CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

Understanding other peoples and cultures, and coming to terms with them, are a difficult proposition. Societies and cultures tend to construct their "others" in defining themselves. It is in this process of constituting an identity by evolving a strategy of dealing with the Other, that one can identify the realm of perception. Perceptions are not "neutral" categories. It involves representational practices and discourses concerning the Other.

In understanding and studying other cultures and societies, there involves the possibility of the object of one's understanding, i.e., the people, the culture or the society one understands or studies, questioning the notions and validity of one's conclusions. This problematic is a significant thing to be seriously considered. For the production of valid knowledges, one has to look into both sides of the dichotomous self/other relations.

The intertwining of knowledge and power complicates self/other relations. In most cases, the Other becomes the site of exercising power by the subject. In Edward
Said's terms, orientalism denotes many things: the academic discipline for studying the 'orient', the thoughts and knowledges generated by a distinction between the 'orient' and the 'occident', and the Western mode of dealing with the 'orient'. Orientalism can be considered as a discourse in the Foucauldian sense. Michel Foucault's idea of mutual implication of power and knowledge is vital to understand the orientalist discourse. Orientalism, then, is a discourse of power. It can, at the same time, be a disciplinary realm with its processes of exclusion and discursive procedures. It can also be regarded as a regime involving the discourse/discipline set, in order that its function as a site of power is grasped properly. The realm of orientalism is a realm of contest. Obviously, then, orientalism connotes a realm of diverse meanings and strategies of power. As a discourse of power, it can also be treated as a colonial discourse, so much so that there is a possibility of thought about counter-discourses of decolonisation.

One may observe overlapping, and sometimes, contradicting meanings in the wide variety of ways in which orientalism is discussed. The intention here is to provide a theoretical realm for grasping perceptions, and perceptions involve representation, knowledge, power discourses and the construction of identities.
In this work, one is concerned with American perceptions on the making of the Iranian revolution. This study has analysed both the observer and the observed. On the one hand, it has discussed those factors constituting American perceptions, namely, the linkages between US imperialism and orientalism, and on the other, those factors contributing for the making of the Iranian revolution. On the basis of such an analysis, the problems of American perceptions on Iran are brought forth.

US perceptions, attitudes and policies towards Iran—and for that matter towards that part of the third world called the 'orient'—are on the one hand, determined by the nature and stage of American imperialism with all its requirements of pursuing and satisfying economic, political, commercial and military interests in Iran and on the other, by the nature of American orientalism, i.e., the corpus of knowledge produced in American academic, media and diplomatic circles on the country and the resultant discourses that inform the policy-maker and the analyst.

Orientalism and imperialism dwelt together and traversed simultaneously. Traditionally, Europe was in the forefront of orientalist scholarship. Following the growth of American imperialism after World War II, this
mantle was passed on to the United States, but American orientalism retained much of the European orientalist bandwagon. In the contemporary world, the United States has been able to expand the skies of its cultural imperialism due to the explosion of information, communication and media technology. The images and attitudes projected through this expanding horizon, on other peoples and cultures such as Islamic and West Asian, have mostly been the photocopies of their masterprint produced in the European orientalist letter press.

Orientalism and imperialism, while maintaining specific identities of their own, do exhibit a mutually reinforcing relationship. One has to have a serious view of the linkage between scholarship and establishments of power in the United States. The framework of oriental studies in the United States, from its very origin, has been political in character. When it grew into the so-called Middle East studies, the inter-relationship between US interests and scholarship concerning the region also grew. Area studies programmes in general, and the so-called Middle East studies in particular, have been infested with covert or overt political connections, so much so that, the knowledge infrastructure of orientalism becomes part and parcel of the project of political economy of control.
The proliferation of policy-oriented research, applied social science techniques and managerial ethos in the area studies programmes regarding West Asia, not only projects their linkages with state power, but also contributes to its epistemological backwardness. The long absence of theoretical work in studies on West Asia can be attributed, to an extent, to its quest for serving power. There of course, are a group of scholars in the US who are trying to break away from this entanglement and who are striving for a newer, deeper and sympathetic understanding of the objects of their study—the people, society and culture of West Asia. Unfortunately, they still are a minority.

What is alarming is the existence of an "American consensus" in various walks of life and in mainstream scholarship, especially in dealing with other cultures including Islamic and West Asian—a consensus which operates as a regime of truth, which legitimates only those attitudes, perceptions and discourses that conform to the traditionally held, power-fed notions, images and views about other cultures. American perceptions and policy discourses on Iran evolve out of, and function within, such a regime and its representational practices, which are informed by orientalism. It is in such a milieu that scholarly and policy discourses attain a great degree of congruity. While there exists a broad consensual
validational process concerning discourses within such a regime, legitimate discourses themselves may exhibit inconsistencies and variety, depending upon the strategy of representation. Thus, the perceptual realm of US policy-making is replete with contending discourses within an overall apparatus of consensus in dealing with Iran.

In understanding the making of the Iranian revolution, aspects of Islamic political discourse and Iranian political economy have been considered. Islamic leaders like Ayatollah Khomeini, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, Ali Shariati and others stressed the integral linkage of Islam and politics. Shariati brought forth the struggle between the oppressor and the oppressed in his interpretation of Islam. According to him, true Islam strives for justice, equality and elimination of poverty.

As against Shariati's anti-clerical view of Islam, Ayatollah Khomeini stressed on the leadership role of the ulama in Islam's struggle against monarchy and imperialism. The intertwining of the political economy logic with Islamic vocabulary and theology was one of the significant achievements of Khomeini, who in the process was able to contextualise Islam to the practice of politics in Iran.

The religio-political vocabulary generated through the interpretations of Islamic texts and traditions by
Shariati, Khomeini and others, provided enough scope for Islam’s function as a powerful ideology in Iranian politics. This political symbolism of Islam easily caught the attention of the believers in Iran due to its cultural rootedness. Religion functioned as a pattern of interpretation and as a source of legitimacy for the function of particular political standpoints.

Shi’i religious tradition and practices, especially the tradition of Husain, provided a convenient space for revolutionary practice, once the abundant symbols and vocabulary were deployed in the cultural and political milieu of Iran. The mosques and the bazaar functioned as the spatial anchor for the Islamic political discourse to operate. It is in such a context that many writers analyse the Iranian revolution, giving the Islamic ideology its fulcrum role. Many other scholars point out that the revolution cannot be understood by an analysis of religion alone. The role of the state, classes, class antagonisms, imperialism, etc. are important determining elements of the revolutionary context. Thus, socio-economic factors have been analysed along with the religio-cultural factors and religio-political discourses. Thus, analysis of the discursive pattern does not constitute an alternative to a political economy perspective. Both have their role in the making of the revolution.
The Iranian revolution has had most features of great revolutions of modern times. One distinct feature of the Iranian revolution was that, while other major revolutions brought into prominence secular, modern and radical leaders, it projected a religious radical/reactionary leadership. The revolution was the result of a movement, embodying peoples' aspirations for ending an oppressive, exploitative, monarchist rule, which was supported by the power and interests of American imperialism.

Analysing Iranian history leading up to the revolution from a political economy paradigm, necessitated consideration of the role of the state and the nature of class formation and class struggle in Iran. The role of imperialism as a contributory factor in such a process has also been noted. The Iranian state monopolised political power, performed as the major and determining economic actor, and entangled itself with the interests of imperialism.

Different political developments in this century contributed to the evolution of the Iranian state and the political system. The Constitutional Revolution, the founding of the Pahlavi dynasty by Reza Khan, World War II, the Musaddiq interlude, the White Revolution and finally the revolution of 1978-79, shaped the nature and
activities of the Iranian state. Through these developments and crises, the state was transformed from a constitutional monarchy to a republic.

Iran entered the capitalist system in the second half of the nineteenth century and acquired typical capitalist features after 1963. This transformation was aided and abetted by imperialism, especially US imperialism in the post-War period.

Iran lacked a strong national bourgeoisie and this explains why the state could monopolise economic and political control. If Reza Shah paved the foundation for capitalist development of Iran by erecting necessary infrastructure and institutions, it was Muhammad Reza Shah who transformed the country into a proper capitalist entity. Many political observers are of the opinion that Iranian capitalism has been dependent in character.

The nationalistic upsurge in the early 1950s and Musadid’s nationalisation of the oil industry as well as his assertion of the power of the majlis over the Shah, did provide a model to fall back on in the subsequent anti-monarchist movements, especially the revolutionary movement of the late 1970s. The US-sponsored CIA coup which ousted him from power was a major landmark in the development of anti-US sentiments among the Iranians.
The Shah consolidated the state in the 1960s with the strong backing of the United States. Land reforms introduced as part of the White Revolution, with all its short-comings, did create a considerable impact on the Iranian society and its class configuration. Some level of capitalist transformation of the countryside took place as a result of the land reforms. Another major impact of the land reforms was the fast growing, rural to urban migration. This new urban proletariat was to form a major component of the revolutionary movement in the late 1970s. There was considerable industrialisation under the Shah's rule, the process of which differed from other capitalist countries due to the dependent nature of Iranian bourgeoisie. The industrial sector was dominated by oil and related industries.

The overall class dynamics of Pahlavi Iran was characterised by a weak national bourgeoisie, a property-owning class of the bazaaris and the landlords, a growing middle class and a predominant working class. These different classes contributed to the revolution in their own different ways.

The ulama and the bazaaris had mutuality of interests and their ties existed for considerably long time. The ulama, with the assistance of the bazaaris and other sections of believers, could set up a huge network of
mosques and religious institutions, which provided sanctuary for oppositional activists during the revolutionary movement. Not only did the clergy provide an ideological leadership but also the material network for waging the revolution.

The revolution has been an expression of the collective will of the Iranian people, who acquired revolutionary subjectivity in terms of, and through, the representational practices of Islam. The context for the construction of revolutionary subjectivity was created by political economy factors like the nature and function of the Pahlavi state, classes and their struggles and the role of imperialism.

The US encounter with Iran began at a time when various parts of the third world were witnessing the colonial transformation of their societies in a big way by the turn of this century. With World War II, US interests in Iran, grew with its involvement in the country as part of Allied War efforts. During the War, many Americans were there in Iran, advising the Iranian government in almost all significant fields. It was able to utilise the influence gained during the War, as future investment in commercial and strategic realms. Oil remained a major American interest. Otherwise, major policies towards Iran
were framed and executed in the light of the American global policy of containment of communism.

It was with the overthrow of the Musaddiq regime through a CIA-hatched coup that the Iranians felt the interventionist nature of US imperialism in their soil and polity. After the reinstating of the Shah in 1953, there developed an all-pervasive American influence in Iran. The monarchy in Iran developed a dependency towards the United States. The United States found that the Shah’s regime was very stable after the launching of the White Revolution and the suppression of opposition forces in 1963. Even though the Shah showed a tendency towards some independence of policy-making by the 1960s and early 1970s, his actions were well within the broad contours of the monarchist--US imperialist alliance.

The US interests and objectives in Iran in the 1970s included oil, security, military, arms sales, markets and investment. Containment policy, recycling of petrodollars back to the US and arms sales topped the US agenda. For every dollar the US spent on oil imports from Iran, it got back at least two through arm sales etc.

The Iranian revolutionary movement, which was directed against the Shah’s monarchy and US imperialism, erupted at a time when the Shah attempted to introduce some political reforms in the context of the problems
faced by the Pahlavi state. The Carter administration found that all its major foreign policy guidelines including human rights, arms limitation and nuclear non-proliferation were flouted by the Shah. But its support continued.

Once the revolution attained greater momentum by late 1978, the US policy-making circles found itself divided. There were many different and conflicting opinions on US policy options within the American establishment. They had no option but to acknowledge the success of the revolution, which directed its will against not only the Shah but also US imperialism.

US perceptions on the making of the Iranian revolution in general paints a dismal picture projecting wide discrepancy between the actualities of Iran and the American version of it and this has been evidenced by the analysis provided at various instances in Chapter V.

The linkage between imperialism and orientalism and their constitutive influence on American perceptions explain to an extent, the problems relating to US perceptions on Iran. One finds an absence of a political economy analysis and the analysis of the Islamic political discourse in American understanding of the making of the Iranian revolution. These two aspects of the revolution are vital to grasp its spirit. The Americans failed to
understand the dynamics of the Iranian revolution, largely due to their inability to perceive the above two determining factors. And this failure has to do with the constitutive domains of their knowledges and interests --orientalism and imperialism.