Chapter V

Conclusion
Cinema is a social phenomenon. It is a reflection of the society. Films, can thus, be examined as a cultural product and as a social practice. Films reflect society’s main values, ideas and beliefs. The cinematic studies in the field of sociology usually study sociological themes such as social structure, hegemony, patriarchy, subordination, marginality, with special attention to the issue of effects of caste, social class, religion, tradition and ethnicity in the analysis of representations in films. Gender too, is an important aspect of the cinematic narratives. Gender is culturally constructed in social interaction and social structure in the course of cinema which depicts and captures the real lives of people in the social and cultural spheres. In fact, the theme of cinema as a reinforcer of traditional structure or as a tool of social transformation is one of the integral debates in the sociological analysis of films. Our study too is a modest effort in this regard.

In the previous chapters of this study we have discussed the linkage of gender and media with specific focus on women's depiction on screen. The general purpose of this study was to investigate the interrelation of gender, women and cinema in the context of Iranian and Indian films. Accordingly, in the first chapter of this study we have considered the sociological view of the concept of gender and its relation to media, specifically cinema, along with the issue of portrayal of women in cinema. Our attempt was to study films in the context of theories related to a) social structure and agency and b) feminist perspectives on media and films, also known as feminist film theory or feminist film criticism. Through the first, the attempt was to determine to what extent films under study presented a narrative that not only reflected the traditional structural elements, but also went on to reproduce it and to what extent did they try to counter the structure through the portrayal of women as change agents. Through the discussion of the feminist film criticism, too, similar questions were raised – whether films depict women as objects or do they provide an alternative to traditional images. These issues were to be examined in terms of structural sub-themes: patriarchy, gender stereotyping, caste/social class system and violence and the sub-themes falling under agency, namely, education, decision making and participation, rebellion and empowerment.

When we went through the literature on this subject, we found that most of the writing was done in the context of Hollywood. For instance, feminists like Laura Mulvey (1975) and Jill Nelmes (1996) analyzed women’s cinematic representation in
American films through psychoanalytical approach underlining the fact that women in films are portrayed as passive objects because of the domination of the male gaze. Clarie Johnston (1973) and Lauire Sharage (1990) have worked on distortion of women's image in cinema. They emphasized the semiotic point of view for analyzing women's stereotypes in patriarchal ideology through codes and myths. Sharon Smith (1972) and Molly Haskell (1973) examined gender roles and stereotyping of women in films in broader social and historical context. They explained how men use their creative power to represent women in terms of the male needs and fantasies. Judith Mayne (1981) and Ella Shohat (1990) have analyzed women's cinema with special reference to female filmmakers and female audiences in films. They too, believe that women's function is to be the objects of the male spectator’s desire.

In the case of Bollywood cinema also we found similar studies. For example, Urvashi Butalia (1984), Supriya Agarwal (2009) and Patricia Uberoi (1990) focused on women’s portrayal as sex objects, unequal partners and having a marginal position in commercial Indian cinema. Anu Celly (2002) and Shoma Chatterji (1998) have applied semiotic and psychoanalytical approaches to study women's function in patriarchal domination in terms of myth, custom and resulting in limitation of women's subjectivity in male gaze. Sangeeta Datta (2000) has examined the impact of globalization and market forces on women's representation as marginalized and subordinate position in India cinema. In the case of Iranian cinema Hamid Reza Sadr (2006), Parviz Ejlali (2005) and Hamid Naficy (1995) have studied Iranian cinema through political, social cultural and ideological changes. And, Norma Claire Moruzzi (1999) focuses on representation of Islamic women in Iranian cinema in relation to their political and the personal realms.

Thus, a perusal of the review of the existing literature on this subject showed that most of the works have focused on the psychoanalytic and semiotic analysis of women's image in cinema. But in this study we have made an attempt to analyze women's representation in Iranian and Indian cinema through sociological theory of structure and agency.

In order to do so our main objectives were: a) to examine the representation of women in cinema in the private and public spheres of women's lives by focusing on the depiction of patriarchal values in films from both countries, thereby focusing on
the structural aspect; b) to search for any tendency in these films to portray women's resistance, personal autonomy and empowerment thereby highlighting the notion of agency; c) to consider the question of women's empowerment and the change in their portrayals in films; and d) to examine and compare the approaches of female and male filmmakers to the portrayal of the problems of women in their respective societies.

The mode of study that we made use of was qualitative research method which took the form of narrative method for analyzing the selected films. For this study we selected two Iranian films namely *Two Women* and *Killing Rabid Dogs* and two Indian films namely *Daman* and *Mrityudand*. These four films have focused on similar issues related to gender relations. All four films belong to the category of art cinema. They all tell women-centric stories and through them represent women's issues and problems in patriarchal and male dominated societies like Iran and India. These films show women characters both as oppressed beings and also as empowered individuals.

Chapter II focused on the gender politics and representation of women in Iranian cinema by analyzing two films namely *Two Women* by Tahmineh Milani and *Killing Rabid Dogs* by Bahram Beyzai. In this chapter we began by describing the position of women in Iranian society and then went on to discuss the growth of Iranian cinema and the emergence of women directors. After discussing the plot of both films we discussed how in both films the sub-themes of structure and agency were tackled. In chapter III we have concentrated on gender politics and representation of women in Indian cinema by examining *Daman* by Kalpana Lajmi and *Mrityudand* by Prakash Jha. Again after describing the position of women in Indian society and the evolution of Indian cinema with special attention to emergence of women directors and representation of women on screen, we once again outlined the plot of both films and then the description of the sub-themes of structure and agency as tackled in these films.

Chapter IV located the sociological analysis within the broad debates on comparison of the selected films under study from Iran and India. We made an attempt to analyze the agenda of women's issues regarding certain sub-themes in four films. The films were studied in terms of commonalities and differences and also in terms of the male and female gaze of their directors. From what we saw in this chapter, the concept of gaze discussed by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey becomes quite relevant.
By examining the representation of women in Iranian and Indian cinema, with the help of film criticism theory and literature on structure and agency, we have tried to unearth the importance of emerging women’s cinema. Our aim was to examine the impact of social structures on women’s lives in social and cultural contexts of both societies in the selected films from Iran and India. Along with the structural dimension we focused on the agency aspect of women in challenging the traditional social norms.

Feminist film theory as was discussed in review of literature emerged during the late 1960s and early 1970s, as part of the wider debates by second-wave feminism. According to Ruby Rich (1972) there are two types of feminist film criticisms. One is based on the American sociological approach and the other one is founded on British theoretical approach. The first stems from personal experiences of the film critic and being a ‘language of experience’ is subjective, fundamentally phenomenological and talks about one’s own voice. The second one termed ‘language of theory’, founded on psychoanalytical and semiotic analysis of the meaning and signifiers as presented by the texts is objective, fundamentally analytical and talks about the voice of history.

Similarly, feminism as a multidisciplinary approach to social analysis emphasizes gender as a major structuring component of power relations in society and argues media are crucial in the construction and dissemination of gender ideologies. Cinema is taken by feminists to be a cultural practice representing myths about women and femininity. Issues of image and representation of women, gender hierarchies, stereotyping of women and patriarchal ideologies in narrative cinema, are central subjects in feminist film theory. They have argued that women function not as representations of female subjectivity but as the objects of male desire in all texts.

Feminists have considered films in terms of the relationship between images of women and society, generally based on sociological theory and have seen the function of women characters in particular film narratives or genres and stereotypes as a reflection of a society’s view of women. According to Kaplan (2000), a feminist analysis of film assumes woman as an unproblematic category constituted through the definitions already produced in society and reflected in film, which determines all representations of women. One of the most important characteristics of feminist cinema is the women’s changing position from subordination to equality and
transformation of women from objects to creative social subjects in the dominant modes of representation. Therefore, they believe that portrayal of women in film shapes the social approaches and attitudes towards women at a global scale. Consequently, they advocate encouraging ‘women’s cinema’ which can be defined in a number of ways – as films by women, made for women, or dealing with women, or all of these combined. The four films under study are supposedly films dealing with women, to some extent made for women but only two of them are films by women.

Julia Wood (1999) believes that media cover gender issues by interacting with cultural images of gender and with individual identities in three ways. They reflect the cultural values and ideologies, they help reproduce culture and they may act as gatekeepers in deciding what is to be shown and what is to be concealed. In the present study, from our findings we can see that all three functions are applicable to our study. Our selected films do mirror the social and cultural reality around them by representing the prevalent stereotypes and images of women. They also function as instruments of cultural reproductions by helping keep the traditional views on gender alive in individuals and societies by reinforcing the same ideas on patriarchal structure. And they also prove that films can act as gatekeepers by selectively choosing to show some aspects of reality while hiding the others. Similar argument is made by Richard Dyer (1993) about image representation through media. He too feels that media representations can be culture-specific, selective and allow multiple interpretations. The point being made is that cinema of both countries has conveyed the same message that women cannot be dominant as men in society which is reflected in films.

Feminist film theory also goes on to say that production of more and more women centric films is a necessary step in enhancing women’s importance not only in films but in society at large. When we look at the films studied by us, this does not however, seem to be true. The first question which comes to our mind is that are the selected four films really women's centric films? Undoubtedly all four films are supposed to fall in the category of women’s films. But as has been shown in the preceding three chapters, when we look at these films critically, we realize that just because their stories are about women and the main characters are women we should not call them women's films. In no way do they provide an encouraging picture of or for women. All the protagonists are shown as suffering and defeated beings
throughout the films, the only silver lining being that they don’t lose hope. As Smith (in Thornham, 1999) has argued that in films women, even as central characters, are shown as confused or helpless, in danger or passive or as purely sexual beings. In this sense we can say that woman characters of the selected films are not being depicted as being empowered but only as being oppressed. In all four films women come across by and large as weaklings who for most of the time in the film tolerate men’s dominance and even physical violence and it is only in the last few minutes of the films where they show some signs of rebellion.

For instance, let us take the case of Fereshteh, the protagonist in Two Women. In the last scene of the film she is portrayed as a woman who has lost everything as she says “I am a bird without any wings”. Similarly, in the Indian film Daman made by a female director, the leading lady is a woman who obeys every command of her abusive husband and suffers a lot of oppression. When she escapes with her daughter and in the final scene kills her husband, although she is supposed to be portrayed as having taken an emancipatory step, yet this proactive action does not lead to her liberation. Her rebellion does not result in the successful act of changing her life in a positive manner. No doubt, the protagonist in order to escape the oppressive conditions in her marital life kills her husband but by this action she moves probably from one prison (her oppressive family) to an actual prison. Thus, both the women directors Tahmineh Milani and Kalpana Lajmi, who are known as feminist filmmakers, just represent women’s problems, pains and the dark face of women's lives not showing any real solution.

The main contention of the feminist film critics is that film could be used as an ideological tool which would counteract the stereotyped images of women presented by the male dominated media and raise women's awareness of their inferior position in patriarchal society and teach them to fight back. They keep trying to drive home the point that if more woman directors emerge, women centric films with the notion of agency will also increase in number. The point is that first of all there are very few women centric films made all over the world and this holds even truer for traditional societies like Iran and India. But as mentioned earlier, even when we do find some women centric films, sadly they continue to show the women as the “other” even if they are the main protagonists. In reality we find hardly any films which underscore the women’s agency. Instead, they keep showing the submissive and oppressed
images of women with little autonomy thereby landing up reinforcing women’s stereotypes rather than counteracting them. This clearly discloses that the male gaze and point of view is dominant and there are not enough woman directors to counter it.

Another contention of the feminist film theorists is that male film makers cannot (and maybe will not) focus on the women’s agency as it suits them to preserve the status quo. But the ironical finding of our study based on the two so called women centric films by feminist female directors is that whether it is Two Women or Daman, the protagonists in both films are anything but independent. On the contrary, both are the epitomes of the suffering, abused women in patriarchal set-ups. They have not changed the stereotypical image of women and they don’t show women’s agency. In fact, films made by women for women on women are called ‘weepies’. The point being made is that the male gaze that limits the range of images of women in films and misrepresent realities distorting them according to the fantasies and apprehensions of the male creators of the films cannot be fought merely by having more women in positions of power (producers/directors) in the film industry since scholars like Thornham (1999) believe that our cultural values and beliefs are too deep-rooted to be got rid of merely by increasing the number of women film directors. Both films by women directors in our study substantiate this point amply.

The criticism of the feminist film theory continues on another plane as well. Johnston (1999) even goes so far as to say that if films are seen merely as ‘texts’ i.e., as complex structures of linguistic and visual codes, then it is futile to view them as reflections of reality. Though they do carry an ideology, yet it would be pointless to compare them with the lived life of women since these are simply the subjective conscious or unconscious manipulations of the individual film maker and thus represent his/her personal views only. Thus, such an analysis is only for the sake of identifying the meaning that the film maker attaches to the text and should be kept separate from the understanding of the real world.

Examination of the feminist film criticism and the way it views the representation of women’s image in cinema shows how closely it is related to the sociological theoretical framework used by us, namely, the structure-agency notion. The debate on the primacy of structure or agency examines how social structure determines individual actions in society and what is the role of agency in the
individual's life. There is a dualism between structure as constraint and action as choice. Where on the one hand, socialized agents with a degree of autonomy take action in social systems mediated by existing institutional structure and expectations, on the other hand, they influence or transform that institutional structure. Thus, there is a complementarity of structure and agency. At the time that society is shaping the individual, the individual is shaping society. Theory of structuration by Giddens, is an attempt to reconcile theoretical dichotomies of social systems such as agency/structure and subjective/objective perspectives. Social structures shape individuals and individuals shape the social structure. This approach focuses on transformative power of human actions and believes that social structures not only act on people, but people act on social structure as well. Its proponents adopt this balanced position, attempting to treat influences of structure (which inherently includes culture) and agency equally.

The structural theory and agency perspective can be applied to film analysis by attempting to examine which dimension is stressed more in films. Accordingly, through this theory one can emphasize the position and representation of women in gender power relations within prevalent social structure and also discuss the possibility of women's agency in their lives. In the debate of structure and agency there is the idea that if agents can reproduce structure through action, they can also transform it. The same can be applied to films analysis to determine which of the two notions is stressed and reinforced through the story, characters, message and the treatment.

Although in all the four selected films we are given the impression that the women are standing up against injustice, moving towards independence and empowerment, thereby denoting agency, yet when we look deeply it becomes quite evident that not only are women not able to fight the patriarchal system with much success, but in order to change the structure, they have to resort to violence and thus give up their ‘feminine’ traits and adopt the ‘masculine’ characteristics. In all the films the ‘empowered’ woman has to pay a steep cost to be ‘free’. In the Indian film Daman Durga turns into a murderer. In Mrityudand, the act of all women in the village coming together and attacking the errant males is seen as an empowering feat. Which leads to the question that can this highly emotional and exciting scene in the cinematic and dramatic context be replicated in real life? If yes, what would be its
further consequences? Similarly, the only way the female protagonists in both the Iranian films can escape their husbands is through their deaths at the hands of other men. Where does agency come into the picture in both these scenarios?

It is possible that the political and social conditions in both Iran and India might make it somewhat difficult for the directors to move away from the typical treatments of their respective films, which may be especially true in the case of women directors. However, the end result in both cases remains the same. Even if to some extent agency is depicted in the portrayals of all female characters, yet, it appears that in all cases patriarchy, signifying structure wins.

**Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion there are some important issues that need to be pointed out:

In the first place, it is important to state that in the media – the cinema and TV mainly – women are portrayed mostly as powerless, even voiceless. Projecting such stereotypes reinforces the influence of patriarchal values, which is dangerous when directed towards a vast illiterate audience. These perverse trends have been creating a wide dispersal of anti-women values. Most women thus live in a state of threat and reprisal, coercion and fear (Kasturi, 1994). Women must not be portrayed in stereotyped images that emphasize the passive, dismissive qualities of women and encourage them to play subordinate role in the family and society.

Secondly, from the analysis presented in the thesis, it becomes obvious that the social and political conditions in a society tend to determine treatment of the subject of the film. As we have seen, culture of the society affects how women are portrayed and how structure and agency are shown in films. In the Indian films the element of agency is depicted with more vigor than in the Iranian films. One reason for that could be the political milieu in Iran where films that touch controversial subjects and deal with the subject in an irreverent or non-conformist manner are banned and their makers imprisoned – a fate that did befall one of the directors of the selected films. Hence, even while tackling women’s subjects, the directors have to be careful in choosing what to show and what to simply imply. Therefore, in both the Iranian films the women have been depicted as being more tolerant and choose to adapt to their circumstances rather than show any strong rebellion, except in the
concluding part of the narrative. The Indian films stress agency a little more with the women protagonists taking some steps that may be considered militant. Even so, the female characters including the heroine are also shown to be by and large conventional.

Thirdly, when we began this study, we assumed that the gender of the director would play a key role in influencing how the films would be handled. Accordingly, we expected women directors to focus more on women’s agency rather than structural elements. But we could not find this aspect in their films. In fact, it was interesting to note that there was no substantial difference between the male and female directors in the way they depicted structure and agency. In all films we could see the typical male and female stereotypes and the portrayal of the patriarchal structure dominating not only the life of the women characters but also the narrative of the film. This makes it clear that in film circles all over the world it is the male gaze that rules the cinematic narratives. Simone de Beauvoir (1988) had described how representation of the world in cinema, like the world itself, is the work of men which they describe from their own point of view, which then is confused with the absolute truth not only by the men but also the women. Much later Sharon Smith (1972) took this argument further by saying that films reflect social structures according to the vision and concerns of their male creators. The consequence is emergence of narratives and stereotypes that reinforce or even generate prejudices that on the one hand, sway the way men look at women and on the other damage the self-perceptions and the social aspirations of the women. What can be further added to this is that this male gaze is not limited to the male directors but is very much a part of the women directors’ work as well. The explanation is simple. Women directors, despite their desire to produce works that deal with women’s issues, are themselves unable to transcend the cultural value structure that pervades the society in which they have been raised and in which they live.

This leads us to the fourth point that ‘structure’ seems to be more powerful than ‘agency’ in determining the narrative style of the films. The ‘real’ issue of oppression of women may be the core theme of the films but the method of depiction of this reality and its language remain male and structure-centric. It is clear that in patriarchal society directors – male or female – fear to make films with revolutionary subjects or give them radical cinematic treatments for the fear of being banned by the
government or of alienating their audiences, who may not want to watch films which question, challenge or subvert their social and cultural beliefs, which is what a film emphasizing women's agency might do.

Finally, the question regarding the portrayal of women in films remains. It seems that is not easy to focus on agency unless we change the structure. So, having more women centric films and more women directors is not a very effective solution. As Claire Johnston (1973) states any revolutionary strategy must challenge the depiction of reality. Smith (1972) also believes that films reflect social changes, but they also shape cultural attitudes. The stereotypes of women found in the cinematic texts are the creation of unconscious beliefs that are too deeply entrenched to be changed. The solution is not merely to have more women working in films as this will not change the film content. For this everyone working in films, male and female, must learn to rethink the traditional sex role stereotypes. The vicious circle of cultural effects can be broken only by blending rational persuasion and stereotype correction. Films will need to incorporate a more extensive assortment of roles for women. And to do all this, a completely new mode of thinking will be needed.

In conclusion, we would like to re-iterate that the application of the structure and agency debate in this study was done with the aim of extending film analysis, especially the study of women's portrayal, from the usual psychoanalytical and semiotic approaches to a more sociological examination. Also, through the film we tried to touch upon the issue of subjugation of women prevalent in male dominated societies. In the long run, the only effective answer to violence against women is the breakdown of patriarchy, the empowerment of women, and the democratization of society. Woman's empowerment and her need for space can become a reality in traditional societies only through the depiction of her struggle to regain her subjectivity and self-expression. In cinematic terms it means that since the image of women in cinematic representations reflects the realities of women's lives, then by showing empowerment and agency of women on screen, perception of society may be changed and people can be made have a better understanding of women's social and cultural issues. Since so much of discrimination becomes internalized as cultural values, cultural action and educational interventions are imperative to break down existing gender stereotypes fostered by patriarchy, both in films and in real life.