internal power and wisdom through which she can achieve her goals. She adjusts with new situations in her life due to her strong will power. She starts a new life after leaving her husband and becomes a writer. When she chooses to give him another chance by helping him in his financial crisis, in spite of not having much knowledge about financial issues such as bankruptcy, she decides to help her husband by dealing with the various parties that can assist him in his situation. She tells her husband that "Seeing you in jail would be hard. I want to help you. The harder it is the better. I will do anything to free you". She, therefore, takes a decision to go ahead without fear and face all the obstacles that she may encounter in order to reach her objective. All through the film she is shown to deal with different type of men and in each situation she has to make a decision to handle them differently, which she does successfully. Even when she is betrayed by her husband a second time, she survives this trauma and walks away back into her intellectual word of writing. She creates a new way of forgetting and overcoming her suffering by taking a decision to write a story about all that happened to her. Thus, in both the films the women protagonists, despite their structural restrictions and limitations, offer a good fight to overcome these constraints.

**Empowerment and Rebellion**

After considering the important factor of women’s power of decision making, we now take up the subject of how women challenge their subjugation by men and offer resistance to the patriarchal structure. Feminists have analyzed the structure of male and female positions in society and criticized the relationship between man and woman on basis of gender discrimination with the male being dominant and the female submissive, thereby implying that men are superior and female inferior. Men use their power to control and oppress women. In order to retain the power, men try every means to build an absolute patriarchy of manhood, so that they can have a tight control of their women, politically, socially, economically, and sexually, both inside and outside their homes. They try to diminish female identity or role in the societal context by setting up an unfavorable image of females as ideologically submissive and dependent, indicating that men are the subject or the absolute and that women are ‘the other’ – an object whose existence is defined and interpreted by the male, the dominant being in society (Yuehua, 2009).
Women world over, however have realized this domination and have proven to be resistant to the authority of men. This brings a sort of self-respect and agency to them. They try not to be mere subordinates and passive victims but try to break the myth that woman can only depend on the men for their survival. They have transformed into agents and active opposers, who rebel against male dominated society and the patriarchal system. In Iran women’s resistance to patriarchy has taken the shape of women stepping out of their homes and trying to find a foothold in the world of employment where they can be equals of men. Also, the resistance from women has come in the shape of writings and films that challenge the patriarchal structure. The selected films are examples of this struggle.

In both films we can see how the female characters react against oppression. In Two Women when Fereshteh’s father shouts at her for attracting the attention of a stalker and accuses her of damaging his dignity, his aim is to give her a feeling of guilt. However, Fereshteh cannot remain silent when she has not done anything wrong and she rebels and protests against this injustice of the patriarchal system. She tells her father "What disgrace? What have I done to cause you disgrace? Any money you sent me I repaid in double. Why don’t you get it, some loser was harassing me, it is not my fault. I won’t shut up, what do you want from me? You have insulted me. I won’t cry. You belittled me, it is enough, instead of supporting me, you break me. I am a human being".

She also rebels against her husband when she feels that she is being suffocated by his suspicion and insecurity. She says to him "You should be ashamed of yourself. Don’t hurt me. I am your friend. Allow me a chance to love you. You don’t want to live together. We both have to work on it. Let me see my family. Let me help and build our life together. You can’t just make judgment about people.... Why don’t you let me talk? Why do you get defensive? You are right. You can’t change me. That I would go to college was the condition to our marriage. I knew that I would come to this. But I will go and you can’t stop me. You have to let me go because you promised. Otherwise I will get a divorce". Thus, Fereshteh is clearly challenging her husband’s authority and even threatening to file for a divorce.

Twice in the film Fereshteh feels so much pressure on herself that she can’t stay with her husband any more. She goes to her father’s house and says;"I can’t live with
this man. It is ridiculous, he drives me everywhere. He hides the phone. He is hiding 
around here and watching me. You wanted to get rid of me; you sold me to a little boy 
who did whatever he wanted to with me. He beat me not physically but verbally. Why 
do you let him lock me up, what have I done? I don’t need this kind of love. Father 
please help me get a divorce”. Once again despite living in a system where women’s 
suffering, abuse, and suppression are commonplace, she tries to defy the system in 
search for her happiness. In the Iranian court where women usually don’t have the 
right to ask for divorce unless they have sufficient reason and evidence, Fereshteh 
asserts that she cannot continue her marital relationship and wants a divorce. The 
judge asks her "Does your husband provide you shelter? Does he beat you? Does he 
drinks alcohol or is having any other addiction?” And she replies "He does 
everything you say but he cannot believe me and he tortures me mentally and 
spiritually. I want to be treated as a human being”. These kinds of expressions 
indicate her assertive and rebellious behavior and she is such kind of woman who can 
resist against inequality and talks about her rights in a system which offers her no 
support.

When her husband is killed, she feels powerless for a moment but soon 
recovers and talking to her friend says that “I can learn to drive, learn computer, find 
a job. Do you think they will let me allow me back in college? What about the kids? 
Will they give them to me or to their uncle or grandpa? I have to fight. God give me 
strength. I have so much to do. I have to go to college, be both parents to my kids, I 
can’t waste any time. Do you have a book on women who have to raise their children 
alone”? Here the important thing is that she is trying to rebuild her self confidence 
and her ability as before. Obviously she doesn't let herself be governed by weakness 
and she tries to be strong and re-discover her agency again. It is quite clear that the 
film is highlighting the issue of women’s rebellion and empowerment by the acts and 
words of its heroine.

In Killing Rabid Dogs, the protagonist carries the pain of her husband’s 
unfaithfulness and suffers from the masculine behavior of men in many situations. 
However, she chooses to stand up to them every time. Even in very harsh conditions 
such as rape and physical beatings, she just screams but does not beg for mercy. She 
challenges the men’s world by courage and even manipulation. Despite being told by 
many men that she would not be able to survive in the financial world ruled by men,
she persists and ends up victorious although in the process she has to face much tension, disrespect, physical and emotional abuse. In one scene where she is ill-treated by one of the men who wants her to beg and cry in front of him, she says "You are trying to force me to beg in front of you because you are a man. If you want me to cry, it is not going to happen. All I have left is hatred and anger". She is portrayed as an empowered woman who can speak assertively, has control over all situations and doesn't show any weakness, because she believes that she must be strong in front of men.

In conclusion one can see that both films represent the present realities of the women in Iranian society. They critique gender hierarchies and patriarchal ideologies (structure) in narrative cinema. Additionally, they focus on the struggle of women (agency) who oppose abusive and biased power of men in the family and in the patriarchal Iranian society. These films portray women both as victimized and as empowered. To some extent the protagonists may not succeed in beating the system. But it is important that they fight it by breaking their silence and stepping forward to change the conditions. The effort, therefore, is to show women in empowering roles thus showcasing the twin phenomena of oppression and overcoming of oppression through films.