Chapter IV

Sociological Analysis and Comparison of the Selected Films from Iran and India
In Chapters II and III we have discussed the storylines and the elements of structure and agency as portrayed in the four films under study. In the present chapter we will attempt a comparative analysis of the four films in terms of how they have been dealt with by the Iranian and Indian directors and also in terms of the difference in the approaches taken by the male and female directors.

As was evident from our inquiry, the four films under study fall in the category of women centric films since they engage with the agenda of women’s issues in the context of the patriarchal values and the ensuing domination in both societies. The narratives of all the films are significantly shaped by women. The position of traditional patriarchy in relation to the feminist challenge for social justice and gender equality is clearly portrayed in all films. All the films have depicted the status of women in a broad socio cultural context. The storylines of the four films trace the obstacles that women face in their lives and go on to depict how they resist and change the situations oppressing them in traditional societies. In the narrative of four films, the effort of the filmmakers has been to portray women in two ways – as objects in the traditional structures and as active agents of change.

In view of the above, let us explore how women’s oppression, revolt and ultimately, deliverance have been shown through different storylines of the four films under consideration. In Two Women, Fereshteh, the protagonist is portrayed as a victim of the traditional society characterized by the suppression and passivity of women. She is depicted as being oppressed by the three men in her life, her father, her stalker and her husband, all of who contribute to her miserable existence. She gradually loses her identity and become a victim of domination, violence and dogmatic social beliefs. However, at the end of the film when she is left alone, she does show a little spark by chalking out a plan for her future life which includes resuming her studies and taking up employment to look after her children.

Killing Rabid Dogs traces the story of Golrokh who despite being cheated on by her husband, tries to save him from prison due to her emotional bond with him. In this process, she is shown as being exploited by men of different kinds, physically and emotionally. The depiction of her struggle with the traditional dominating men is actually symbolic of her fight with the patriarchal structure, which gives her only pain and anguish. This film also ends on a positive note despite her being deceived by her husband once again.
**Daman** tells us the story of Durga who is shown to endure immense ill-treatment – physical and emotional – by her oppressive husband. She chooses to leave him in order to save her daughter from being ruined by an early marriage and on being pursued by her husband who now threatens the life and freedom of her daughter, she kills him. The final film *Mrityudand* portrays three women's story. There is Ketki who lives in a traditional family and tries to stand up to the patriarchal system. There is Chandravati who is the epitome of the quietly suffering woman who tolerates injustice mutely. And then there is Kanti, an impoverished woman who is exploited by men since she bears the double cross of not only being a woman but also being poor. In the end of the film all three come together to fight the oppressive patriarchal system.

It is significant to note that in all the four films, women who have led unhappy lives search for liberation from societies ruled by men. They suffer from the injustices heaped on them by the patriarchal system but choose not to be viewed as victims. Instead, they all strive to change their dependent and subordinated positions. They go through a lot of hardship in their lives but decide to rebel against the society by making efforts to impose their own will and demands on their relations with men, both in the private and public spheres. They are presented as changing image of women moving away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self sacrificing women towards self assured assertive and ambitious women making society aware of their demands.

After discussion about the storyline, concentrating on the major sub-themes will lead us to comprehend the main concepts of the films. It should be mentioned that different directors from different cultures often express similar themes. Let us now discuss the commonalities and differences in the films in terms of the sub-themes which are related to social structure and women's agency within the four selected Iranian and Indian films. In fact all four films have strong social and cultural sub-themes and outline the women lives in relation to their experiences, challenges and limitations in the socio cultural context.

**Sub-themes of Structure and Agency**

As the earlier chapters showed, in order to consider the chosen films, we have focused on some significant themes which influence women's lives. In this context as we have
broadly examined some sub-themes signifying structure such as patriarchy, gender stereotyping, caste and social class and violence, and themes falling under agency, namely, education, empowerment, decision making, participation and rebellion.

**Patriarchy**

One of the important themes tackled by all the films is patriarchy. Patriarchal society may be defined as a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. Obviously patriarchal values influence women's lives. Gender inequality is rooted in the system of patriarchy.

The four films under study show that there are some strict social norms which have been laid down by men in as per the patriarchal ideology. This kind of set-up expects the women to obey the social traditions and norms. In this system a woman is oppressed and controlled by her father, later by her husband and finally by society. This fact highlights inequality in gender relations as exhibiting a domination-submission pattern. System of patriarchy demands a subjugated woman to submit quietly to the trauma of her oppression. All four films demonstrate that gender injustice is based on the existing culture in the form of patriarchy. They try to reveal that how women are unprotected from the domination and abuse prevalent in this system.

Fereshteh, Golrokh, Durga and Ketki are all presented as women living in the clutches of traditional and oppressive set-ups. They are not presented with any options by their societies. If they don’t accept men's rules they are punished. Patriarchy in *Two Women* has been shown through the males controlling the direction that the lives of woman take. It focuses on the issue of gender inequality by showing that all men have the right to make decision for a woman which she has to accept unconditionally. The film focuses on gender stereotyping of woman as passive and obedient. In *Killing Rabid Dogs*, patriarchy is depicted through the exploitation and manipulation of women. Most of the men in this film have a traditional mind-set and lose no opportunity of insulting the heroine Golrokh and rubbing in the fact that women are inferior beings. *Daman*, depicts patriarchy in the form of a family structure in a joint family where men establish rules for women. The message is that men expect women to obey them, otherwise they are abused. Patriarchy in *Mrityudand* is depicted in the
shapes of village, family, religious patriarchy and male chauvinism. The film shows a male dominated world where men are superior and women are subjugated and exploited by them.

When we compare the Iranian films we see that in *Two Women*, patriarchy is shown in the form of gender relations with the father and husband holding authority over a woman. In the film the pressure of patriarchy is depicted in the routine life of the protagonist and in the domestic and private sphere of the woman's life. On the contrary, existence of patriarchy in *Killing Rabid Dogs* has been shown as relationship of the protagonist with men in the public sphere. In the case of Indian film *Daman* patriarchy emerges in the unequal gender relationship between wife and husband, in the form of submission of the woman to her oppressive husband in a family unit, as was the case in *Two Women*. On the other hand, the notion of patriarchy in *Mrityudand* comes out both in the domestic and public spheres.

It is interesting to note that both Iranian and Indian woman directors focus on showing patriarchy mainly in the private domain of the family, whereas both the male directors have depicted it mainly in the public realm.

**Gender Stereotyping**

All four films have provided us with certain gender stereotypes. The concept of womanhood in patriarchal system has been divided to two categories as "good woman" and "bad woman". The former include women who are submissive, sacrificing, conforming to the social norms, even if they violate their rights. The latter image includes women who are non-conformist and who dare to question the patriarchal values.

All four films provide us with characterization of good women as those who are chaste, submissive, weak, traditional, uneducated, faithful wives, sacrificing mothers, dependent on patriarchal authority and accepting social norms, and bad women as those who are strong, educated, talented, independent, rebellious and fighting for their rights. In *Two Women*, we find depiction of a dutiful and passive woman as daughter and wife. In *Killing Rabid Dogs*, the focus is on chastity and faithfulness. *Daman* once again portrays the woman stereotype as a submissive and
tolerant wife and sacrificing mother. In *Mrityudand*, this stereotype is presented by Chandravati who is shown as a silent and passive sufferer and Kanti as an obedient and sacrificing wife.

Comparatively, in the Iranian film *Two Women*, we find more traditional stereotypes of Iranian woman while in the other film, *Killing Rabid Dogs*, the protagonist does break the mould of the stereotypical wife to some extent. In the case of Indian film *Daman* we again find some typical stereotypes of Indian women (the obedient wife, sacrificing mother and the trouble making mother-in-law) whereas *Mrityudand* offers a variety of characters, most of them representing the ideal types except for the protagonist who dares to question the system and thus emerges as a non-typical character both in Indian films and Indian society.

Along with the commonalities in four films in terms of the gender stereotyping of women, there is an essential difference between female and male filmmakers. In the works of male directors, female protagonists come across as more active and rebellious than those in the female director’s films. Both in *Killing Rabid Dogs* and *Mrityudand*, they are shown as taking action to overcome subjugation and make some changes in their lives. They assertively argue for their rights during the course of negotiations of gender inequality. In some sequences they even dictate terms to the male characters and work hard to maintain their own positions of authority against the onslaughts of the dominant system. On the contrary, women directors mostly represent women’s suffering in male dominated system. In such films women are shown as accepting the social norms and not opposing them. In the end of these films women emerge as victims of injustice and domination. Even Durga who manages to save her daughter from her husband in *Daman*, can do so only by killing him and probably being punished for it by law. Therefore we can say that sticking to traditional gender stereotypes is more visible in the works of women's filmmakers while the male directors have concentrated more on showing the women's power.

Men in all selected films are depicted as typical traditional males. They are mostly aggressive, dominant, suppressive and abusive, not allowing women to have their own voice. They treat women as the second and weaker sex whose only task is to bow to their men’s will and fulfill their needs. Men are shown as being financially powerful and thus believing they can dominate and exploit women. They don’t
believe in equal rights of man and woman and feel threatened by progressive and educated woman. Thus it is noteworthy that male directors have tried to an extent to deconstruct the conception of womanhood and break the traditional stereotyping of women in their films while female directors from both countries concentrate on providing us with the traditional stereotypes of women in their films.

It is also notable that in the films helmed by women directors, the female characters other than the main protagonists are also represented as being part of the patriarchal structure. Fereshteh’s mother and mother-in-law and Durga’s mother-in-law are shown to be as oppressive as the men in the films. This is a clear indicator of the fact that the women directors believe that in a patriarchal set-up both men and women are socialized into accepting the dominant social norms and in that sense are equally subject to the dominant ideology.

Caste and Social Class

Caste is one of the main themes in many Indian films. Caste system is an integral part of Indian culture. Most films show high castes having the power to dominate over low castes. We see shades of this in both the Indian films as well. Both in Daman and Mrityudand, the caste system is shown in a prominent way. In the case of Daman, the caste factor is shown in the institution of marriage. Domination of husband over the protagonist is related to her low caste. In fact, her in-law's family holds the belief that all the problems related to her marriage are rooted in this fact. In the case of Mrityudand, the notion of caste pervades all the sub-plots of the film. One example of it is its representation in terms of exploitation of low caste women. Kanti is exploited by the contractor who is a high caste person who uses his caste status to subjugate all low caste people. And then there is the story of Chandravati who despite being a high caste woman conceives from a low caste man and this results in his being killed in public by high caste men who feel insulted.

Unlike caste system, it is social class that is portrayed in the Iranian films. In Two Women, Fereshteh comes from a humble economic background which becomes the reason for her having to leave her studies and also having to marry a rich man in order to be able to pay a hefty fine to the courts. Her husband as well as her own family members, feel that his wealth makes it acceptable for him to dominate her. In some scenes it is shown that he lets her know that she is dependent on his wealth. The
point being made is that if a woman is not economically independent she has to tolerate her husband's domination. Also it has been shown that the economic and cultural level of family influence woman’s status in society. In the case of *Killing Rabid Dogs*, social class is depicted in the lifestyle of upper class men who have power to misbehave with people, specifically women who are weak and unprotected.

Thus, the power of caste system is conveyed in the Indian films while social class is highlighted in the Iranian films. But it is necessary to note that in Iranian films the social stratification is not shown as strong an element of the social structure as caste system is in Indian films.

**Violence**

Violence against women as a crucial but controversial sub-theme is depicted in all four films under study. In *Two Women*, the protagonist is victim of an abusive marriage. She has a dominant husband who dominates over her, emotionally abuses her and doesn’t let her have her own choice to live. The notion of violence is shown to exist more in emotional and verbal form. In *Killing Rabid Dog*, the main character is also abused emotionally by her husband and physically and verbally by different men whom she comes across in the course of the film. The concept of violence in *Daman* takes the form of marital rape, emotional torture and verbal abuse. The protagonist suffers physically, sexually and emotionally on account of her abusive husband. *Mrityudand* depicts violence against women in the shape of physical exploitation and verbal taunting. All women in the film have to suffer these forms of violence both in private and public domains.

Thus abuse and violence (physical and emotional) is depicted in all four films. But interestingly enough both Iranian films show violence as being perpetrated by men while in the Indian films women, too, take recourse to violence when the need arises. Also, although both male directors show women’s suffering in the domestic sphere, yet they focus on mainly the violence in the public domain. On the other hand, the female directors from both countries have shown marital abuse as the main form of violence.

After discussing the depiction of the elements of structure in all four selected films, let us now turn to the presentation of the elements of agency.
Education

Education as a source of women’s empowerment is a significant subject which has been stressed by Iranian and Indian filmmakers. In many films it has been depicted that educated women are more aware of their needs and rights and that it is more likely that an educated woman would try to challenge the patriarchal rules which hinder her development. In the film Two Women this concept is highlighted. The protagonist is portrayed as an intelligent university student who has to discontinue her education first due to some political developments in Iran, and later due to her family circumstances. She requests her husband to permit her to continue her studies but her traditional spouse refuses to support her. Through her travails which are contrasted with the happy and content life of her friend who goes on to complete her education, it is shown how education can help women lead a fulfilling life. In Killing Rabid Dogs the main character is shown as an educated woman who is a writer. In this film too, it is indicated that it is because of her education that she comes across as a strong person who has the self-confidence to stand against male domination.

In the Indian film Daman, once again the protagonist Durga is depicted as a woman who is not educated and leads a miserable life having to tolerate ill-treatment by her husband and his family. In a poignant scene she is shown to rue her being uneducated and displays her desire for educating her daughter so that she can be spared of the kind of existence that Durga herself has led. Finally, although the film Mrityudand does not focus directly on the subject of women's education, however, it is shown that in a village full of traditional inhabitants, it is an educated woman Ketki who first stands up to the injustices inherent in patriarchy and then motivates other women to rebel against the exploitation and domination of men.

Thus, there is a similarity between all the four films which extol the virtues of education, directly or indirectly. However, it is important to take note of the fact that of the four films, it is those directed by women which focus more clearly on this subject whereas in the male directed films, the issue is touched upon indirectly only. In fact, in the Iranian film Killing Rabid Dogs, the director portrays an educated woman who despite her education and confidence, is manipulated and fooled by men in society, including her husband.
**Decision Making and Empowerment**

One of the main indicators of agency is decision making power. It is a well known fact that patriarchy is characterized by men making all the decisions whereas women stand at the sidelines merely conforming to the norms and decisions made by men. In this sense the capacity to be able to take independent decisions would indicate empowerment for them. In the films under study it becomes relevant to see whether the central female characters individually take any decisions or do they also portray the traditional roles of women following their men's directions.

In *Two Women* the protagonist despite social opposition decides to apply for a divorce from her husband. Although she is unsuccessful in this endeavor, yet she shows the courage to stand up to him and confront him. The main character of *Killing Rabid Dogs* too, is depicted as a woman who leaves her husband because of his affair with another woman. In *Daman* the protagonist takes the decision to leave her home to bring to an end her misery on account of the abuse she suffers at her husband’s hand. *Mrityudand* shows Ketki as a woman who first takes the decision to defy the males in her household and the village and then to lead the other women towards emancipation from domination system. The other character Chandravati, an otherwise traditional woman decides to break the social norms, leave her home and have an affair with a low caste man. Thus in all the films women become sensitized to their power and try to challenge the existing structure by taking some bold decisions.

**Rebellion**

It is interesting to mention that most of women characters in the four selected films have a touch of rebellion in their personality. They don’t accept their situation of insults and rejections easily but instead rebel against the patriarchal system in order to explore the possibility to live on their own terms. These are women who attempt to assert their individuality through their actions, sometimes not even thinking about the consequences of these actions.

In *Two Women*, Fereshteh is shown as a rebellious woman who breaks her silence and revolts against the authority of her father and oppression and suspicion of her husband. Many times she goes to her father and the court for getting a divorce. In the film *Killing Rabid Dogs*, despite all disrespect and abuse, Golrokh stands up to the
male dominated world and fights hard for her rights as a woman. The protagonist Durga in *Daman* rebels against her husband’s violence and finally kills him, thereby breaking away from the expected image of a submissive woman. Notably in *Mrityudand*, rebellion is emphasized by showing all women coming together and rebelling against the patriarchal system assertively.

When we compare the two Iranian films, we find that both *Two Women* and *Killing Rabid Dogs* represent women’s rebellion. Both protagonists have been shown as women who resist male domination. In spite of this, a common thing in both the films is that though they take decisions that challenge the patriarchal system but ultimately both are not successful in changing the system. The only thing is that they are aware of their rights and thus choose to carry on their resistance. In the Indian films *Daman* and *Mrityudand*, however, we see greater evidence of women’s agency to rebel against the social norms and patriarchal ideology and their capacity to change the system.

From the above discussion of the selected films in the context of structure and agency, we can see that all four film makers demonstrate a similar awareness of gender politics and women’s issues. Their works are outside the mainstream Iranian and Indian cinema. They have attempted to show a changing dimension of women’s characters in the cinematic frameworks of both societies to break the traditional representation of women on screen. Through these films they have tried to represent the changing image of women moving away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self sacrificing women towards self assured assertive and ambitious women making society aware of their demands. Additionally, they have focused on women’s agency and subjectivity under the dominant patriarchal system. To what extent they have succeeded in achieving their goals will be discussed in the concluding chapter.